

## **Analysis of the Way for Leaders to Resolve Employee Silence: From the Conservation of Resources theory**

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### **Abstract**

**Employee silence has a greater loss and harm to the enterprise, undoubtedly, its existence is one of the greatest hidden dangers to the development of the enterprise. Based on the three levels of individual employee, organization and leadership, this paper will excavate the potential causes of employee silence and analyze how enterprise leaders implement supervision and path selection. Finally, based on the conservation of resources theory, this paper will put forward solutions for the leaders of enterprises to promote the change of employee silence from three aspects: the internal efficiency of employees, the style of leaders and the culture of the organization.**

### **Keywords**

**Leader, Employee silence, Conservation of Resources theory.**

### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, with the increasingly unpredictable market competition environment, enterprises need to be able to respond to all unknown factors in a timely and accurate manner. And employees are the most important part of the enterprise, so the dissemination of their behavior and views will affect the internal cultural environment of the enterprise and the decision-making efficiency of senior managers. Therefore, leaders often require employees to be able to put forward their opinions to the organization, and offer advice and suggestions to the existing problems in the enterprise to ensure the correct development of the enterprise. However, employee silence is pervasive in all kinds of organizations in reality, which has brought many unfavorable effects to the development of enterprises. Similarly, "Silence is golden" has been regarded as the golden laws and precious rules to maintain the relationship between leaders and employees in traditional Chinese culture. Therefore, the phenomenon of employee silence is more common in China because the Chinese people influenced by traditional Confucianism pursue the doctrine of "the mean" [1]. Employee silence has a great negative impact on enterprise development and individual employee, which is a major problem that needs to be solved urgently in contemporary management circles[2].

As far as conservation of resources theory (COR) is concerned, employees tend to choose the safe action of silence for self-protection because of the negative impact and pressure of making suggestions[3]. On the contrary, employees may reverse the occurrence of silence when they have access to relevant resources, and this link is the exertion of leadership[4]. Existing studies have shown that leadership is regarded as an important variable in predicting employee silence. However, a large number of literature studies on the active mechanism of employee silence are still focused on the active mechanism of employee' individual factors on employee silence, while the research on the effect of leadership factors, especially organizational factors, on employee silence is not deep enough.

Therefore, it is an urgent problem to be solved about the ways leaders should adopt and how to give employees appropriate resources so that employees can put aside their prejudices and

change their negative attitudes. To sum up, this paper hopes to explore the influencing factors of the change of employee silence in enterprises through COR, and to study how to reduce the existence rate of employee silence in organizations based on leadership.

## **2. Employee Silence**

### **2.1. Concepts and Dimensions**

In recent years, although more and more scholars have begun to study silence in organizations, there is still no consensus on the definition of the connotation of silence. It is concluded from previous literature that Morrison et al. first studied the silence behavior in organizations, while the silence of individual employees is a silence from bottom to top, which mainly refers to the silence of individual employees[5]. Different scholars have studied employee silence from different perspectives. For example, from the perspective of individual employees, Van Dyne et al. classified employees into passive and active types according to their emotional characteristics. Based on this, they classified silence motivation into disengagement (resignation or compliance), self-protection (fear) and other orientations (cooperation), and further classified employee silence into acquiescent silence, defensive silence and prosocial silence[6]. And Knoll et al. thought that the silence motivation was affected by the type of problem, situation and its importance to employees through organizational level, and divided the silence motivation into four dimensions: opportunistic silence, acquiescent silence, inaction silence and prosocial silence[7].

Zheng Xiaotao, a scholar, summarized the research of western scholars in the Chinese environment and pointed out that there are many kinds of social exchange relationships in organizations, including employees and organizations, superiors and colleagues. The corresponding situation of employee silence can be divided into silence due to dissatisfaction, fear and distrust of the leader or organization, and silence due to disharmonious and distrustful colleague relationship, that is, the object of employee silence includes colleagues, leaders and organizations. At the same time, he believed that although the specific motives of employee silence were different, the starting point was the individual interests of employees [8]. To sum up, how to meet the relevant needs of employees and how to develop the anti-silence atmosphere of employees become the key to restrain employees silence.

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### **2.2. Influence Factor Model**

Based on the existing literature, this paper concludes that silence motivation can be used as the basis for the division of employee silence in different dimensions. However, scholars have analyzed the influencing factors of employee silence motivation from different perspectives, including employee factors, leadership factors and situational factors.

#### **2.2.1. Silence Motivation Based on Employee Factors**

In the context of unfair organizational situations, Pinder et al. studied the influence of different personality characteristics on silence behavior. The results showed that employees with high external control personality, communication anxiety and low self-esteem showed more inaction silence[9]. Through empirical research, Brinsfield found that there was a significant

positive relationship between the neuroticism of employees and the deviant silence and invalid silence[10].

The psychological factor is another important factor in predicting employee behavior. The study found that positive psychological states, including psychological safety, trust, job satisfaction, organizational identity, working group identity, professional commitment, organizational commitment and so on, can predict the different dimensions of silence behavior. Sometimes, the reason why employees keep silent is to avoid risks, and trust can enhance the willingness of employees to take risks voluntarily. Therefore, when employees trust supervisors, they will choose to share information even though they know that expressing information, opinions and ideas will have some negative effects on themselves.

### **2.2.2. Silence Motivation Based on Leadership Factors**

Existing studies have found that management factors (frequency) rank first among the many factors affecting employee silence through surveys and statistics. Milliken et al. interviewed 40 full-time employees to explore the reasons for employee silence. It was found that 30% of the respondents mentioned "leadership relationship", including leadership disapproval and distance between superiors and subordinates. Leadership beliefs and attitudes are important sources of silence in organizations. Research showed that the attitude of executives and supervisors towards silence had a significant positive impact on employee silence. In addition, a large number of studies have shown that leadership equity can effectively suppress negative behavior in organizations. Employees will not be punished or revenged for expressing their ideas and opinions in a fair leadership situation.

### **2.2.3. Silence Motivation Based on Situational Factors**

Knoll et al. believed that silence motivation was influenced by the type of problem, the situation and the importance of employees. Organizational ethical atmosphere refers to a shared understanding of what ethical behavior is correct and how ethical issues should be dealt with in an organization, which is not only an important guideline for decision-making and behavior of organizational members, but also affects the willingness of employees to expose organizational problems. Previous studies have found that instrumental atmosphere, caring atmosphere and autonomous atmosphere have significant effects on silence behavior. At the same time, fair organizations respect the dignity and value of employees and allow employees to challenge authority.

## **3. Strategic Choice of Resolving Employee Silence**

COR considered that work resources from the perspective of work resources could bring value-added resources, which is an important factor to relieve employees pressure and improve their working attitude and behavior. Researchers from this perspective believed that individual characteristics, organizational support and so on could provide support for individual values, which could slow down emotional exhaustion and prevent stress. Individuals who have more resources are less likely to suffer from the attack of loss of resources, more able to access resources and more willing to make suggestions. On the contrary, individuals who lack resources are more likely to suffer from the pressure brought by the loss of resources, resulting in more silent behavior.

Leaders are the individuals who can most directly contact employees in the working environment. Work resources, including leaders themselves, have the most direct contact with employees through leadership. At the same time, the internal resources of individuals also need the guidance and Inspiration of leaders. The difference of leadership behavior not only directly affects the ideas and specific behavior of employees, but also affects employees' overall impression of the organization. Therefore, leaders need to influence and intervene employees comprehensively through the following three levels to restrain the occurrence of silence.

### **3.1. Stimulate the Intrinsic Effectiveness of Employees**

Research in Chinese context has confirmed that superior-subordinate relationship not only has a significant negative effect on employee silence, but also weakens the negative effect of traditional values (collectivism tendency, individual traditionality) on employee silence. An important purpose of effective leadership is to help unit members maintain interest in tasks for a period of time and strive for it to achieve the desired goals or vision. The key to achieving this goal is to make the unit members have the motive to change.

In the new era, it is increasingly necessary for leaders to increase new knowledge and acquire new skills to help them communicate and manage around beliefs and values. Leaders play a role in beliefs and values around perception and management changes. Leaders can effectively exert their leadership at belief and value levels, which can help employees to build up self-efficacy such as confidence. Giving trust and paying attention to interests can enhance the construction of employees' psychological capital, so that they can correctly and effectively cope with changes and various transitional situations.

### **3.2. Choose the Right Leadership Style**

The leader is a person who uses his influence to lead the members of a unit to achieve the common desired goals in a specific system. From this point of view, leaders have two main roles: promoting relationship development and focusing on tasks. Whether a leader can play these roles depends mainly on his leadership style. When choosing their leadership style, leaders should first consider the cultural environment in which the members of the unit live, and culture is usually embodied in expectations and values. In addition, if a unit wants to achieve its goals, it needs to change at some level, which is another important factor affecting the choice of leadership style. Different leadership styles are suitable for solving different problems. If the members of a unit doubt the rationality and feasibility of the path, intellectual stimulation will be more effective in forming the sense of belonging of the members of the unit.

For example, according to previous studies, in the working environment of grass-roots civil servants, it is more suitable to use ethical leadership to suppress the occurrence of silence and ethical leadership is more conducive to the occurrence of organizational justice. True leadership is more suitable in the environment with trust crisis. Such personality traits can easily win the trust of employees and promote closer communication between employees and leaders, and so on.

### **3.3. Choose the Right Leadership Style**

Leaders become the first line of defense in organizations to avoid the formation of silent culture and advocate the formation of open culture. From the point of view of promoting the growth of unit members, leadership should be regarded as the ability to create the environment, the ability to cultivate the environment and relationship that unit members can stand out, rather than the ability to persuade others to obey orders or persuade them to follow leaders. The external environment of the unit is becoming more and more complex, which makes leaders need to shift their focus and leadership skills to solving problems such as relationships, culture, environment and higher-level learning, which has become a crucial issue.

## **4. Conclusion**

To sum up, leadership is demonstrated by the incentive of leaders to unit members and the feedback from unit members, not just by what skills leaders can teach unit members. If leaders want to give full play to leadership to stimulate the sense of belonging of unit members, they must have a strong desire to change the environment and optimize the environment, and then create a situation full of challenges and great affinity, which can not only stimulate the working motivation of unit members, but also make unit members have a pleasant psychological feeling.

Only when meeting the needs of employees, can employees break the silence and make suggestions that are beneficial to the organization.

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