Forecasting organizational silence according to moral behavior styles

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Lack of expressing opinions by employees in organizations causes organizational silence. Researchers have identified two contributing factors for the organizational silence: Management fear of negative feedback and staff perceptions of management's complex ideas about them.

Method: This article aimed to forecast organizational silence according to moral behavior styles. A total of 300 employees working in Mobile Telecommunication Company of Iran (MCI) were enrolled as the sample using simple random sampling. It was a correlational study.

Result: The results showed that organizational silence had a significant relationship with moral behavior.

Conclusion: The results help managers prepare the ground to receive feedback from employees with various moral behavior styles.

INTRODUCTION

Lack of expressing opinions by employees in organizations causes organizational silence. Researchers have identified two contributing factors for the organizational silence: Management fear of negative feedback and staff perceptions of management's complex ideas about them (Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Morrison and Milliken stated that silence had become a driving force in organizations. However, a serious study has not conducted in this regard. They introduced the term and showed that organizational silence is a social phenomenon in organizations, influenced by numerous organizational features. It consists of decision-making, management, culture, employees' perception process of an effective factor in silence. According to the findings by Butson (1998) and Levin et al. (2001), greater accountability and empathy caused an increase in moral act. Piaget and Kohlberg's theory claimed that one's passage from the initial stages of ethics to higher levels depends on cognitive structure. As individual gets older, moral thinking rises. Therefore, the cognitive development closely correlated with the moral development. According to Abbas Zadeh et al. (2002), good intentions would lead people to good deeds. Moral deliberation is mainly effective in at individual level. In deontology teleology, professional ethics is effective in solving moral problems, while social ethics is based on the situation. Talebi believes that social and environmental factors such as encouragement and punishment, group values, income and parents' education, and place of residence of students are effective in their moral growth.

Being independent of social and emotional factors is one of Kohlberg's moral development shortcomings. Moral behavior is an inevitable consequence of moral judgment in various studies. Moral growth is a multidimensional one. When we study one's behavior in actual conditions, we realize that motivation, type of thinking, and moral sense are effective in moral act. Some researchers such as Rest and Blasi believed that moral act is not necessarily the result of moral reasoning. Emotional and motivational factors and personality traits determine the moral behaviors. Hopkins (2006) also believes that positive feelings strengthen positive information in memory and facilitate the process of moral thinking.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research Subject and Design

This is an applied, descriptive survey, providing the possibility of generalizing the results to the whole statistical population. The statistical population consisted of all employees working in the Mobile Telecommunication Company of Iran (MCI). The minimum sample consisted of 200 employees for the factor analysis and 300 for the appropriate sample size. A sample of 300 was enrolled using simple random sampling.
Research Tool and Data Collection
Data were collected using two questionnaires: Taghi Lou Moral Behavior Style Inventory and Vakola & Bouradas Organizational Silence Survey. Vakola & Bouradas (2005) Organizational Silence Survey is a 13-item questionnaire to assess the organizational silence. The items scored on 1-5 Likert scale (1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- No Idea, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly Agree). The first four questions are directly, and the next nine questions calculated indirectly. The first four questions measure Defensive Silence, next four questions for Acquiescent Silence and the last five questions assess Pro-social Silence. The study by Salavati et al. (2014) reported the Cronbach's alpha of 0.889, showing great and optimal reliability.

Taghi Lou Moral Behavior Style Inventory (total of 30 items) classifies moral behavior styles into three: Task-oriented (13 items), People-oriented (11 items), and Self-centered (6 items). The items scored on a 1 to 5 Likert scale (1-Never, 2- Rarely, 3- Sometimes, 4- Often, and 5-Always). 26 questions are directly, and 4 calculated reversely. Self-centered individuals are those who just meet their needs. Task-oriented individuals work based on their duties. People-oriented individuals are those who meet the needs of society. Taghi Lou reported the correlation coefficients of 0.53, 0.59, and 0.48 for the three subscales on 42 subjects in a two-week interval, showing acceptable scores of subscales.

Statistical Analysis
Data were analyzed using path analysis by LISREL.

RESULTS
Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics (age, education, work experience, and gender). After factor analysis, path analysis was used for the hypothesis testing using LISREL.

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Data Normality
Table 2 shows the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for data normality. Since the significance level is greater than 0.05 for all variables, it is concluded that the distribution of above variables had no significant difference with a normal distribution. Therefore, a normal distribution of variables was concluded.

Sample Adequacy Test
Sample Adequacy Test is one of the prerequisites for LISREL structural equation modeling. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett test of sphericity(BTS) used. Table 3 shows the results:

According to the table, adequacy was 0.889. Therefore, it is appropriate for use in SEM. In general, closer adequacy to 1 indicates that factor analysis is applicable for the data. If adequacy is less than 0.05, factor analysis is likely not to be appropriate. Correlated variables required for the factor model. As Table 3 shows, the significance level is less than 0.05 for Bartlett’s test, showing that correlation found between the variables of each factor.
**Abbreviation of Variables**

| Variable | Description                        |
|----------|------------------------------------|
| KHM      | Self-Centered Moral Behavior Style |
| VM       | Task-Oriented Moral Behavior Style  |
| MM       | People-Oriented Moral Behavior Style|
| ST       | Defensive Organizational Silence    |
| SM       | Acquiescent Organizational Silence  |
| SND      | Pro-Social Organizational Silence   |

**Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Moral Behavior Styles**

Figure 1 shows the measurement model of moral behavior styles at standard estimation mode. Figure 2 shows the same model in significance mode. Figure 1 shows factor loadings for each of measurement model paths. Approval or rejection of each of model paths depends on the comparison of factor loading of the path at standard estimation mode with its calculated t at significance mode (figure 2). All hypotheses verified.

Load factors in estimation mode show the extent of the effect of each of variables and items in determining the variance of the main variable. In other words, load factor shows the extent of correlation of each item with the latent variable (factors). For example, the load factor of the first item is 0.71 in people-centered moral behavior. In other words, it determined almost 71% of people-centered moral behavior. The error is 0.45, which is the extent of variance which cannot be determined by the first item. Obviously, the lower error shows a greater correlation between the item and the related factor. Determination factors range between 0 and 1. Closer values to 1 show greater variance determination. As figure 2 shows, all model relationships are significant because the calculated t was not between -1.96 and +1.96.

Table 4 shows fitting index. According to the results, it claimed that all fitting indices are optimal. Therefore, the model verified.

**Table 4** Fitting Indices of Final Model for Moral Behavior Style

| Index   | Acceptable Range | Value | Result |
|---------|------------------|-------|--------|
| X2/df   | X2/df ≤ 3        | 2.33  | Verified |
| RMSEA   | RMSEA < 0.09     | 0.09  | Verified |
| GFI     | GFI > 0.9        | 0.93  | Verified |
| AGFI    | AGFI > 0.9       | 0.94  | Verified |
| CFI     | CFI > 0.9        | 0.93  | Verified |
| IFI     | IFI > 0.9        | 0.93  | Verified |
| df      |                   | 402   |        |
| X2      |                   | 940.38|        |

**Table 5** Fitting Indices of Final Model for Organizational Silence

| Index   | Acceptable Range | Value | Result |
|---------|------------------|-------|--------|
| X2/df   | X2/df ≤ 3        | 2.54  | Verified |
| RMSEA   | RMSEA < 0.09     | 0.072 | Verified |
| GFI     | GFI > 0.9        | 0.93  | Verified |
| AGFI    | AGFI > 0.9       | 0.9   | Verified |
| CFI     | CFI > 0.9        | 0.92  | Verified |
| IFI     | IFI > 0.9        | 0.92  | Verified |
| df      |                   | 51    |        |
| X2      |                   | 129.31|        |

**Figure 1** Moral Behavior Style Measurement at Standard Estimation Mode
Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Organizational Silence

Figure 3 shows, loading factor for each of the mode paths. Approval or rejection of each of model paths depends on the comparison of factor loading of the path at standard estimation mode with its calculated t at significance mode (figure 4). According to the results, all relationships verified except for the 4th one (Acquiescent Silence). Load factors in estimation mode show the extent of the effect of each of variables and items in determining the variance of the main variable. As figure 4 shows, all relationships were significant except for the 4th item because the t was not between -1.96 and +1.96. According to 4th loading factor, Acquiescent Silence removed from the final model.

Table 5 shows fitting index. According to the results, it is claimed that all fitting indices are optimal. Therefore, the model is verified. The fitting indices were optimal, and the questionnaire structures show the related variables well.

Structural Path Analysis

Figure 5 shows the structural model t estimation mode. It also shows standard Beta coefficients for structural model paths. Figure 6 shows the structural model at correlation coefficient mode and the calculated t.

As figure 5 shows, the standard Beta value is -0.3 for self-centered moral behavior style. As figure 6 shows, calculated t (-6.78) is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at 99% confidence level. It concluded that self-centered moral behavior style predicts organizational silence and the relationship was negatively significant.

As figure 5 shows, the standard Beta value is -0.28 for task-oriented moral behavior style. As figure 6 shows, calculated t (-3.6) is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at 99% confidence level. It concluded that task-oriented moral behavior style predicts organizational silence and the relationship was negatively significant.

As figure 5 shows, the standard Beta value is 0.75 for people-oriented moral behavior style. As figure 6 shows, calculated t (9.82) is greater than the critical value of 1.96 at 99% confidence level. It concluded that people-oriented moral behavior style predicts organizational silence and the relationship was negatively significant.

Table 6: Final Model Values concerning the Relationship between Organizational Silence and Moral Behavior Style Variables

| Relationships | Standardized Value | Standard Error | T value | R²     | Significance Level | Result |
|---------------|--------------------|----------------|---------|--------|--------------------|--------|
| Organizational Silence is predicted based on Self-centered Behavior Style | -0.3 | 0.014 | -6.78 | 0.44 | P<0.01 | Verified |
| Organizational Silence is predicted based on task-oriented Behavior Style | -0.28 | 0.035 | -3.6 | 0.44 | P<0.01 | Verified |
| Organizational Silence is predicted based on People-oriented Behavior Style | 0.75 | 0.031 | 9.82 | 0.44 | P<0.01 | Verified |

Figure 2: Moral Behavior Style Measurement at Standard Significance Mode

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Organizational Silence

Figure 3 shows, loading factor for each of the mode paths. Approval or rejection of each of model paths...
organizational silence and the relationship was positively significant.

According to figure 5 and 6, it is concluded that organizational silence determined by self-centered and people-oriented, and task-oriented moral behavior styles. According to the comparison of standard confident, people-oriented moral behavior style (Beta=0.75) was greater than the other two styles (0.3 and 0.28).

DISCUSSION

One way to guarantee top performance is to seek the successful role of HR. HR is the most important knowledge capital of every organization. In order to reach more productivity and development, organizations require the correct use of this important and vital source. To foster creativity and motivation of staff, organizations have to pay attention to the opinions and ideas of staff or create solutions to meet their concerns. Lack of stating opinions by employees creates a phenomenon, called organizational silence. As stated earlier, employees mainly have ideas, opinions, and information for better methods in order to improve the work and organization. They state “organizational voice”. Some employees share these opinions, while others do not and keep silent. Sharing ideas (organizational voice) or avoiding sharing (organizational silence) might behaviorally seem two contradictory activities because silence requires not talking while voice needs sharing problems in the organization. In fact, silence is not necessarily against organizational voice. The difference between voice and silence does not lie in talking or not, but in reasons to avoid sharing information, ideas, and opinions. There are three motives regarding silence and voice: 1) Disengaged behavior according to the submission and satisfaction of all things, 2) Fear-based self-protection behavior, 3) Other-oriented behaviors because of interest in others and creation of opportunity for collaboration. These motives cause three types of voice or silence: Acquiescent, Defensive, and Altruistic, caused by passive or proactive behaviors (figure 7).

Moasa (2011) studied “silence and voice in organizations”. Despite his previous studies in relation to organizational voice and silence, he considered organizational silence and voice separate topics. According to Moasa, organizational silence and voice have closely intertwined strategic forms, which support each other. Lack of one fully reduces the effective presence of the other. Social activists can have both qualities because they are faced with different conditions. The study by Moasa showed that voice and silence seem, at first glance, opposite because one indicates expression and the other silence. However, voice and silence support each other. Voice cannot exist without silence and vice versa. Both strengthen each other. Reviewing this phenomenon has multiple phenomena. The most important factor is that voice and silence need to be considered social activities because they are strategic and communicative forms of interactions. According to experts, organizational silence prevents effective organizational changes and development by blocking the negative feedback. How the management uses a variety of management practices is an important factor for creating or eliminating silence. Managers, who do not allow their inferiors to decide or share, must only expect silence. The sense that employees are not able to discuss their concerns and worries can cause helplessness, reduced job satisfaction, and other job and personal consequences in the long run. The following reasons are stated as the main cause of organizational silence: fear of losing benefits, the loss of privileges, and dismissal from the current position. In such conditions, individuals believe that sharing ideas is an important factor for shaking organizational peace. Therefore, they take silence

![Figure 3](image-url)
and indifference as the best solution because they believe that their ideas are not effective enough in organizational decision making.

Although organizational silence is generally a tool not to express employees’ ideas and comments, its nature would differ due to the motivations for silence. Sometimes, silence is associated with the acquiescence to any conditions, fear and cautious behaviors, and sometimes creation of opportunity for others and their opinions.

The hypothesis outlined here was as follows: “Organizational Silence of employees working in MCI is predicted through the Moral Behavior Styles”. Path analysis was used for the hypothesis testing, indicating the verification of the hypothesis. As it can be seen, organizational silence had a significant relationship with moral behavior styles at 99% confidence level. Therefore, organizational silence can predict moral behavior styles. According to the positive correlation between the people-oriented style and organizational silence, it is claimed that the dominance of people-oriented moral behavior causes an increase in organizational silence. Task-oriented and self-centered behavior styles had a negative correlation with the organizational silence, meaning that individuals with task-oriented and self-centered styles do not keep silent. As it can be seen, individuals with people-centered behavior style are more likely to display organizational silence compared to those with task-oriented and self-centered behavioral styles. This is justifiable according to what was mentioned in the definition of moral behavioral styles. According to Taghi Lou (2015), people-oriented behavioral style is the most sublime style and can be compared with the third level of Kohlberg’s moral development, especially the ethics based on the universal principles. Individuals with people-oriented styles are controlled by some internal ideas, performing based on trueness, not the reaction of others. The results showed that people-centered individuals are likely to select organizational silence due to acquiescence to any conditions or the creation of opportunity for others to express. Individuals with greater scores of task-oriented element respect others and act based on rules and regulations. They are less likely to ignore their rights compared with those with great scores in people-oriented scores. They are sensitive to the rights of others and try to live with no expense for their own and others. Individuals with greater scores in the people-oriented element are likely to behave in accordance with the second level of Kohlberg's moral development, especially the rule and regulation-based morality. Hamsou, consistent with Kohlberg, believed that contractual level is a level of moral growth in which individuals try to maintain the expectations of families, groups, and people, regardless of results. He stated that the ones with task-oriented behavioral style act based on the contracts (Taghi Lou). Therefore, it
is expected that people who have a high degree of conscientiousness are likely to be interested in their work, have a greater level of self-esteem, prefer not to keep silent regarding organizational issues, and express and share their opinions. According to the results, individuals with task-oriented moral behavioral style do not select silence. As Kohlberg thought, ethics and customs are parallel and distinctive development frames, not a single pattern. Since all social phenomena, including moral ones, occur in wider contexts, one’s reasoning regarding a correct act in particular social status requires that individuals obtain their perceptions in multiple social-cognitive frameworks or coordinate various social-cognitive frameworks. For example, standing in line to buy a ticket for a theater is a common social problem. Anyone who has traveled outside of Northern Europe or North America can attest to the fact that standing in line in various cultures is not a common social norm. For example, in the United States or England, standing in line is the common practice to observe the turn. Observing the turn is a moral consequence and a mechanism for the common use, which means one of the dimensions of distributive justice. Jumping the queue is more than violating a common norm in England and the United States. It is the violation of rules developed by people to preserve the justice. According to Toril’s visions, What Kohlberg’s theory tries to explain in a single development framework, in fact, is a set of age-related efforts that people perform at different development levels to harmonize their social perceptions of normative in multiple territories. Therefore, according to the development theory, there are many inconsistencies in people’s judgment in different contexts.

Carol Gilligan raised one of the major criticisms of Kohlberg in his famous book called In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development (1982). According to his opinion, Kohlberg’s theory has a bias against women because only male subjects have participated in his studies. Based on women’s experience, Gilligan stated that Caring Morality dominates rather than Kohlberg’s justice and rights. In his opinion, caring morality is based on non-violence policy, while justice and right morality based on equality. These two types of morality give two different results: Decision to reject unfair treatment (fairness) and negation of indifference to those in needs. He believes that these two moralities are potentially correlated.

Finally, morality had expanded to wider horizons rather than theoretical reasoning. It is now evident that the findings related to the growth-stage model of moral reasoning must be interpreted in terms of our information regarding motivational, self-regulatory, self-development, social information processing stages. Studies on social-texture differences in cultural research give new visions in relation to the formation of children’s morality.

In Kohlberg’s view, morality has three dimensions: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. Behavioral dimension refers to a wide range of behaviors. Albert Bandura pointed the Proactive and Inhibitive aspects and believed that proactive morality characterized by positive behaviors which are useful for others and inhibitive morality characterized by preventing those harmful for others. In Bandura’s opinion, even the preventive aspect of morality is positive because it prevents the harms to others. Some intercultural researchers have focused on moral behavior and believe that moral behaviors are those based on public accepted norms. In general, according to the experts in the field of morality, it is inferred that moral behavior is related to the well-being and welfare. Therefore, doing or not doing increases the well-being or reduces well-being. Studies show that either the staff selects to be silent or not can be dependent on their moral behavior style.

On the other hand, self-centered behavioral style indicates a lack of moral growth. It is similar to the Freud’s view of the character rather than Kohlberg’s first level of moral development. Individuals with self-centered behavioral style are similar to children at Kohlberg’s second level of moral development. They observe the law because of their fear of authorities and respect the rights of others. Individuals with greater self-centered scores have greater id
than the other two parts (ego and super-ego) and always try to achieve their goals without the sense of guilt.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

The results of our study showed that the ones with self-centered moral behavior style do not keep silent and try to achieve the goals regardless of the impact of environmental factors. The results indicated that moral behavioral styles are effective in selecting the organizational silence. In addition to organizational and managerial factors, the results showed that moral behavior styles are also effective in silence. The study showed that the following issues could be taken into account to improve the organizational voice against the organizational silence: holding public relations and communication training workshops, identifying the capabilities of individuals and using them in the decision-making process and identifying personal characteristics of individuals while delegating the responsibilities. For future studies, it is recommended to study other factors affecting the organizational silence, study the same model in large Iranian organizations for the generalization of results, study the effect of manager personality on employee silence, study the relationship between different types of moral behavior style and different types of organizational silence.

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