

## **Validating Organizational Silence Questionnaire at Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of Iran**

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of the present study was to determine validity and reliability of Persian version of organizational silence questionnaire. The population was all employees of ministry of youth affairs and sports of Iran. Due to the population size, total population sampling method was used in which sample size is the same with population size. To collect information Vacola and Bouradas questionnaire (2005) was used. This questionnaire is consisting of three components including top management attitude toward organizational silence, supervisors' attitude toward organizational silence, and communication opportunities. Face and content validity of questionnaires were discussed and confirmed by university professors and experts. And using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the reliability was calculated in a case study in which the reliability is 0.90. To describe statistical data, descriptive indicators was used and to determine construct validity, confirmatory factor analysis was used. The results showed that based on relations and significant levels, all the questions had significant relationship with factors and could be an appropriate predictor for their factors. Regarding to the results of this research, Persian version of organizational silence questionnaire has acceptable level of reliability and validity.*

**Keywords:** *organizational silence, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, confirmatory factor analysis, Iran.*

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### **Introduction**

Organizations to be survived, need people who respond to environmental challenges and do not hesitate to share their knowledge and information, and are determined in the beliefs of themselves and their team (Bagheri, Zarei and Nik Aeen, 2012, P:50). Organizations always ask their employees to be innovative, to express their view and comments and to be more responsible due to extensive competitive market, high expectations of costumers and greater focus on quality, which all show the changing world (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997, P: 47). Managers constantly try to encourage their employees to do their jobs better in different issues. They believe that when a person is employed somewhere, he/she has to accept all its conditions (Huang, Van der Vliert, Van der Vegt, 2005, p: 478). Some managers insist on this issue that staff' satisfaction could be increased by rewarding and encouraging. Maybe they consider their staff as subordinates and have to obey their orders (Van Dyne, Linn, Son and Botero, 2003, P: 6). Of course, nowadays, due to financial pressure, economic issues of the job are important for employees. But gradually interested staff, are seeking greater job autonomy in their work, so that they feel they are more valuable person than before. If these staff faces barriers on their job demands, the result would be job frustration and isolation that will lead to issues such as organizational silence (Avery and Quinones, 2002, P:85).

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Morrison and Milliken (2000) have introduced this concept and declare that organizational silence is a social phenomenon in which employees refuse to express their views and concerns about organization's problems. Meanwhile, two main factors that cause employees to be silent in organizations are: manager's concerns about negative feedbacks of employees due to risk of losing their benefits and positions, and employees perceptions towards implicit beliefs of managers about them (Morrison and Milliken, 2000, p:716). Pinder and Harlos (2001) define organizational silence as 'the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive and affective evolutions of organizational circumstances (Pinder and Harlos, 2001, P: 333). Two main factors that cause employees to be silent in organizations are: manager's concerns about negative feedbacks of employees due to risk of losing their benefits and positions, and employees perceptions towards implicit beliefs of managers about them. These beliefs include some management thoughts based on the fact that employees only consider their personal interests and the manager of any organization understand more than others and knows the best decision and the fact that disagreements are naturally harmful issues for the organization (Podsakoff, Mac kenzie, Paine and Bachrach, 2000, p:543). Although these issues are management beliefs and none of them are true in the organization, but they also create harmful feelings and emotions such as fear, deception, and anger in the employees of the organization and ultimately lead to creation of employees' silence (Slade, 2008, P:21). Organizational silence, by limiting the comments of the employees, can lead to an effective reduction of organizational decision makings and processes of change and this is an issue many organizations complain about. Also this behavioral phenomenon prevents effective organizational evolution and development through prevention of negative feedback; thus the organization loses the ability to review and correct the errors. Therefore, paying attention to this problem is very important in organizations (Perlow, 2003, P: 278).

Crant (2000) had done a research titled 'organizational silence (looking for a domestic model for Iranian organizations). In this study, the researchers identified the concept of organizational silence as well as its various aspects, dimensions and its components (Crant, 2000, p: 450).

Zarei Matin et al (2012) had done a research titled 'organizational silence: concepts, causes, consequences. This research defines organizational silence and organizational voice and compares these two concepts. Then analyses types of organizational silence and voice, describes philosophical dimensions of silence and its related perspectives, defines organizational and management variables which influence on creation of organizational silence, mentions silence contents in organizations and describes the reasons and consequences of organizational silence (Zarei Matin, Taheri and Sayyar, 2012, P:99).

Ting and Ying (2016) in his research entitled 'organizational silence' introduces the concept of organizational silence and its reasons and identifies its components, dimensions and the impact of different occupational attitudes on it (Ting and Ying, 2016, P:646).

Barry and Wilkinson (2015) conducted a research entitled 'Analysis on occupational attitudes of staffs of governmental organizations, explanation of organizational silence atmosphere and organizational behavior of organizational silence. Results showed that there is a significant relation between silence atmosphere dimensions (top management attitudes to silence, supervisors' attitude to silence, and communication opportunities) and occupational attitudes of employees with employees' silence behavior. so that there is a strong positive correlation between top management attitudes and supervisors' attitudes with employees' silence behavior. And there is a severe negative correlation between communication opportunities and employee's occupational attitudes with employees' silence behavior. Also they concluded that when knowledge-oriented employees, as strategic property of the organization, are silent, the management should be noticed that a great danger is about to happen (Barry and Wilkinson, 2012, P: 276)

Danaei Fard, Fani and Barati (2011) in their research entitled 'clarification on the role of organizational silence on organizational silence in public sector' concluded that it is difficult to move on from a silent atmosphere to an atmosphere that free and open relations are encouraged and supported. But it is not

impossible. One of the ways that could create such a change in organization, is replacing top manager with a new top manager that his records had shown that he supports open communication atmosphere. This happening not only enables organization to move away from its past, but also make staff to feel that the organization is committed to change the status quo. The other crucial point is that managers should always persuade their employees that they are looking forward to hearing their comments, suggestions and problems and they do not show any negative reaction towards employees who share organization issues with them. However, managers should support these messages in act. Also it would be great if managers develop employees' behaviors which affects their decision making in positive way, with proper motivational techniques (Danaei Fard, Fani and Barati, 2011, P: 77).

Afkhami & Jalili in their research titled 'the relation between personality factors and silence of knowledge-based employees' showed that there is a negative significant relation between personality dimensions including being extroverted and conscientious, and silence; while there is a positive significant relation between compatibility and silence; and there is no significant relation between neurotic aspect of personality and silent. Morrison and Milliken et al concluded that social capital has direct and significant impact on different aspects of employees' activities (Morrison and Milliken, 2000, P: 274).

Karaca (2013) conducted a research titled 'general concepts and promotional factors'. The results showed that organizational silence has become a pervasive issue and is influenced by following factors: 1. Features of management team 2. Organizational and environmental features 3. Factors affecting the employees' interactions, 4. Manager's belief, 5. Organizational structures and politics. 6. Management of negative feedback and fearing, 7. Demographic differences (Karaca, 2013, p: 47).

Bear and Nuria (2000) facing environmental challenges and meet the change needs, requires employees' empowerment and creating free communication channels. Because lots of employees consider "lack of organization's support from free communication channels and not sharing knowledge and information" as one of the failure reasons of management change. Bear and Nutria's point of view in this study confirm that there is a significant correlation between adaptive aspect of organizational culture and organizational silence (Bee and Noria, 2000, P: 39).

Whitside and Barclay (2012) conducted a research titled 'Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world'. The results showed that there are powerful forces in many organizations that cause widespread withholding of information about potential problems or issues by employees. They also presented a model. In their model they identify contextual variables that create conditions conducive to silence and explore the collective sense making dynamics that can create the shared perception that speaking up is unwise. They also discuss some of the negative consequences of systemic silence, especially for organizations' ability to change and develop in the context of pluralism (Whitside and Barclay, 2012, P: 14).

Regarding to this issue that 'organizational silence' is a new and unfamiliar topic in Iran organizational and scientific communities, and few research in this area could be found, this study tries to describe the concept of organizational silence by reviewing the literature and background existed in this topic. And define its different types and different motives of employees to follow each type, in order to identify and categorize organizational, management and personal factors which influence on creation of organizational silence and in order to propose some solutions to reduce silence. Due to this fact that organizational silence could be a barrier for people to bring up their opinions, identifying the factors that affecting it and trying to eliminate these factors could provide a condition in which employees could propose their ideas and opinions, promote their creativity and organizations could progress in success with benefits of active and conscious participation of employees.

**Table (1): Cronbach's alpha coefficients**

index	Cronbach's alpha coefficients
Management's Attitude	0.924
Supervisor's Attitude	0.933
Communication Opportunities	0.921
Organizational Silence	0.900

**Methodology**

This study is a correlation research and the method is applied in terms of research objective and is a survey research in terms of data collection. The population are all staff of ministry of youth affairs and sports of Iran. Due to the population size total population sampling method is used that in which sample size is the same with population size. In this study demographic variables (sex, age, marital status, level of education and records) and organizational silence is investigated. To collect information, the following questionnaires is used: a questionnaire on personal information (sex, age, marital status, level of education and records), organizational silence attitude questionnaire of Vacola and Bourdas (2005) which is consisting of three components including top management attitude toward organizational silence, supervisors' attitude toward organizational silence, and communication opportunities (Vakola and Bouradas, 2005, p:458). The scoring format is *five*-point rating scale (strongly disagree: 5 to strongly agree: 1). the results of Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each indicator is as follow:

Regarding to table above, obtained Cronbach's alpha confirms the reliability of questionnaire. To verify the content validity of the instrument, the experts surveyed and confirmed the questionnaire. Analyzing data by SPSS and LISREL software, mean, standard deviation, maxima and minima is used for descriptive statistics and confirmatory factor analysis is used for inferential statistics.

**Results**

First, general specifications of respondents is reported. Due to descriptive statistics, 71 percent of respondents are male and 30 percent is female. The respondents who are in age category of 41-50 have the most frequency (40 percent) and the people who are in age category of lower than 30, have the lowest frequency (8percent). Majority of the samples (78 percent) are married and 22 percent are single. 36 percent of the samples have B.A. degree and the lowest frequency in this part is allocated to Ph.D. degree (3 percent). More than half of people (58 percent) have less than 15 years' job experience and 42 percent is working for more than 15 years.

Here, descriptive results of organizational silence dimensions (top management attitude toward organizational silence, supervisors' attitude toward organizational silence, and communication opportunities) are described and then the overall evolution of index is studied.

**Table (2): Descriptive Statistics of organizational silence dimensions**

Description	Mean	SD	Lowest Score	Highest Score
Management's attitude	15.62	6.66	5	25
Supervisor's attitude	15.87	6.82	5	25
Communication opportunities	16.00	6.73	5	25

**Table (3): Frequently Distribution of Organizational Silence**

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Low	97	40.4
Medium	35	14.6
High	108	45
Sum	240	100
Statistical Index	X 45.50 SD 14.09	Lowest: 15 Highest: 75

In this part, constructive components of organizational silence are investigated to determine whether these components and items are valid identifiers of organizational silence or not.

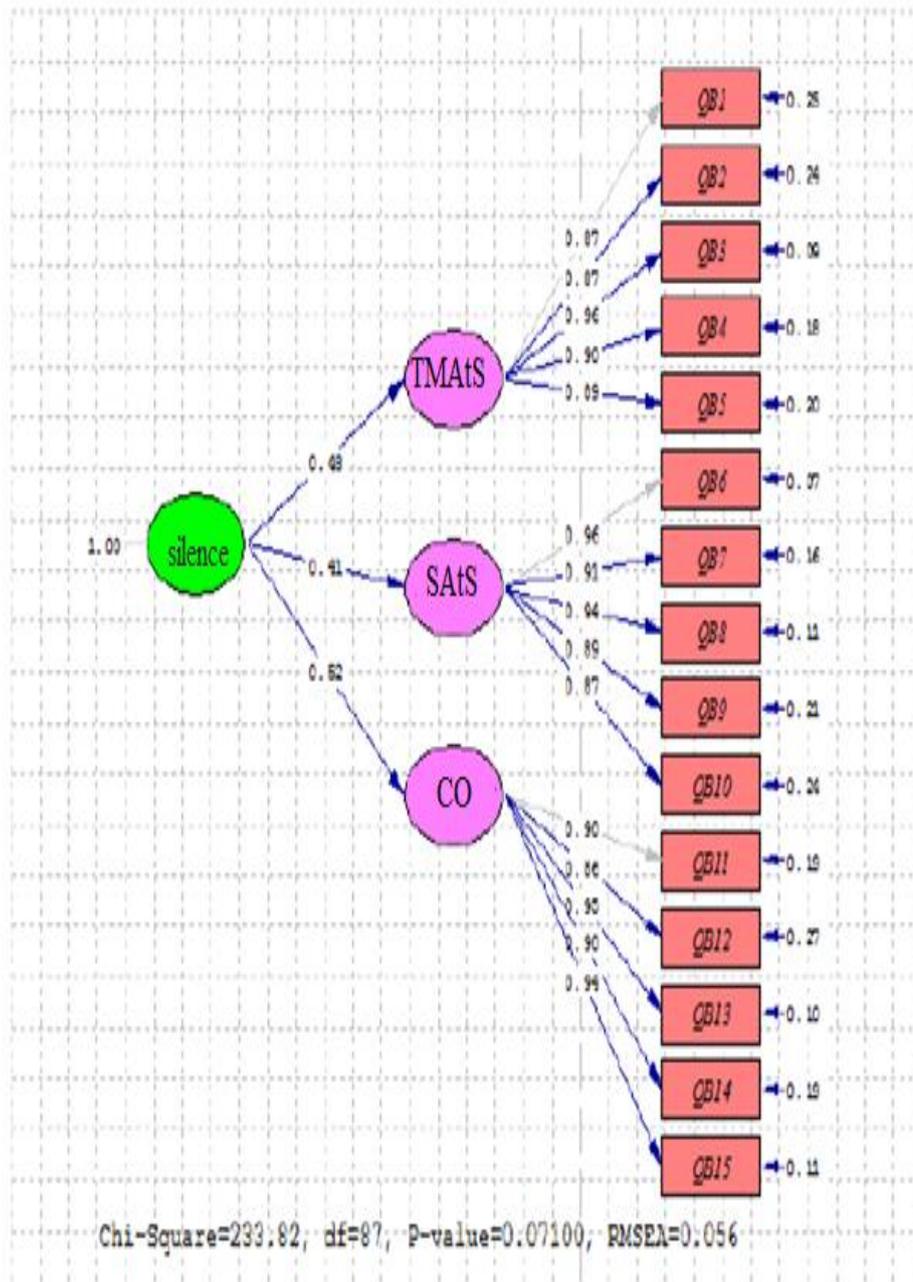


Figure (1): Second Order Factor Analysis Model of organizational silence (Standard Mode).

- TMAts: top management attitudes to silence
- SAts: supervisor's attitudes to silence
- CO: communication opportunities

## Investigating Fit Indices

*Table (4): the indices extracted from the model.*

<i>Statistics</i>	<i>V</i>
<i>Chi-Square</i>	233.82
<i>Df</i>	87
<i>Chi-Square/ Df</i>	2.68
<i>RMSEA</i>	0.056
<i>GFI</i>	0.94
<i>AGFI</i>	0.92
<i>CFI</i>	0.96
<i>NFI</i>	0.97
<i>RMR</i>	0.039

According to fit indices of the model which mentioned in above table, the amount of  $\chi^2/df$  is 2.68. When  $\chi^2/df$  is lower than 3, it shows that fit index of the model is appropriate. Also RSMEA should be lower than 0.08 which in this model is 0.056. The components GFI, AGFI, CFI and NFI should be lower than 0.90 which in this model are equal to 0.94, 0.92, 0.96, and 0.97. Also RMR should be lower than 0.05 that in this model is 0.039. Regarding to indices and outputs of organizational silence model, it could be declared that the identifiers to assess organizational silence index is valid.

## Discussion & Conclusion

The aim of this research was determining validity and reliability of organizational silence index among employees of ministry of youth affairs and sports of Iran. In this research, organizational silence index of Vacola and Bouradas (2005) has 3 components including top management attitude toward organizational silence, supervisors' attitude toward organizational silence, and communication opportunities could explain all questions (15 questions) significantly. Common perceptions and attitudes will develop when the members of a social community find an opportunity to interact and communicate with each other. The more these communications and interact will be performed with more consistency and in a shorter period, it is more likely to transfer the attitudes of one person to another. Management and structural factors will lead to organizational silence. (Like focused decision-making, lack of formal feedback mechanism), Similarity, stability, unity workflow, integration of social interaction among employees will increase the probability of creating a silent atmosphere. People prefer to interact with those who are similar to themselves and confirm their beliefs and perceptions. Hence, if the organization reject comments and opinions or any disagreement from employees, the more the employees would be similar to each other, the probability of creation of silence atmosphere will be increased. Moreover, common perceptions will develop in such organizations which members have relatively fixed membership. Because stability means more opportunities for employees to be in contact with each other and share their perceptions to each other. Workflow integration is another variable which help the process of collective conceptualization which may lead to silence atmosphere in case of existence of specific structural features. When employees should coordinate their activities in a work group, it will be more crucial to communicate with each other and more opportunities will be created to share perceptions and experiences.

Finally, it could be declared that different attitudes of employees will cause a certain type of organizational silence or voice. And as a result the employees will refuse to declare their information, comments and beliefs and will create a kind of silence or voice (Zehir and Erdogan, 2011). The ministry of youth affairs and sports of Iran could be hopeful that in future, such a condition will be developed in their organization in which the employees have no fear or concern to talk about their opinions, beliefs and concerns.

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