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Effects of Organizational Silence on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: The Mediating Role of Positive Leadership Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The principal aim of this inquiry was to clarify the effects of organizational silence on the organizational citizenship behaviors exhibited by employees, with a particular focus on the mediating role of positive leadership behaviors.

Methods: A sample of 280 employees drawn from both governmental and non-governmental entities situated in Kerman, Iran, selected through accessible sampling techniques. The collection of data was conducted through the implementation of the Organizational Silence Questionnaire, the Organizational Citizenship Behaviors Scale, and the Positive Leadership Behaviors Questionnaire. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to investigate the mediating function of positive leadership behaviors in the association between organizational silence and organizational citizenship behaviors, while the bootstrap method was applied to evaluate indirect effects.

Results: The results indicated that the hypothesized model exhibited an adequate fit with the empirical data (CFI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.062). Specifically, the findings demonstrated a negative and statistically significant relationship between organizational silence and organizational citizenship behaviors ($r = -0.43$, $p < 0.01$), a negative and statistically significant relationship between organizational silence and positive leadership behaviors ($r = -0.51$, $p < 0.01$), and a positive and statistically significant relationship between positive leadership behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). The analysis conducted through structural equation modeling validated that positive leadership behaviors act as a mediator in the relationship linking organizational silence to organizational citizenship behaviors among employees, revealing a significant indirect effect ($\beta = -0.24$, $p < 0.01$).

Conclusions: These results imply that strategies aimed at fostering both positive leadership behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors may be effective in mitigating employees' organizational silence.

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Introduction

Organizational silence refers to the collective phenomenon where employees withhold information, ideas, concerns, or feedback, which could be beneficial for the organization's growth and problem-solving capabilities (Bagheri et al., 2012). The term was first explored by researchers such as Morrison and Milliken (2000), who described it as a deliberate act by employees to avoid speaking out due to fear, perceived futility, or a culture that discourages open communication.

The roots of organizational silence often lie in the dynamics of power, fear, and culture within an organization. According to Edmondson and Besieux (2021), psychological safety plays a pivotal role in encouraging employees to voice their concerns. However, when employees perceive a lack of psychological safety, they tend to retreat into silence to avoid potential risks, such as reprimand or job loss.

Silence can manifest in various forms, including withholding innovative ideas, refraining from reporting unethical practices, or avoiding feedback on management strategies. It is often driven by top-down communication patterns, a lack of trust in leadership, and an environment where dissenting opinions are not welcomed (Detert et al., 2010).

Organizational Silence can be categorized into several distinct types. Acquiescent silence manifests when employees perceive themselves as powerless and disengaged from their work environment. This particular variant of silence arises from the conviction that articulating concerns will not precipitate any substantial transformation. As a result, employees may refrain from offering suggestions or highlighting problems, even when they are acutely aware of organizational inefficiencies (Harlos & Knoll, 2021). Defensive silence is driven by the instinct for self-preservation. Employees deliberately abstain from voicing their opinions in order to protect themselves from adverse repercussions, such as blame or retaliation. This form of silence is especially common in hierarchical organizational structures, wherein feedback is often viewed as a challenge to established authority (Brinsfield, 2013). The third category is prosocial silence. Diverging from the negative implications typically associated with silence, prosocial silence represents a conscious decision made to serve the interests of others or the organization at large. For example, employees may opt to withhold confidential information or sensitive issues in order to safeguard the organization's welfare (Van Dyne et al., 2012).

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The phenomenon of organizational silence can be ascribed to a multitude of factors. When employees harbor apprehensions regarding punitive actions or adverse repercussions stemming from the articulation of their viewpoints, there exists an augmented propensity for them to remain reticent. This tendency is frequently a consequence of authoritarian leadership paradigms or a repressive organizational milieu (Nafei, 2016). Employees may opt to withhold their contributions if they perceive that their insights will be disregarded or trivialized. Such perceptions can diminish morale and curtail the probability of subsequent participatory efforts (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). In certain organizational contexts, silence becomes deeply entrenched within the cultural fabric. Employees may internalize through observational learning that dissent is not tolerated, resulting in conformity and a deficit of open discourse (Bogosian, 2018).

The ramifications of organizational silence are extensive and can profoundly influence organizational efficacy, employee welfare, and innovative capacities. When employees suppress their ideas, organizations forfeit potential avenues for creativity and advancement. A culture characterized by silence constrains innovation and responsiveness within a competitive landscape (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Silence frequently precipitates disengagement and dissatisfaction among employees. Those who perceive their voices as unacknowledged are less inclined to exhibit motivation or commitment to their responsibilities (Brinsfield, 2013). In the absence of transparent communication, unethical behaviors may remain unreported, resulting in damage to the organization's reputation and possible legal ramifications (Miceli & Near, 2013).

Organizations have the capacity to implement proactive interventions to mitigate silence and cultivate a culture characterized by openness and trust. Leadership should endeavor to establish an environment wherein employees feel secure in articulating their thoughts without the apprehension of judgment or retaliation. This necessitates active listening, the encouragement of feedback, and the appreciation of diverse viewpoints (Edmondson & Besieux, 2021). Leaders who practice inclusivity and exhibit approachability and empathy can significantly contribute to the attenuation of silence. By recognizing and responding to employee contributions, leaders can exemplify the importance of transparent communication (Nembhard et al., 2015). Organizations should institute formal mechanisms for feedback, such as suggestion boxes, anonymous surveys, or regular town hall assemblies. These instruments can empower employees to articulate their opinions in a constructive manner (Wilkinson et al., 2024).

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Organizational silence represents a pervasive challenge that undermines the potential for development and innovation. By comprehensively understanding its origins, manifestations, and repercussions, organizations can formulate strategies aimed at fostering a culture of openness and trust. Addressing the issue of silence not only augments organizational performance but also enhances employee satisfaction and engagement (Edmondson & Besieux, 2021).

In modern organizations, creating an environment that fosters innovation and productivity is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge and ensuring long-term sustainability. Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs)—voluntary actions that go beyond formal job duties and contribute positively to the organization—are integral to achieving these objectives (Organ, 2018). These behaviors, which include altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue, play a vital role in enhancing teamwork, morale, and overall organizational effectiveness (Podsakoff et al., 2014). However, OCBs are influenced by various factors, such as organizational culture, leadership styles, and employees' psychological states.

One key obstacle to fostering OCBs is organizational silence, a phenomenon where employees deliberately withhold feedback, opinions, or information that could benefit the organization (Acaray & Akturan, 2015). This silence often arises from fear of retaliation, distrust in leadership, or a belief that speaking up would be futile (Van Dyne et al., 2012). The repercussions of organizational silence include diminished creativity, constrained problem-solving, and employee disengagement, all of which negatively impact OCBs (Çınar et al., 2013). It creates a demoralizing atmosphere, discouraging employees from contributing beyond their assigned roles.

On the other hand, leadership behaviors significantly influence workplace dynamics and can help counteract the effects of organizational silence. Positive leadership behaviors—characterized by openness, ethical decision-making, and the promotion of trust and collaboration—have been shown to cultivate a psychologically safe work environment where employees feel acknowledged and appreciated (Kelloway et al., 2013). Leaders who actively demonstrate inclusivity and provide support can motivate employees to go beyond their formal responsibilities and engage in OCBs, mitigating the adverse effects of organizational silence (Walumbwa et al., 2018).

While research has investigated the relationships between leadership behaviors, organizational silence, and OCBs, gaps remain in understanding the mediating mechanisms linking these variables. Specifically, the role of positive leadership behaviors as a mediator deserves further

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exploration to uncover how such behaviors can transform the negative effects of organizational silence into opportunities for fostering OCBs. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how organizational silence influences OCBs and the extent to which positive leadership behaviors mediate this relationship. The research seeks to contribute to the literature by providing empirical insights into the interaction of these factors and offering practical strategies for organizations to enhance their outcomes.

Organizational silence presents a significant challenge to promoting OCBs, as it limits employee contributions and collaboration, thereby undermining organizational effectiveness (Bogosian, 2018). Employees working in silent environments are less likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization, which adversely affects teamwork, innovation, and morale. Despite the detrimental effects of organizational silence, limited research has addressed how it interacts with leadership behaviors to shape OCBs.

Positive leadership behaviors are a promising solution for addressing organizational silence by creating an environment characterized by trust, psychological safety, and open dialogue ((Walumbwa et al., 2018). Leaders who demonstrate ethical practices, solicit feedback, and empower employees can reduce the effects of fear and perceived futility, thereby encouraging the development of OCBs. However, further investigation is needed to better understand how these leadership behaviors mediate the relationship between silence and OCBs.

Clarifying this mediating role is vital for organizations seeking to improve employee engagement and organizational performance. Without a deeper understanding of this relationship, efforts to diminish organizational silence or promote OCBs may fail to yield optimal results. This study aims to answer the following questions: How does organizational silence impact OCBs, and to what extent can positive leadership behaviors mediate this impact? By addressing these questions, the research will offer evidence-based recommendations to build a culture of trust, openness, and collaboration, ultimately enhancing organizational efficiency and employee well-being.

Material and Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to explore the relationship between organizational silence and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), emphasizing the

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mediating role of positive leadership behaviors. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to assess the proposed relationships and the mediating effects.

The target population consisted of employees from governmental and non-governmental organizations located in Kerman, Iran. A total of 280 employees were selected as participants using accessible sampling techniques. The sample size was determined based on the guidelines for SEM, which recommend a minimum of 10 respondents per model parameter (Kline, 2015). Participants included employees from various departments, ensuring diversity in the sample.

Instruments

Three standardized questionnaires were utilized for data collection, each validated in previous studies:

Organizational Silence Questionnaire: This evaluative tool assesses employees' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of organizational silence, specifically focusing on the degree to which individuals refrain from offering feedback, suggestions, or voicing concerns as a consequence of apprehension, insufficient trust, or a sense of futility (Daşcı & Cemaloğlu, 2016). The instrument comprises 36 items, which are rated on a 5-point Likert scale that spans from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In previous investigations, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was documented at 0.89 (Daşcı & Cemaloğlu, 2016). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was similarly reported as 0.89.

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors Scale: This scale assesses voluntary, discretionary behaviors demonstrated by employees that enhance organizational effectiveness, incorporating dimensions such as altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy, and civic virtue (Van Dyne et al., 1994). An exploratory factor analysis conducted on the initial dataset, followed by a confirmatory factor analysis on cross-validation data, led to the retention of 34 items distributed across five distinct factors. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were recorded at .88 for obedience, .84 for loyalty, .68 for social participation, .86 for advocacy participation, .75 for functional participation, and .95 for the overall OCB scale. The temporal stability of the OCB instrument was evaluated using responses from a sample of 85 supervisors. The construct validity was investigated through the examination of convergent validity, confirmatory factor analysis, and evaluation of the interrelationships posited in the authors' preliminary nomological framework (Van Dyne et al.,

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1994). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total scale was documented as 0.84.

Positive Leadership Behaviors Questionnaire: This instrument evaluates the degree to which leaders exhibit transparency, engage in ethical decision-making, and promote collaboration and trust among employees (Haghparast & Rastgar, 2021). It consists of 12 items, which are scored utilizing a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of this instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, which was found to be 0.87 in previous validations (Haghparast & Rastgar, 2021). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall scale was recorded as 0.82.

Procedure

Participants were apprised of the study's objectives, the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Upon obtaining informed consent, questionnaires were disseminated in both printed and electronic formats to cater to the preferences of the participants. The data collection process was finalized over a duration of three months. The amassed data were subjected to analysis utilizing SPSS version 28 and AMOS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were computed for the variables under investigation. Pearson Correlation Analysis was employed to explore the interrelationships between organizational silence, positive leadership behaviors, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was executed to evaluate the proposed model and to investigate the mediating effect of positive leadership behaviors on the relationship between organizational silence and OCBs. Model fit indices, such as Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), were assessed to ascertain the adequacy of the model. The bootstrap method, involving 5,000 resamples, was utilized to evaluate the significance of the indirect effects.

Ethical Considerations

Participants provided informed consent, and all collected data were anonymized to uphold confidentiality. The study conformed to ethical research guidelines as delineated by the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Results

The study sample comprised 280 employees from governmental and non-governmental organizations in Kerman, Iran. Descriptive analysis revealed the mean and standard deviation scores for organizational silence, positive leadership behaviors, and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients between the variables of the present study

	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2
1	Organizational silence	105.25	5.67	-	
2	Positive leadership behaviors	39.87	3.62	-0.49**	-
3	Organizational citizenship behaviors	111.24	7.23	-0.53**	0.51**

** p < 0.01

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to empirically assess the proposed theoretical framework and to examine the mediating function of positive leadership behaviors. The suggested model exhibited an adequate fit with the observed data, as evidenced by the fit indices. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was recorded at 0.91, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was determined to be 0.062, and the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was computed as 0.91. The SEM analysis elucidated the subsequent direct effects (figure 1).

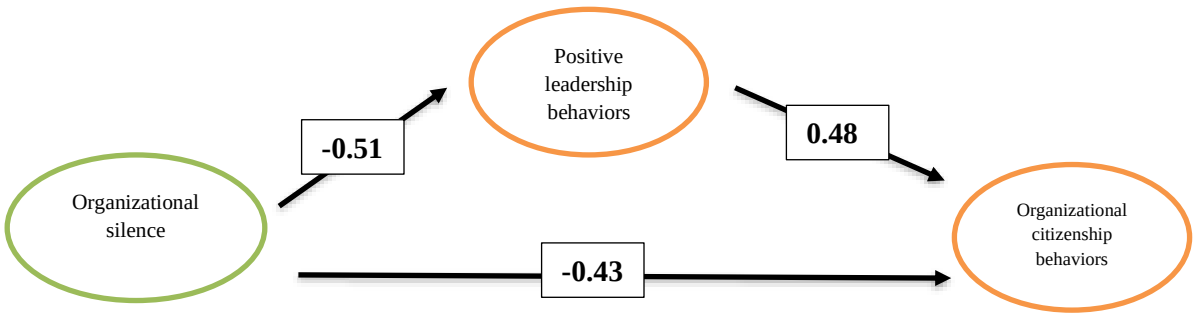


Figure 1. Correlation between organizational silence and organizational citizenship behaviors

As illustrated in Figure 1, the correlation between organizational silence and organizational citizenship behaviors was found to be negative and significant ($\beta = -0.43$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the association between organizational silence and positive leadership behaviors was significant

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and negative ($\beta = -0.51$, $p < 0.01$), while the correlation between positive leadership behaviors and organizational citizenship behaviors was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$).

The bootstrap method was employed to evaluate the mediating effect of positive leadership behaviors. The findings substantiated that positive leadership behaviors partially mediated the association between organizational silence and organizational citizenship behaviors ($\beta = -0.24$, $p < 0.01$). The outcomes revealed that organizational silence adversely influences organizational citizenship behaviors both directly and indirectly through its effects on positive leadership behaviors. It was determined that positive leadership behaviors serve to alleviate the detrimental impacts of organizational silence, thereby promoting the citizenship behaviors of employees.

Discussion

The findings of this study elucidate the profound impact of organizational silence on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), with positive leadership behaviors acting as a mediating factor. In particular, organizational silence was identified as having a harmful direct effect on OCBs, as evidenced by the inverse correlation observed between these constructs. This observation supports the premise that organizational silence obstructs transparent communication and collaboration, which are vital for nurturing discretionary actions that confer benefits upon the organization. Furthermore, the mediation analysis revealed that positive leadership behaviors serve to partially alleviate the adverse consequences of organizational silence on OCBs, thereby emphasizing the pivotal role of leadership in cultivating a conducive workplace atmosphere.

Positive leadership behaviors, defined by attributes such as transparency, ethical decision-making, and inclusivity, emerged as a crucial element in motivating employees to participate in OCBs notwithstanding the existence of organizational silence. This discovery is in harmony with the existing leadership literature, which underscores the significance of leader-facilitated trust and psychological safety in promoting employee engagement and citizenship behaviors.

The outcomes of this study substantiate prior research that indicates a negative correlation between organizational silence and employee outcomes, including diminished morale and engagement (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Correspondingly, the notable positive association between positive leadership behaviors and OCBs is consistent with studies that illustrate how ethical and supportive

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leadership styles cultivate employee trust and voluntary contributions toward organizational objectives (Walumbwa et al., 2018).

Moreover, the mediating function of positive leadership behaviors aligns with earlier research suggesting that leadership acts as a conduit to mitigate the adverse effects of detrimental organizational dynamics, such as silence (Cameron, 2012). This investigation contributes to the extant literature by quantifying the indirect influence of leadership behaviors, thereby offering empirical validation for their significance in counteracting the detrimental repercussions of organizational silence.

The implications derived from this study possess considerable practical relevance for organizations striving to enhance OCBs and diminish the incidence of organizational silence. First, organizations should prioritize the development of positive leadership behaviors through targeted training and development initiatives that focus on ethical decision-making, transparency, and open communication. Leaders who are proficient in these competencies are more likely to cultivate a culture characterized by trust and inclusivity, thereby mitigating the propensity for organizational silence. Second, interventions designed to address organizational silence, such as anonymous feedback mechanisms or structured dialogue forums, can complement leadership development efforts. These strategies can empower employees to express their concerns without apprehension of retaliation, ultimately bolstering organizational citizenship behaviors.

Future investigations should examine the longitudinal repercussions of organizational silence and positive leadership behaviors on OCBs to evaluate the lasting influence of these variables. Additionally, broadening the sample size and incorporating a variety of organizational contexts may enhance the applicability of the findings. Exploring the role of other potential mediators, such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment, could also yield a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved.

This research is not devoid of constraints. Initially, the cross-sectional methodology constrains the capacity to deduce causality among the variables, thereby necessitating prudence in the interpretation of the findings. Furthermore, the dependence on self-reported information may engender response bias, as participants might exaggerate or diminish their assessments of leadership behaviors or organizational silence. Lastly, the study's concentration on a singular

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cultural and geographic context (Kerman, Iran) may restrict the generalizability of the results to alternative cultural or organizational environments.

By illuminating the relationship between organizational silence, affirmative leadership behaviors, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs), this research offers pragmatic insights for organizations aiming to elevate employee engagement and performance. The results emphasize the significance of nurturing leadership behaviors that foster openness and trust, consequently alleviating the adverse consequences of organizational silence and advancing a culture of citizenship and collaboration.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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