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# Silence in the Islands; An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence in the Maldives

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## Abstract

Organizational silence is interpreted as a collective phenomenon that acts as a barrier to the development of the pluralistic organization. Communication and the flow of information between employees and different departments are strategic factors to achieve organizational goals. Free flow of communication without any obstruction between managers and employees contribute to a more open and vibrant workplace. However, many employees often decide to remain silent rather than expressing their opinions and concerns. Employee silence results in negative impacts for both the employees and the organization. As employee silence hinder organizational progress, proper mechanisms have to be implemented to ensure that employees can voice out and be open about their concerns, without fear of penalization. In line with this view, the starting point for this would be to find out the reasons for silent behavior. The Maldives being among the developing countries, it is important to identify the factors which may hinder organizational development. Hence the main aim of this study is to identify whether employee silence exists among the group of employees in the Maldives and identify the reasons why employees remain silent. This study is a qualitative study where data was collected by conducting face to face interviews with 10 employees who work in various public organizations in the Maldives. The results of this study point to the existence of employee silence among the sample group in the Maldives.

**Keywords:** Employee Silence, Employee Voice, Organizational Silence

## 1. Introduction

Employees are regarded as the most important assets in the organization. They play a key role in change, creativity, and innovation which are strategic factors to achieve organizational goals, but employees often decide to remain silent rather than conveying their valuable opinions and concerns about the problems in their organizations. Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin (2003) drew attention to the fact that employees frequently choose not to speak up about problems and concerns in the workplace. They describe this as employee silence.

Morrison and Milliken (2000) define organizational silence being "for employees to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational problems." Pinder and Harlos (2001) refer to it as "the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress." Remaining silent creates negative consequences both for employees and the organization.

Park and Keil (2009) examine this silence in three dimensions. First, silence can be intentional. Employees remain silent even if they are aware of the problem and know of a better solution. Second, silence can be a defense mechanism. Employees can remain silent to protect their interests or not to contradict others openly. Finally, silence can be a collective decision of employees; a collective reaction of not sharing ideas, thoughts, or knowledge with others.

Organizational silence is interpreted as a collective phenomenon that acts as a barrier to the development of the pluralistic organization (Morrison and Milliken, 2000). It is often seen that in some cultures, employees face difficulty to openly communicate with their superiors about organizational problems or issues that concern them. The phenomenon of employee silence has been studied from many perspectives. However, the concept has not been studied in the Maldivian context. Hence the main aim of this study was to identify whether employee silence is prevalent in the Maldives and to shed light on the reasons why employees prefer to remain silent.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The concept of silence

The concept of silence has a long history in organizational science. In the past, researches have conducted various studies in similar areas which eventually led to employee silence. Following the historical overview, the phases of silence concept are categorized in to three periods or waves; (1) the initial wave, consists of research conducted in the 1970s to the mid-1980s; (2) the second wave, consists of research conducted in the mid-1980s to 2000; and (3) the current wave, consists research conducted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These waves were categorized based on the themes studied during a particular period of time (figure 1).

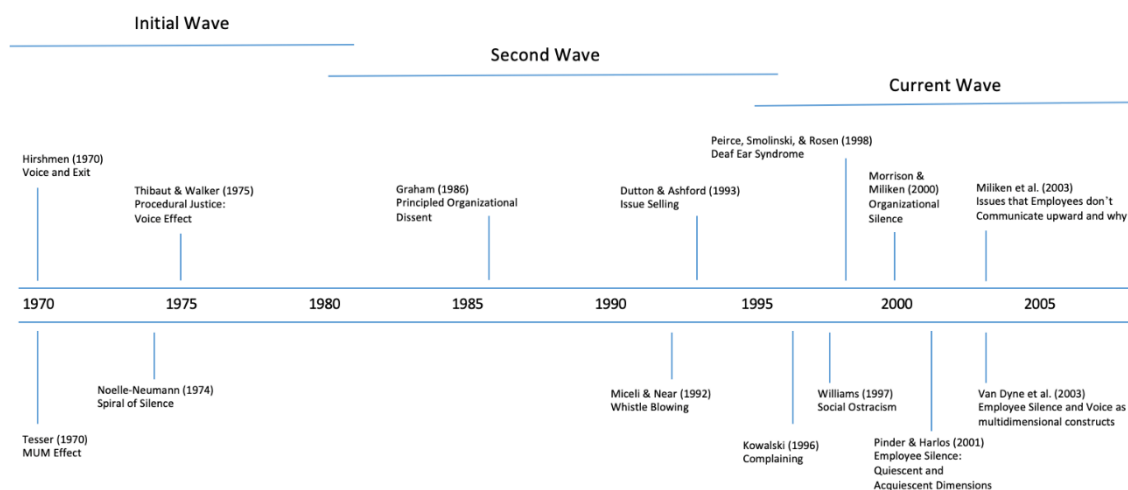


Figure 1 - Waves in the Literature of Silence and Voice in Organizations

Source: Brinsfield, C.T., Edwards, M. S., and Greenberg, J. (2009). Voice and Silence in Organizations: Historical Review and Current Conceptualizations. Greenberg, J. and Edwards, M.S. (Eds.). In: Voice and Silence in Organizations, p.9.

### *2.1.1 Initial Wave*

During the 1970s to the mid- 1980s, the researcher recognized that silence in organizations exists in various forms. Among the earliest concepts, the main focus was on the studies of MUM (keeping mum about undesirable messages) effect and analysis of spiral of silence.

Albert Hirschman (1970) was the first social scientist to study the concept of voice concerning organizational dissatisfaction. According to him, consumers will respond to dissatisfaction in two ways. They either exit by discontinuing their relationship with the organization or voice by complaining and making an active attempt to investigate change. Hirschman (1970) defined voice as “any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion” (p. 30). Furthermore, Hirschman claimed that the use of ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ depends on loyalty. To date, Hirschman’s framework of voice has been used as a basis of most studies in employee voice and voice is considered a universal concept that could be applied to all employees.

#### The MUM effect

The MUM effect was a concept proposed by Abraham Tesser, followed by the first works of Hirschman (Rosen & Tesser, 1970). The MUM effect defines an individual's reluctance to express negative thoughts because of the expectation of psychological discomfort associated with negative effects (Conlee and Tesser, 1973). This has been identified as the main reason why employees do not speak up about problems faced in the workplace (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003). Researchers have identified that an individual feels discomfort when it comes to communicating bad news as it may result in harming one’s relationship with recipients (Morran, Stockton, & Bond, 1991) and also due to the guilt associated with not sharing recipient’s misfortunes (Tesser & Rosen, 1972). In the workplace, power distance and status seem to intensify the Mum effect (Millikan et al., 2003). Results of a research conducted by Millikan et al., (2003) showed that employees feel more concerned and uncomfortable if they are to report wrongdoing to their superiors and in many cases, employees tend to withhold information or distort information to reduce its negative effects. Fear of communicating negative news is not entirely limited to upward communication, however, it is also observed in downward communication. For instance, sometimes, managers delay or try to avoid giving feedback to poor performers (Benedict & Levine, 1988). Similarly, the managers avoid communicating negative news to subordinates by delegating the task to others (Rosen & Tesser, 1970).

#### The Spiral of Silence

Studying the historical background of silence, one of the most prominent theory is the theory of the spiral of silence (Noelle- Neumann, 1974). According to this theory, individuals remain silent due to their perception of weak public support, fear of isolation, or self –doubt. In these situations, individuals feel hesitant to speak up, and as a result, it further makes their perception of weak public support stronger. Over time this cycle may develop into a spiral of accumulative silence in association to a given issue. This theory also states that in situations where public support seems stronger, individuals tend to disclose their views more freely. In the past, the spiral of silence theory has been applied in various research to identify the reasons why individuals are reluctant to express their views (e.g., Donsbach & Stevenson, 1984; May; Glynn & McLeod, 1984; Salmon & Neuwirth, 1990; Salmon & Oshagan, 1990).

Bowen and Blackmon (2003) proposed the study "vertical spiral of silence." According to their study, the spiral of silence may become more pervasive and spread on other issues. For instance, if an employee decided to stay silent about one issue, it increases the likelihood of that employee staying silent about other issues. This behavioral tendency is higher in matters related to personal identity and sexual orientation (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003).

### *2.1.2 Second Wave*

During the mid-1980s and 2000, several new constructs were incorporated to voice and silence concept. At the end of the 1990s, two important silence related constructs, deaf ear syndrome, and social ostracism were

developed. These additions boosted the growth of more research in the organizational sciences resulting in more paradigms of silence.

### Social Ostracism

Social Ostracism is often referred to as "the silent treatment." Although social ostracism and silence have rich literature, these themes were not given much attention in organizational sciences until the past decade. In recent literature, William (2007) stated that ostracism involves ignoring or excluding people and it has been functioning as "a process that is characterized as an unfolding sequence of responses endured while being ignored and excluded." The silent treatment is a common problem faced in the workplace. An employee may choose not to speak up about issues at the workplace if he/she feels the fear of being ostracized. Hence based on the research findings, it is said that social ostracism is an example of silence in organizations or it could be regarded as behavior which has the potential to lead to silence. William (2001), highlighted two main types of ostracism; (a) physical ostracism which involves being forced to withdraw from or leaving the situation (leaving a room during an argument, being put in solitary confinement, and being exiled) and (b) social ostracism which involves the emotional withdrawal that occurs in the physical presence of the target (removal of eye contact, not talking, and not listening).

Ostracism and employee silence are similar concepts. Employee silence involves mainly remaining silent on issues or situations related to one's job or organization. Whereas an individual who practices ostracism may refrain from communicating about a wide range of issues and may remain silent in many different contexts. These behaviors show how silence could be used as a tool to affirm the power and cause distress in a socially unacceptable manner (Briensfield et al., 2009).

### Deaf Ear Syndrome

In the 1990s, researchers were interested to study the factors that shape employee's reluctance to engage in speaking up behavior. In particular, reluctance to speak up was studied in the context of harassment. The term deaf ear syndrome was introduced by Peirce, Smolinski, and Rosen (1998) to describe an organizational norm that discourages employees from engaging in open expression of dissatisfaction. Based on the literature, Peirce et al. (1998) identified three reasons which enhance the "deaf ear syndrome"; "(1) inadequate organizational policies (cumbersome or unclear reporting procedures), (2) managerial rationalizations and reactions (denying the claims, blaming the victim, minimizing the seriousness of the offense, protecting a valued employee, ignoring a chronic harasser, retaliating against the victim), and (3) organizational characteristics (family-owned businesses, rural locations, male-dominated industries)" (Briensfield et al., 2009).

"Deaf ear syndrome" was further studied by Harlos (2001). Research by Harlos stated that some voice systems such as formalized complain reporting systems, open-door policies, suggestion boxes, etc. cause what they are intended to prevent, intensifying employees' perceptions of unfairness, discontent, and frustration. The voice systems give the impression that organizations take complaints seriously. However, if the voice systems fail, it may lead to a violation of the psychological contract and may result in negative feelings about employment relationships (Rousseau, 1995). According to Harlos (2001), safety, credibility, accessibility, and timeliness of outcomes are keys to building an effective voice mechanism in the organization. The "deaf ear syndrome" is the foundation that contributed to the development of quiescent and acquiescent silence (Pinder and Harlos, 2001).

### *2.1.3 Current Wave*

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the concept of voice and silence has been studied in a broader context. Particularly, researchers focused on the concept of silence. Common to many studies, it is considered that silence is not a mere absence of voice, and it is more meaningful. Although there was a growing interest in the silence and voice topics, not much was accomplished in terms of construct development and empirical research related to moderating factors. Most prominent studies on silence were conducted by Morrison and Milliken (2000). They proposed the concept of "organizational silence" and individual level silence behavior, i.e., "employee silence." This paper focuses on the individual level of silence behavior, employee silence.

### 3. Types of Silence

The literature review about the types of silence has classified employee silence into major three types, namely Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and Pro-social Silence (Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003). The three types of silence are summarized in the following table (table 1);

Table 1- Types of Silence

<b>Nature of Behaviour</b>	<b>Primary Motive</b>	<b>Specific Type of Behaviour</b>
<b>Employee Passive</b>	Acquiescence (submission)	Acquiescent silence
	Self- protection (fear)	Defensive silence
<b>Employee Proactive</b>	Other-oriented (cooperation)	Prosocial silence

Source: Van Dyne, L., S. Ang, and I. C. Botero. (2003). Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40.6, 1359-1392.

#### 3.1. Acquiescent Silence

Pinder and Harlos' (2001) has defined Acquiescent Silence as withholding views, relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation. Acquiescent silence advocates disengaged behavior. Therefore, it is a passive behavior (Van Dyne, et al. 2003). In the case of acquiescent silence, employees commend the status quo and prefer not to speak up. They do not try to change organizational circumstances. This is a voluntary behavior that the employees choose when they believe that speaking up will not make any difference (Karacaoglu and Cingoz, 2008).

#### 3.2 Defensive Silence

The feeling of fear is one of the common reasons for individuals to remain silent. Pinder and Harlos (2001) used the term Quiescent Silence to describe deliberate omission based on personal fear of the consequences of speaking up. This is consistent with Morrison and Milliken's (2000) emphasis on the personal emotion of fear as a key motivator of organizational silence. Based on the work of Pinder and Harlos, Morrison and Milliken, Defensive Silence is defined as withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions as a form of self-protection, based on fear. Defensive Silence is an intentional behavior with the aim of protecting one's self from external threats. In contrast to Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence is more proactive, involving awareness and consideration of alternatives, followed by a conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions as to the best personal strategy at that particular moment (Van Dyne, et al. 2003).

#### 3.3 Prosocial Silence

Prosocial silence is "withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization, based on altruism or cooperative motives." The primary reason for this type of silence is a concern for others. Prosocial silence is intentional and proactive. Unlike defensive silence, prosocial silence is others oriented, rather than fear of negative personal consequences of speaking up (Van Dyne, et al. 2003).

### 4. Reasons for employee silence

There are various reasons employees remain silent in organizations that emerge from an individual, organizational, and cultural factors.

The literature on individual factors leading to silence is scrutinized, it shows that there is a significant relationship between employee silence and personality traits. Le Pine and Van Dyne (1998) considered silence as a product of individual personality characteristics. For example; individuals high in neurotic personality traits tend to remain silent, whereas an individual high in extroverted personality finds it easy to communicate (Brinsfield 2013). Research also shows that a person's self-esteem has a rather important and positive effect on an individual's

behaviors at the workplace (Le Pine, Dyne 1998). Individuals whose self-esteem are high are more willing to bring the change. Individuals whose self-esteem are low are more concerned about self-protection. They do not allow themselves to be in defenseless status. Thus, they withhold their ideas and information due to the risk that they perceive (Premeaux, Bedeian, 2003). Similarly, an individual's perceived communication fear and negative consequences that may arise from communicating and perceived status in terms of authority and control influence employees to remain silent in the workplace (Brinsfield 2009). Employee's lack of experience and low status also hinder open communication (Milliken et al. 2003). Likewise, emotional breakdown and psychological lethargy experienced by individuals also hinder communication (Whiteside & Barclay 2013).

In addition, employees may remain silent if they feel that speaking out will not bring any changes and that they may find themselves in a dangerous situation (Gephart et al. 2009; Morrison, Milliken 2000; Brinsfield 2013). The injustice employees experience (e.g., discrimination, nepotism) in their workplace develop silent behavior in employees (Whiteside, Barclay; Cemaloğlu et al. 2014). Due to the fear of workplace isolation or social isolation, employees express ideas which are parallel to the ideas of the majority. This behavior prevents the employees from expressing their opinion or ideas genuinely (Bowen & Blackmon 2003).

National culture, as well as Organizational culture, plays a crucial role in employee behavior. Hofstede (1991) stated that in large power distance societies, managers and co-workers consider each other existentially unequal. Due to the hierarchical system in such societies, it is believed that the manager is always right, and there is no room for open communication. The relationship between managers and co-workers in large power distance organizations are normally loaded with emotions. In a low power distance organization, it is more likely to see a supportive culture. A supportive culture is more open to ideas and enhances communication (Dutton, 1997). The cultural infrastructure of top management influences how they perceive their employees. If the organization comprises executives from high power distance cultures as the Maldivian culture, managers will rely on superiors and formal rules. Especially in the public sector, organizational functions such as decision making are limited to the management of top executives (Calpham & Cooper 2005). Hence, executives from collectivist and high power distance cultures are considered as a motive of employee silence. In high power distance societies, silence is accepted as a cultural norm ((Huang et al. 2005).

Manager's negative feedback facilitates the creation of a climate of silence. Argyris and Schone (1978) stated that many managers want to avoid embarrassment, threat, and vulnerability. Therefore, managers try to avoid information that might harm their self-image negatively (Argyris & Schone, 1978). Another reason managers want to avoid negative feedback, especially from subordinates, is the fear of being perceived as unsatisfactory. People exhibit various strategies to satisfy their fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For some people, how they are perceived by others is immensely important, and they often wonder if they are socially acceptable (Leary, 2001). In their relationships, they might follow self-image goals to construct, maintain, and defend desirable self-image (Crocker & Canevello, 2012). In that case, managers create a climate that inhibits negative feedbacks from subordinates (Slade, 2008). Different opinions are not welcome in such situations because if communicated, it may lead to conflict between manager and subordinate. Due to the fear of confrontation, subordinates usually prefer to remain silent and express opinion parallel to those of his/her manager (Perlow & Williams 2003). However, taking into account cultural differences, it is essential to question whether self-image goals exist in Maldivian culture in the same way. Is the manager's negative feedback a reason for employee silence in the Maldives? This question is important because reasons for employee silence varies depending on the culture. A result of a study conducted in Japan shows that people brought up in collectivistic cultures such as Japan tend to give priority to communal over personal goals (Bresnahan, Chiu, & Levine, 2004; Yamaguchi, 1994).

Morrison and Milliken (2000) proposed two organizational structures that reinforce employee silence. One is the High centralization of decision making, and the other is the Lack of formal upward feedback mechanisms. Some organizations are structured in a way that gives executives the sole authority and initiative in decision making. If managers feel that their employees are untrustworthy, they prefer an autocratic management style rather than a

participative management style. Since an autocratic management style does not involve employees in the decision-making process, it may be a reason for employee silence.

Leadership style is one of the significant concepts affecting an employee's attitude and behavior. For instance, previous research on the transformational leadership approach has indicated a significant relationship between transformational leadership style and follower's positive attitude. Particularly transformational leadership style enhances speaking up as it boosts the self-confidence of employees (Wu et al. 2010). A transformational leader may encourage voice behavior by personally interacting with employees and providing them room for expressing their concerns (Sevendsen & Joensson, 2016). On the other hand, authoritarian leaders tend to determine what is to be done. This leadership style may hinder voice behavior, as there is no room for open communication (Aryee et al., 2007). Therefore, the style of leadership could be one of the reasons for employee silence.

An empirical study conducted by Yalçın and Baykal (2012) identified that fear, lack of experience, fear of isolation, and fear of undermining relations are among the reasons why nurses remain silent in Turkey. Another study by (Bayın et al. 2015) revealed that the relationship between supervisor and nurses, negative perception about having a voice, belief of speaking doesn't make a difference, negative consequences and manager doesn't allow speaking up are also reasons for employee silence.

Employee silence is intentional behavior that is widely a result of many cultural, political, and other factors. In the Maldives, silence or not voicing out is believed as a means where employees show respect or obedience to their supervisors and superiors. An employee who voices out concerns is always seen as a threat or someone who is against the set rules and beliefs. This naturally leads employees to work as guided and instructed by the very few people in the top positions with no questions asked or a willingness to express themselves. Though the new generation workforce indirectly expresses themselves, there is no proper mechanism in the system that allows or encourages employees to participate in the decision making. As a result, a large number of employees still remain silent or are not encouraged to voice out. This very much affects organizational efficiency and hinders progress. This study aims to confirm the existence of employee silence in the Maldives further and to identify the reasons and factors.

## **5. Methodology**

### *5.1 Sample*

At first, interviews were conducted with 10 people who work in different public organizations. Data is collected from 10 people using convenience sampling. 4 females and 6 males participated in this phase. In terms of age, 5 of the respondents were between ages 20 – 25 years, 4 respondents between 26 – 30 years, and only 1 respondent was above 30 years. 4 respondents work at a managerial position, and 6 were junior-level employees. In terms of tenure, 6 of the respondents had worked 0 – 5 years, 3 respondents have 6 – 10 years of work experience, and there was one employee who had worked for more than 10 years. Out of the 10 respondents, 3 of the respondents had completed postgraduate level education, and 6 of the respondents were undergraduate level, and only 1 respondent was a high school graduate.

### *5.2 Procedure*

10 interviews were conducted individually, on a face-to-face basis at offices where the employees work.

### *5.3 Survey Instrument*

Interview questions were structured based on the interview guide used by Milliken (2003) in various qualitative studies. The following are the questions asked during the interview.

Q1. Demographical characteristics of interviewee which includes gender, education level, age, position, and tenure

Q2. How comfortable do you feel in communicating your boss or to the top management?

Q3. When you raise an issue or a problem, do you get attention to the issues/problems from your boss or top management?



Q4. Have you ever preferred not to talk about an issue and keep silent instead of expressing your opinion and why?

Q5. In your opinion, what is the reason for employees remaining silent?

Q6. What are the likely consequences if you raise your “voice” in your organization?

Q7. What do your colleagues think about keeping silent?

#### 5.4 Statistical Analysis

In this study, content analysis was used to identify the variables which contribute to employee silence in the Maldives. Content analysis is a method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual communication messages (Cole 1988). Through content analysis, it is possible to filter words into fewer content-related categories. It is assumed that when classified into the same categories, words, phrases, they share the same meaning (Cavanagh 1997). Hence, all the answers were categorized into different groups (e.g., job security, fear, injustice, etc.) and descriptive analyses were conducted.

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics of people interviewed are presented in frequency Table 1 below:

Table 2- Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Gender	Age	Education Level	Tenure	Position
Females 4	20 -25 years 5	High school 1	0 – 5 years 6	Managerial 4
Males 6	26 – 30 years 4	Undergraduate 6	6 -10 years 3	Non-managerial 6
	Above 30 years 1	Postgraduate 3	11 – 15 years 1	

2. How comfortable do you feel in communicating your boss or to the top management?

Out of the 10 respondents, five stated that they felt comfortable and had no problems communicating with their superiors. Three of the respondents stated that they felt comfortable to communicate with their immediate supervisors but not with the top management. One of the respondents stated that initially, it was difficult, but after several years in the organization, it became easier to communicate. One of the respondents stated that it was very difficult to communicate and even to get documents signed.

3. When you raise an issue or a problem, do you get attention to the issues/problems from your boss or top management?

Five of the respondents stated that they could get attention. Two of the respondents stated that sometimes they got attention depending on the type of issue or manager. One of the respondents stated that he expressed concerns, but no action was taken. Two of the respondents stated that the junior level was not the priority and especially regarding change issues top management responded aggressively.

4. Have you ever preferred not to talk about an issue and keep silent instead of expressing your opinion and why?

Seven of the respondents stated that they kept silent instead of expressing issues. Two of the respondents stated that they usually expressed their ideas unless it was a political issue. However, one of the respondents stated that since she worked with the top management, it was easy to talk about the issues she faced. These results point to employee silence in the Maldives.

4. In your opinion, what are the reasons for employees remaining silent?

Several different answers were given by the interviewees. Some of the most repeated answers were; fear and insecurity, politics, job security, and trust. It is seen that the reasons employees choose to remain silent are in line with the findings in the literature of Milliken et al., (2003). The answers were categorized, and the frequency table is presented below (see table 2).

Table 3- Reasons employees remain silent

Reasons for Employee Silence	n=10
Fear and Insecurity	9
Nepotism / Favouritism	4
Job Security	8
Trust	7
Poor relationship with supervisor	2
Values and beliefs (e.g., respecting elders )	5
Injustice (e.g., discrimination )	7
Managerial Practice	6
Politics	9

5. What are the likely consequences if you raise your “voice” in your organization?

In general, all interviewees stated that they might face negative consequences if they raised their voices. Some of the likely consequences are;

- Cannot survive in the workplace (e.g., too much pressure)
- Limiting employee rights (e.g., Maybe difficult to get leave)
- Discrimination within the workplace
- Affect employee appraisal/Evaluation
- Labeled negatively
- Employee Dissatisfaction
- Affect career advancement
- Isolation
- Disturbance (e.g., Additional workload)
- Job termination

7. What do your colleagues think about keeping silent?

Nine of the respondents stated that usually, their colleagues remained silent. Only one respondent stated that his colleagues expressed issues, as they were close to their manager. But they communicated some issues indirectly (e.g., using social media to express dissatisfaction).

## 7. Discussion

The findings of this research provide important facts about employee silence among a group of employees in the Maldives. The reasons identified in this study are; fear and insecurity, politics, job security, trust, injustice,

managerial practices, nepotism/favoritism, values and beliefs (e.g., respecting elders) and poor relationship with the supervisor. These reasons are in line with the findings in the literature of Milliken et al., (2003).

When employees were asked how comfortable they felt in communicating with their superiors, three of the respondents stated that they felt comfortable communicating with their immediate supervisor but not with the top management. This could be due to a large power distance between the top executives and subordinates. The hierarchical system is based on its existential inequality which obstructs open communication. One of the respondents stated that initially, it was difficult to communicate, but after several years in the organization, it became easier to communicate. This finding is consistent with Milliken et al. (2003) statement, which concludes that employee's lack of experience hinders open communication. Among the ten respondents, one respondent stated that his colleagues expressed issues as they were close to their manager. This finding indicates that upward communication is affected not only by the organizational context but also by characteristics of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. In order to facilitate open communication, there should be a good relationship between the managers and subordinates.

The research has also shown that employees fear negative consequences such as discrimination at the workplace and isolation if they raise their voice. Employees' silence due to the fear of isolation is in parallel with the theory of the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Over time, the cycle develops into accumulative silence eventually increases the likelihood of employees remaining silent. Another reason employees highlighted is fear being labeled negatively. Since this reason is associated with psychological discomfort, it is consistent with Morrison and Milliken's (2001) emphasis on the personal emotion of fear as a significant motivator of employee silence and the MUM effect.

Employee silence and voice behavior are also associated with psychological safety. The feeling of being unappreciated often encourages employees to engage in employee silence behavior. Some of the respondents in this study have highlighted that, even if they raise their concerns, no action was taken. The feeling of lack of support leads to employee silence. Two of the respondents highlighted the fact that junior level staff are not involved in decision making when it comes to matters such as organizational change. In collectivistic and high power distance cultures, organizational functions are limited to the top management. In high power distance cultures, authority in decision-making is vested to top executives, and delegation is avoided (Sagie & Koslowsky, 2000). In addition, in high power distance organizations, decision-making is perceived as a privilege of top management executives, and participative decision making is considered as an infringement to management prerogatives.

## **8. Conclusion**

Employee silence results in negative impacts for both the employees and the organization. The organizations lose the benefits of open communication, such as the intellectual contribution of employees, feedback, information exchange, and problem-solving. These obstruct effective decision making leading to restraining organizational change and development (Morrison & Milliken 2000; Premeaux 2001). At an individual level, employee silence can negatively impact commitment, trust, job satisfaction, and eventually lead to job resignation (Detert & Edmondson 2006; Milliken & Morrison 2003).

Employee silence causes disruption or barriers to the creation of any healthy feedback mechanism. An absence of a feedback system causes managers to make flawed decisions based on limited or distorted information, which can be costly to organizations.

Organizations should encourage their employees to express their opinions freely. In some cases, the existence of feedback mechanisms alone does not perform effectively or encourage employees to speak up. Some employees need support or help from managers to speak up and to feel confident that their opinions will be taken into consideration. The relationship between managers and employees is important for any organization to flourish. It

is important that confidence and mutual respect exist and the gap between managers and subordinates is decreased to ensure a healthy feedback mechanism. Panahi et al. (2012) state that establishing an appropriate reward system for creative ideas and facilitating development and skill-building can break employee silence. Other changes such as reorientation of rules, collaborative studies, restructuring the harvesting of institutional knowledge, and other human resource management programs for executives are important to minimize employee silence.

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