

# **EMPLOYEE SILENCE: COMMITMENT TO STATUS QUO AMONG LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES WITH HIGH SOCIAL DOMINANCE**

**Sania Usmani<sup>1\*</sup> and T. Ramayah<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Department of HR and Management, College of Business Management, Institute of Business Management, Karachi 75500, Pakistan*

*<sup>2</sup>School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM Pulau Pinang, Malaysia*

\*Corresponding author: [sania.usmani@iobm.edu.pk](mailto:sania.usmani@iobm.edu.pk)

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Many employees want to either retain their jobs or attain promotion. In doing so, they remain silent and conform to all the decisions taken by the top management. Most studies have treated the causes of this silence as unobserved intervening mechanisms and named them black boxes. The current study therefore, aims to explore those unobserved psychological characteristics of employees. More specifically, it examines the employee's psychological ideology, namely liberalism and conservatism in affecting commitment to status quo mediated by employee silence and moderated by social dominance. This study proposes that employee ideologies (liberalism and conservatism) affect their voicing behaviour and ultimately their resistance or acceptance to the status quo. Data from 219 faculty members from different universities in Karachi, Pakistan was gathered. The study hypothesised that liberals will tend to voice their opinions and resist the managements status quo while conservatives tend not to voice their opinions and endorse status quo, and they accept management's decision and will not question their actions. The results showed that liberals have an indirect relationship with silence, namely they do not remain silent. Additionally, silence had an indirect relationship with status quo. Even though they are silent it does not mean they endorse status quo. Further, it was found that silence mediates the relationship between liberals and commitment to status quo.*

*It was also found that conservatives also endorsed status quo but there was no relationship between conservatives and silence. Further, silence did not mediate the relationship between conservatives and status quo. Moreover, social dominance orientation strengthens or moderates the relationship between silence and status quo.*

**Keywords:** employee ideology, conservatism, liberalism, management, silence, status quo

## INTRODUCTION

Rapid pace of technological growth is witnessing organisations highlighting the importance of employee-driven initiatives. Constructive advices improves organisational functioning and enhances its adaptability towards external dynamic changes. However, employee voicing is risky as it creates the fear of damaging ones image, threatening supervisor-subordinate relationship, offending status quo or negatively affecting one's own career advancement and promotion (Jiang et al., 2018). Due to these undesirable outcomes, dissenting voices remain silent. The unsatisfied employees are reluctant to speak the truth especially if they want to be accepted in their organisation. As job retention is important, many employees choose to remain silent (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). This calls for paying more attention to the mechanisms underlying their fear of voicing constructive arguments against the status quo.

Powerful games underlie the silence of employees. Managers indirectly tell employees not to challenge organisational mandate and policies. Organisations generally are intolerant of employees who disagree with organisational systems and prerogatives and thus, employees do not speak about the problems. These "un-discussible" includes a wide range of problems, such as organisational procedures, inefficiencies and performance, managerial incompetence and pay inequity. When employees remain silent, it is either because it is an unspoken agreement or commitment with the status quo (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Voice efficacy is a belief in his or her capacity to speak up. Employees with high voice efficacy will tend to appraise a situation rather than be silent about it. It helps to overcome their fear of using their voice. Drawing on the implicit voice theory, employees remain silent also due to lack of information or leader behaviours. Personal abilities can give strength to employees to inspire them to challenge the status quo and express their opinions (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2018).

Behr & Fehre (2019) reported that most bureaucratic organisations do not respond to external changes unless after a new CEO is appointed. Top managers have difficulty in bringing about changes and implementing them successfully. This commitment to the status quo brings organisational inertia. Organisations face difficulty in changing because the status quo holds a lot of practical and theoretical significance. The firm's current performance may increase the commitment to status quo and therefore, things should be kept the way they are (Hambrick et al., 1993).

Inbreeding or cloning is incorporated in selection, development and succession practices which hampers new ideas and growth. Many leaders and CEOs are unable to recognise that change is called for the external environment. This resistance to change and commitment to status quo can inform future strategy. Understanding the origins and implications of the executive's mind sets is vital. Commitment or commitment to status quo comes from many sources; such as sunk investment in specialised assets, bureaucratic control, internal political, and cultural constraints and external restrictions. One such factor is employee silence, especially among those who are socially dominant in the organisation. These socially dominant people are usually top executives who have their own beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and values (Behr & Fehre, 2019).

Many studies have been conducted on employee silence where antecedent-silence relationships were tested and significant relationships were found with neuroticism, agreeableness, positive affect, empowering leadership, transformational leadership, LMX, ethical leadership, trust in supervisor, workplace ostracism, organisational justice, organisational cynicism, organisational identification, perceived organisational politics, power distance, and proactive personality (Hao et al., 2022; Kwon et al., 2016; Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018; Wang et al., 2016; Nechanska et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2019). Studies on silence-outcome relationships suggested that silence is a strong predictor for burnout, stress, commitment, satisfaction, work engagement, turnover intention, task performance, citizenship behaviour, innovative work, deviant behaviour, job withdrawal (Hao et al., 2022). However, there are still yawning gaps in the literature with respect to political identities of employees and their commitment to status quo. Being responsive is important for the survival of any organisation in the current dynamic and competitive era. Therefore, creating ideas and implementing them is necessary. Commitment to status quo is a prominent psychological factor which increases resistance to change. Managerial power is a central tenet in making strategic decisions. Managers must facilitate the pre requisites to change the status quo,

further welcoming and implementing new ideas (Chiu et al., 2020). Employees political identities, such as liberalism, help them embark upon their voicing behaviours while conservatism leads to silence and commitment to status quo.

Building upon this, Zhu et al. (2022) reported that developing countries like Pakistan usually practice a bureaucratic style of leadership in their organisations. This is due to the fact that Pakistan is a high on uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and power distance. The country is hierarchical. Research has established that societies with distinct power distance tend to have organisations where employees are reluctant to show any disagreement with their superiors and do not raise their voice about issues. The employees often feel threatened by uncertain situations and avoid voicing their ethical concerns on any important issues. Therefore, they remain quiet and show their commitment to status quo and do not question the authority.

As part of a collectivist society, employees have an interdependent relations and thus, sometimes it hampers their creativity and voicing over their grievances. Like many other developing countries, a workplace culture of being silent prevails in Pakistan and exercising one's voice is not typically viewed as normal.

This study makes several contributions to literature. First, only very few studies have used an integrated mechanism to test the antecedents as well as outcomes of silence, such as Tumurbaatar (2017), Boadi et al. (2020), Nechanska et al. (2020), and Dong and Chung (2020). This study is an effort to focus silence as the main element that leads to commitment to status quo while liberal and conservative personality characteristics are the antecedents of silence. Additionally, social dominance is taken as a moderator between silence and status quo. Second, most studies have used social exchange theory or a cost-benefit perspective (Liu et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2011) while this study applied the moral foundations theory of individual orientation which is an underlying theory for cultural psychology which relates to the three-level model of personality (McAdams & Pals, 2006). This study has adapted the second level of personality model "adaptation characteristics" which encompasses values, goals, and moral strivings that are reactions (or adaptations) to the contexts and challenges an individual encounter. Characteristic adaptations (Level 1) are therefore, more conditional than dispositional traits (Level 1), and are more variable across life stages and situational contexts. The moral and personality traits as Level 2 characteristic adaptations link closely to dispositional traits (Level 1). The moral foundation theory measures the morality of a person and quantify the degree to which that person's morality is based on each foundation. A different level of personality analysis was adopted

in this study using the context in which an individual makes a moral decision using explicit judgments of moral relevance (Graham et al., 2009). According to Graham et al. (2009) care and fairness are valued slightly more by liberals than conservatives. Loyalty, authority, and sanctity, are valued more by conservatives compared with the liberals. Third, liberal and conservative identities have been used in consumer behaviour (Oyserman & Schwarz, 2017) but not in organisational behaviour. It fits in organisational behaviour as liberal and conservative identities are part of a personality which largely impacts on employee behaviour. Fourth, only a few studies have focused on the education sector in Pakistan and no study has ever used this model previously. Only a few studies, particularly on employee silence in the education sector, have been conducted recently, such as Bhatti and Ahmed (2021), Mousa et al. (2020), and Shah et al. (2021). Previous studies have also not taken commitment to status quo as an outcome of employee silence.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Moral Foundations Theory (MFT)**

People generally engage in moral evaluation of the action of others, and they later engage in moral dialogue using virtue terms. They use character and actions of others with reference to cultural ideals, and develop terms, such as “kind” and “cruel” for people who care or harm others respectively (Graham, 2013). The MFT is a pluralist approach to morality. The current study’s approach of morality is justified and consistent with recent developments in various disciplines, such as neuroscience and developmental psychology. The MFT was created in cultural psychology (Haidt & Joseph, 2004), not political psychology. The list of moral foundations was not reverse-engineered from known differences between liberals and conservatives from US. Yet, the theory mapped on closely to the two sides of the culture war (Hunter, 1991). These were the first empirical findings of MFT by Haidt and Graham (2007). Haidt and Hersch (2001) later reported that conservatives have a higher moral domain, related to ethics of community and divinity. Shweder’s three ethics (autonomy, community, divinity) translated directly into the five foundations, which Haidt and Graham (2007) used to make prediction that liberals show greater reliance than conservatives on care and fairness foundation, whereas conservatives show greater reliance on loyalty, authority and sanctity foundation. Haidt and Graham (2007) suggested that MFT could explain the reason of culture war, and issues, such as gay marriage, abortion, welfare and arts, which create the inability of two sides to understand each other.

## **Personality-Morality Ideology**

The MFT views that individual and group differences emerge from various interactions in individual experiences, biology, socialisation (Haidt, 2012). McAdams and Pals (2006), created a three-level model of personality. The first level is known as dispositional traits (e.g., Big 5), while the second level is known as characteristic adaptations (e.g., values, goals, and moral strivings) which are adaptations or reactions to the contexts an individual encounters. Characteristic adaptations are variable across life stages and situational contexts which dispositional traits are relatively constant. The third level is known as integrative life stories (e.g., personal narratives of values and beliefs). These are the development of their existing ideologies and moral beliefs. Haidt et al. (2009) explained that the third level in political psychology is borrowed from ideological narratives and stereotypes prevalent in the culture. This study takes the view of moral and personality traits as characteristic adaptations, rather than dispositional traits or personal narratives. Moral foundations cannot be measured directly, and therefore, the explicit judgments of moral relevance were used (Graham et al., 2009). The morality of a person is evaluated by quantifying the degree of that person's morality. It can be said that a person's morality develops in a culture coupled with their experiences.

## **Liberals versus Conservatives**

The MFT (Haidt & Graham, 2007) is critical with respect to moral differences in employee silence; particularly among liberals and conservatives. There are two types of liberal and conservatives: one relates to ideological diversity while the other to personality diversity. Ideological commitments reflect moral commitments. Moral differences may vary across cultures as well (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Liberals build their moral systems on two psychological foundations: harm/care and fairness/reciprocity while conservatives build their moral systems on three psychological foundations: ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, purity/sanctity. However, it was found by Graham et al. (2009) that conservatives rely equally on all five psychological foundations. Liberals have an optimistic view of human nature and perfection while conservatives have a pessimistic view of human nature. They believe that people are naturally selfish and imperfect. Liberals on the other hand, hold an unconstrained image of people where they are free to pursue their own personal progression (Sowell, 2002). Conservatives hold a constrained image in which they need the constraints of organisations, authority, traditions and customs to live in the society. In terms of personalities, liberals are more outgoing, are open to new experiences, seek change and innovation personally and professionally. Conservatives look for familiarity and stability and

expect predictability. Conservatives prefer authoritarianism. They are emotionally sensitive to change in the social order and hierarchy thus, they limit their liberties to defend that order and maintain balance and harmony.

Jost et al. (2003) concluded from their meta-analysis that conservatives have two core aspects; resistance to change and acceptance of inequality. Moral institutions derive from psychological mechanisms which come from cultural practices. Cultures provide the ground work for humans to teach their children basic virtues and moral practices. According to Graham et al. (2009), moral ideology is not one-dimensional, instead it is characterised by five virtues: fairness, justice and reciprocity (fairness/reciprocity foundation); care, nurture, and protection (harm/care foundation); patriotism, loyalty, and personal sacrifice for the group (ingroup/loyalty foundation); subordinate's respect and obedience for authority (authority/respect foundation), and purity and sacredness (purity/sanctity foundation). The fairness/reciprocity and harm/care virtues relate to individualising or the ideology of liberalism while the ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity virtues are part of the binding or conservative ideology.

## **Employee Silence**

The definition of organisational silence incorporates a collective phenomenon in which employees withhold their concerns and opinions about the problems of the organisation (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Although organisations encourage empowerment and open lines of communication, yet employees are not truly empowered as they cannot communicate about their issues. Organisational silence is important because of the “flow of upward information”, which provides diverse ideas that improves organisations health, decision making, and its systems (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Employee silence is a huge barrier in the change and development of organisation. This tends to be more applicable and has more consequences on a “pluralistic” organisation where managers respect and value diverse opinions and perspectives of employees (Morrison, 2014; Harquail & Cox, 1993). Organisational silence does not promote pluralism and discourage diversity of opinions.

Employee silence refers to withholding critical information in a conscious manner. It is an act of restraint and constant controlling of frustration. This psychological effort is due to their assumption that disclosing information will not make any difference in the organisation (Al-Hawari et al., 2020).

Literature on employee silence have been generalised on all types of employees and very few have focused on the academic silence or silence of faculties in the

higher education sector. Bhatti and Ahmed (2021) found that workplace bullying increases turnover intentions and employee silence among the faculty in higher education institutes. Psychological distress mediates the relationship between bullying and silence and bullying and turnover. Mousa et al. (2020) found that rectors' narcissism increases the faculty's silence. Additionally, the faculty's silence mediates the relationship between the rectors' narcissism and moral obligations and emotional attachment of the faculty. They collected data from five universities in Egypt to study the behaviour of rector and faculty. Shah et al. (2021) studied the relationship between different types of organisational cultures and job engagement mediated by employee silence public sector universities in Pakistan. They found a significant relationship between their independent and dependent variables. Several other studies have also used employee silence as a mediator, such as Whiteside and Barclay (2013) and Morrison (2014).

Organisational forces cause silence among employees, such as change in leadership. Many forms of individual and contextual variables motivate employees to speak up, raise an issue or blow the whistle. Some studies have analysed the relationship between moral identity and leadership, such as Arain et al. (2017) and Skubinn and Herzog (2016) while Aquino and Reed (2002) and Kennedy et al. (2017) confirmed the relationship between moral identity and voice behaviours of employees. Hameed et al. (2020) examined the indirect effect of moral identity between Islamic work ethics and employee voice behaviours and they found that moral identity moderates the relationship between Islamic work ethics and prohibitive voice behaviour.

This study proposes that employees who are liberals or identify as having liberal ideologies tend to voice themselves as part of creating change while conservatives tend to be more silent. Thus, liberals have negative relationship with employee silence while its vice versa for the conservatives as they want to maintain authority, loyalty, respect, and sanctity in the workplace. The study therefore, proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Liberal identity have a negative relationship with employee silence.

H2: Conservative identity have a positive relationship with employee silence.

### **Commitment of the Status Quo (CSQ)**

Status quo is defined as a belief in the enduring correctness of current organisational strategies and profiles. Executives are hamstrung by "what is" instead of "what might be." Commitment to status quo is a psychological conviction that the

organisation should remain configured as it is. It is the absence of change, inaction, and continuity (Chiu et al., 2020; Behr & Fehre, 2019).

Commitment to status quo is defined as an enduring belief in the current strategies and decisions of top management. It is a state or a condition and therefore employees may differ with this state depending on organisational or personal factors. A lot of have been written on commitment with respect to jobs and organisations. However, none has focused on the concept of a psychological conviction of top managers that the organisation should remain configured the way it is. The current configuration includes strategies, structure, decisions, human resource policies—in short, the culture and soft architecture of the organisation (Chiu et al., 2020; Behr & Fehre, 2019).

Hence, commitment here is the state of being obligated towards the status quo being formed and kept. It is the condition of being bound towards current strategies and actions of top managers. Here, the focus is on the psychological commitment to status quo which is the result of psychological orientation of one's self, namely moral identity (Hambrick et al., 1993; Geletkanycz, 1997; Chiu et al., 2020; Behr & Fehre, 2019). Commitment to status quo is proposed in the upper echelons theory where top managers act on the basis of psychological orientations which include their specific values, cognitions, and beliefs (Hambrick et al., 1993).

Commitment to status quo plays an important role in change management, yet few studies have been conducted on the CEO commitment to status quo (McClelland et al., 2010; Chiu et al., 2020; Behr & Fehre, 2019) and its antecedents while no such research has been conducted on employee commitment to status quo. The empirical knowledge remains fragmented and mostly unobserved on commitment to status quo especially on the role of employee's high commitment to status quo in this dynamic environment. Chiu et al (2020) focused on identifying factors that decrease resistance to change due to commitment to status quo. Hence, they studied the role of different power bases such as structural power, social power, expert power, and ownership power as moderator between CEO commitment to status quo and divesture activity. As per their results, structural power and ownership power increases the likelihood of divesture and it reduces commitment to status quo of CEO.

Behr and Fehre (2019) compared CEO turnover and voluntary turnover. The forced CEO turnover mandates a change, therefore, there is lower commitment to status quo. They also propose that tenure of a CEO or insider succession of a CEO does not lead to higher commitment to status quo.

## **Employee Silence and Commitment of the Status Quo**

Organisations are composed of different levels of employees, each having different opinions and bringing different information through their expertise. Different opinions mean communication with the upper echelons of the organisation to shape the culture and participate in decision making. Communication is important for organisations to grow, develop, and be profitable. Organisations who want to be successful through innovation can sustain only if their employees challenge the status quo by breaking their silence and voicing their opinions (Jiang et al., 2018; Gabel, 2020).

Moasa (2011) suggested two main consequences of silence, namely commitment or resistance of the status quo which are common among both classical and contemporary theorists. When employees remain silent, it is either because they do not have anything to voice or it is an unspoken agreement with the status quo (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Employee silence is a passive behaviour which leads to acceptance of status quo, refraining from changing the circumstances and exploring new options for solving problems (Jiang et al., 2018; Gabel, 2020).

Hirshman (1970) reported on the tripartite model of responses to dissatisfaction which included exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. According to this popular silence model, exit and voice are active reactions while loyalty and neglect are passive reactions and synonymous to remaining silent, thus endorsing the status quo. Cohen (1990) suggested that silence reflects resistance to status quo instead of commitment. He considered silence to be a sign of rebellion and opposition against the status quo. This resistance is either due to lack of voicing opportunities, information or a belief that voicing one's opinions or suggestions will be dangerous or useless. Silence can have major consequences on individuals, groups as well as organisations. These consequences include learning, decision making, change management, perceived lack of control and cognitive dissonance (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Moasa, 2011). Few unintended consequences also incur such as making silence as part of personality or identity and then maintaining it in everyday jobs, which also might become contagious in the group or at organisational level. This study proposes that employee silence leads to commitment to status quo which might become harmful for an overall atmosphere in the organisation. It has used status quo bias theory between employee silence and status quo commitment by employees. Status quo bias refers to the condition where people chose to remain the same and do not act against any wrong doing due to transition costs. They fear regret for bad outcomes which are due to new actions rather than inaction (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982).

Employees with high commitment to status quo conform to the current strategy and perceive that there is no need to change or make any adjustments. They do not initiate any strategic change nor do they voice their concerns. Low commitment to status quo challenges the current strategic position and are often termed as change agents in the company. The upper echelons theory proposes that an organisation reflects top managers psychological orientation which affects the entire organisational decisions. In fact, employees who want to be associated with top management tend to conform to the latter's decisions by showing high commitment to status quo (Behr & Fehre, 2019). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Employee silence has a positive relationship with commitment to status quo.

### **Identity of Liberals and Conservatives and Commitment to Status Quo**

Employee background, experiences and values shape their knowledge, understanding and decision making. Values are important principles that influence decision choices through behavioural channelling and they affect perceptual screening of employees before making any decisions. Employees selectively support the strategic choices guided by their values and moral identity. Their commitment to status quo reflects their value orientations (Chiu et al., 2020; Behr & Fehre, 2019).

De Dreu et al. (2008) showed that individuals known as challengers or individuals who are resistant to status quo perceive endorsers of status quo or defenders more negatively in interactions as well as in terms of group-level biases. Although previously it was identified that general psychological orientation (liberalism or conservatism) does not explain effects of position of the status quo on intergroup biases, further research is warranted before making any generalisations or drawing any conclusions on the subject (Bäck & Lindholm, 2014). Therefore, this study aims to identify which values of liberals or conservatives tend to impact their silence in organisations which in turn lead to acceptance of status quo in the firm with respect to social dominance orientation. It proposes that employees who are liberals tend to voice themselves as part of creating change while conservatives tend to be more silent. Thus, liberals have negative relationship with employee silence while conservatives have a positive relationship as they want to maintain authority, loyalty, respect, and sanctity in the workplace. Further, conservatives tend to endorse status quo while liberals tend to resist status quo as they voice their opinions which makes them meddlers, posing a threat to status quo. Additionally,

liberals tend to have low social dominance orientation while conservatives have high social dominance orientation (particularly if they both belong to low status groups).

This research highlights the importance of moral ideologies of employees working in the organisation with respect to liberals and conservatives which lead to silence and endorsement to status quo. According to Tumurbaatar (2017), organisational and employee values must be aligned, lest it results in poor performance. Organisational value system which is incompatible with one's own value system will result in negative consequences (Tumurbaatar, 2017). Therefore, it is important to study the individuals value system for the future of organisations. Hence, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H4: Liberal identity has a negative relationship with endorsement to status quo (challengers).
- H5: Conservative identity has a relationship with endorsement to status quo (defenders).
- H6: Employee silence mediates the relationship between liberal identity and commitment to status quo.
- H7: Employee silence mediates the relationship between conservative identity and commitment to status quo.

### **Social Dominance Orientation**

Sidious and Pratto (2001) described the social dominant theory of inter group relations which focuses on maintaining stability of social hierarchy. It has two types of legitimising myths which include hierarchy enhancing and attenuating ideology; the former relates to the contribution of discrimination based on hierarchy supporting inequality while the latter corresponds to the reduction of discrimination based on hierarchy supporting equality of groups. Individuals usually accept or reject such ideologies based on their own psychological orientation towards equality or inequality. Individuals having high social dominance tend to support hierarchy enhancing ideology while lower social dominance groups support hierarchy attenuating ideology.

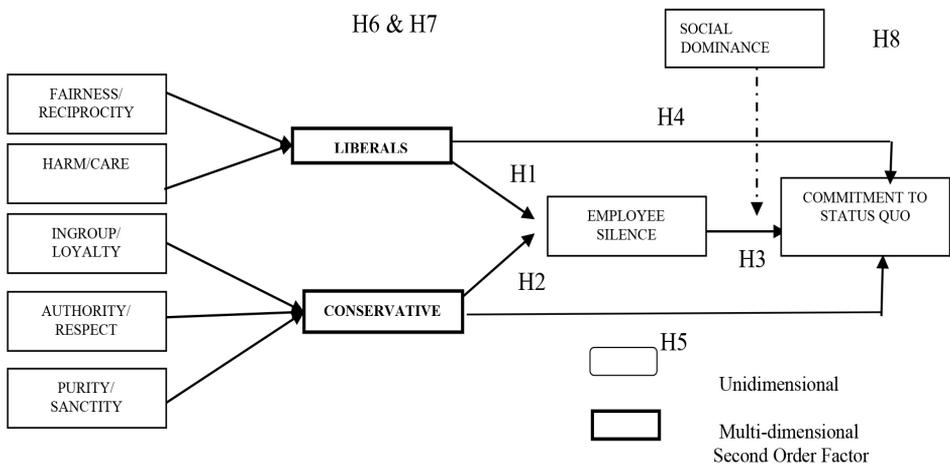
There is an evidence of discriminatory behaviour by supervisors towards those who threaten the hierarchical norms (Martin & Bok, 2015). According to Jost et al. (2003) individuals in low status groups but high social dominance orientation prefer to endorse status quo and management decisions and actions. The notion of social dominance orientation helps to comprehend which low status group

members will choose to enhance their status by endorsing and maintaining the status quo (social identity theory) and which will emphasise their current status and opt for resisting the status quo (system justification theory).

Moral foundation theorists suggest the following: the liberals relate to fairness and care while the conservatives choose loyalty, authority, and purity. Kugler et al. (2014) suggested that liberal and conservative differences in moral foundations are mediated by authoritarianism and social dominance orientation, thus, the conservative's valuation of loyalty, authority, and purity is attributed to high level of authoritarianism, whereas liberal's valuation of fairness and harm is attributed to low level of social dominance.

Hence, in this study, high or low social dominance orientation is used as a moderator, employee silence as a mediator, and liberal and conservative values as an independent variable. Additionally, commitment to status quo is taken as a dependent variable. Low status in this study refers to employees not holding any kind of managerial position in the hierarchy of an organisation. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Social dominance orientation moderates the relationship between employee silence and commitment to status quo such that employees with high social dominance do not remain silent and voice their disagreement with the status quo.



*Figure 1. Conceptual model*

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This is a quantitative study where primary data was collected using focus group techniques for the development of the scale commitment to status quo and then a structured questionnaire was used to collect information from the employees to test the scale and the hypotheses. The independent variables were conservative and liberal values, employee silence was the mediator, commitment to status quo was the dependent variable and social dominance orientation was the moderator.

### **Sampling**

The target population in this study was all the faculty of selected universities in Karachi, Pakistan. The data was collected from the respondents from various universities and institutes, namely Szabist, Iqra, IoBM, IBA, Greenwich, PAF Keit, and MAJU. Non-probability based convenience sampling technique was used because the sampling frame was not available and due to accessibility and proximity of respondents (Etikan et al., 2016). The Daniel Soper sample size calculator was applied in this study which used the significance level of 5%, a statistical power of 80%, 46 number of items and effect size ( $f^2$ ) of 0.15. It recommended a minimum sample size of 228. According to Wong (2013), in practice, significance level, statistical power, effect size are appropriate parameters to identify minimum sample size. The sample collected was 250 but the correct responses collected were 219 after checking for incomplete questionnaires, thus the response rate was 87.6%.

### **Measurement**

Hard copy and soft copy (Google form) questionnaires were distributed to teaching facilitators, instructors, lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors and professors.

#### *Employee silence*

Employee Silence was measured using a scale adopted from Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) with 5 items. Likert scale ranged from 1 = Never to 5 = Always.

### *Moral judgment*

Moral judgment items related to liberal or conservative views were rated; 4 items were for harm, 4 for fairness, 4 for Ingroup, 4 for authority and 4 items were to measure purity (total 20 items) taken from Graham et al. (2009). These items were measured on a scale of 5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree.

### *Social dominance*

16 items for social dominance were adopted from Ho et al. (2015). These items were measured on a scale of 5=Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree = 1

### *Commitment to status quo*

Commitment to status quo was measured by creating a scale with six items. These items were created after discussing with the specialist PhDs and teachers in management area. The reliability for status quo was 0.407 and after removing item number 5, the reliability increased to 0.798; therefore, this item was removed from the study. The reliability of the rest of the variables was within acceptable threshold of 0.6–0.9 and therefore, they were used for further analysis. These were the latest scales developed and popularly used by researchers between 2008 and 2015. These items were measured on a scale of 5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree. They include; “I accept the changes made by top management”; “I appreciate the efforts that top management makes”; “I implement the decisions made by top management”; “I like the decisions taken by top management”; “Sometimes I feel frustrated about the actions of top management (R)”; “Top management is always right”

## **RESULTS**

Table 2 contains demographics of the sample whereby 62% were males; two respondents were less than 21 years of age, 60 were between the age group of 21 and 30, 127 belonged to the age group of 31 to 40, 26 respondents were between the age bracket of 41 to 50, while the rest were between the age bracket of 51 to 60 (Table 1). The mean, standard deviations and inter-correlations of five variables using SPSS 19 software were reported. The variables were: Employee Silence (ES); Liberal Ideology (LIBER); Conservative Ideology (CONSER); Status Quo (ST); Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) as shown in Table 2.

Table 1  
*Demographics*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	136	62.1
Female	83	37.9
Age (years old)		
< 21	2	0.9
21–30	60	27.4
31–40	127	58.0
41–50	26	11.9
> 50	4	1.8
Position		
Teaching Facilitator	13	5.9
Lecturer	60	27.4
Assistant Professor	97	44.3
Associate Professor	37	16.9
Professor	12	5.5

Note: N=219

Table 2  
*Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations*

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	ES	LIBER	CONSER	ST	SDO
ES	5	2.242	0.791	–	–	–	–	–
LIBER	8	3.800	0.506	–0.001	–	–	–	–
CONSER	12	3.482	0.465	0.131	–	–	–	–
ST	5	3.694	0.711	(–0.141)*	0.177**	0.161*	–	–
SDO	16	3.162	0.414	0.161	0.453**	0.567**	0.105	–

Note: N = 219; p < 0.05\*, p, 0.01\*\*; ES = Employee Silence; LIBER = Liberal Ideology; CONSER= Conservative Ideology; ST = Status Quo; SDO = Social Dominance Orientation

Partial least squares (PLS) was applied in the SmartPLS 3.2.9 to test the measurement and structural model as it does not require data normality. As it was from a single source, the issue of common method bias was addressed using the full collinearity diagnostics suggested by (Guide & Ketokivi, 2015). All the variables were regressed against a common variable and the variance inflation factor (VIF) was checked (VIF must be less than 3.3). It was found that all variables VIF was less than 3.3 (Table 3), and thus, there was no bias from the single source data.

Table 3  
Full collinearity test

ES	LIBER	CONSERV	ST	SDO
1.072	1.675	1.954	1.064	1.540

Note: ES = Employee Silence; LIBER = Liberal Ideology; CONSER = Conservative Ideology; ST= Status Quo; SDO = Social Dominance Orientation

## Measurement Model

Hair et al. (2020) guidelines were used to assess the measurement model by assessing first the loadings ( $\geq 0.70$ ), average variance extracted (AVE) ( $\geq 0.500$ ) and composite reliability (CR) ( $\geq 0.70$ ). Since we had 2 second order constructs (**bolded**), Liberals (*2 dimensions, italics*) and Conservative (*3 dimensions, italics*) as shown in Figure 1. The validity and reliability of the first order constructs were assessed before assessing the validity and reliability of the second order constructs. Next, heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio as suggested by Franke and Sarstedt (2019) was used to assess discriminant validity. Convergent validity was represented by correlations among constructs. Construct reliability was represented by Cronbach alpha which must be  $\geq 0.5$  (Nunally, 1967); AVE must be  $\geq 0.5$  (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) and CR must be  $\geq 0.7$  (Gefen et al., 2000). Table 4 and 5 list the values, namely CR and AVE for first order and second order constructs.

Table 4  
Measurement model for the first order constructs

First Order Constructs	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Authority (Au)	A3	0.875	0.661	0.795
	A4	0.746		
Igroup (Ig)	I3	0.763	0.689	0.815
	I4	0.892		
Purity (Pu)	P1	0.743	0.665	0.798
	P4	0.882		
Fairness (Far)	F1	0.704	0.586	0.809
	F3	0.791		
	F4	0.799		
Harm (Har)	H2	0.619	0.611	0.822
	H3	0.888		
	H4	0.814		

Table 5  
Measurement model for the second order constructs

Second Order Constructs	Indicator	CR	AVE
CONSER	Au	0.802	0.671
	Ig		
	Pu		
LIBER	Far	0.815	0.598
	Har		
ES		0.821	0.605
ST		0.898	0.689
SDO		0.694	0.491

Note: ES = Employee Silence; LIBER = Liberal Ideology; CONSER = Conservative Ideology; ST = Status Quo; Ig = Ingroup/Loyalty; Pu = Purity/Sanctity; Au = Authority/Respect; Far = Fairness/Reciprocity; Har = Harm/Care; SDO = Social Dominance Orientation

**Discriminant Validity**

The heterotrait criteria was used to measure discriminant validity;. HTMT < 0.8 (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 7 shows that all the values of HTMT ratios were < 0.8 except Purity (Pu) and Harm (Har) which is 0.878. Using both the criteria, cross loadings and HTMT, it was clear that the constructs have discriminant validity.

Table 6  
HTMT ratio

Higher Order Construct	Lower Order Construct	Au	Ig	Pu	Far	Har	ES	ST	SDO
CONSERV	Au	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Ig	0.673	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Pu	0.800	0.713	–	–	–	–	–	–
LIBER	Far	0.390	0.599	0.339	–	–	–	–	–
	Har	0.790	0.431	0.878	0.790	–	–	–	–
ES	–	0.358	0.163	0.509	0.371	0.739	–	–	–
ST	–	0.752	0.576	0.715	0.560	0.502	0.390	–	–
SDO	–	0.419	0.454	1.432	0.759	0.680	0.563	0.577	–

Note: ES = Employee Silence; LIBER = Liberal Ideology; CONSER = Conservative Ideology; ST = Status Quo; Ig = Ingroup/Loyalty; Pu = Purity/Sanctity; Au = Authority/Respect; Far = Fairness/Reciprocity; Har = Harm/Care

## **Path Coefficient**

In order to test the structural model, bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples to generate the standard errors was carried out, with  $t$ -values,  $p$ -values, and bias corrected confidence intervals (Hair et al., 2020). First, the variance explained of each of the endogenous constructs in the model was assessed. Employee silence had an  $R^2 = 0.124$  and endorsement of status quo  $R^2 = 0.098$  indicating sufficient in-sample prediction. The  $R^2$  was low probably due to the weak relationship among variables. Additionally, this model was tested empirically for the first time, hence, this could be the reason for the lower coefficient.

The direct and indirect paths in the structural equation model were assessed through partial least squares-structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) as shown in Table 7. Hypothesis 1 “Liberals have a negative relationship with employee silence” is supported and the relationship is negative as the  $p$ -value is 0.02 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with  $\beta = -0.228$ . Liberals do not tend to remain silent in the organisation. Hypothesis 2 “Conservatives have a positive relationship with employee silence” is not supported with  $p$ -value 0.322 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Hypothesis 3 “Employee silence has a relationship with commitment to status quo” is supported as the  $p$ -value is 0.014 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with  $\beta = -0.175$ . It means that employees who are silent do not accept status quo. Hypothesis 4 “Liberals have a negative relationship with commitment to status quo (challengers)” is not supported as the  $p$ -value is 0.709 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Hypothesis 5 “Conservatives have a positive relationship with commitment to status quo (defenders)” is supported and the relationship is positive with  $p$ -value is 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) with  $\beta = 0.437$ . Conservatives tend to accept or endorse status quo. Hypothesis 6 “Employee silence mediates the relationship between liberals identity and commitment to status quo” is supported with  $p$ -value of 0.059 ( $p < 0.1$ ) at 90% confidence interval with  $\beta = 0.040$ . There is full mediation as H4 was rejected which showed liberals do not have any impact on status quo directly. Hypothesis 7 “Employee silence mediates the relationship between conservatives identity and commitment to status quo” is not supported as the  $p$ -value is 0.359 ( $p > 0.05$ ). Finally, Hypothesis 8 “Social dominance orientation moderates the relationship between employee silence and commitment to status quo such that employees with high social dominance do not remain silent and voice their disagreement with the status quo.” is supported as the  $p$ -value is 0.065 ( $p < 0.1$ ) at 90% confidence interval with  $\beta = -0.151$ . It can be understood that higher social dominance or higher status groups do not endorse or accept status quo. In all, even if the employees remained silent, it did not mean they agreed with the actions of management.

Table 7  
Direct and indirect effects

	Direct and Indirect Effects	$\beta$	Mean	SD	T Statistics	P Values	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Decision
H1	LIBER → ES	-0.228	-0.229	0.098	2.327	0.020	-0.377	-0.053	Accept
H2	CONSER → ES	-0.096	-0.109	0.097	0.990	0.322	-0.244	0.077	Reject
H3	ES → ST	-0.175	-0.157	0.071	2.469	0.014	-0.289	-0.065	Accept
H4	LIBER → ST	0.034	0.027	0.090	0.374	0.709	-0.104	0.197	Reject
H5	CONSER → ST	0.437	0.424	0.089	4.920	0.000	0.299	0.586	Accept
H6	LIBER → ES → ST	0.040	0.034	0.021	1.891	0.059	0.015	0.089	Accept
H7	CONSER → ES → ST	0.017	0.017	0.018	0.917	0.359	-0.003	0.059	Reject
H8	Moderating Effect → ST	-0.151	-0.125	0.082	1.846	0.065	-0.282	-0.040	Accept

Note: ES = Employee Silence; LIBER = Liberal Ideology; CONSER = Conservative Ideology; ST = Status Quo; Moderating Effect = Moderating effect of Social Dominance

It can be understood that silence fully mediates the relationship between liberals and status quo and hence Hypothesis 6 is fully supported. Employees with liberal ideology tend to remain silent and accept the status quo due to wanting to retain their employability, but this remains a conjecture until is tested in future studies. Many studies have shown that individuals when faced with real world crisis or even laboratory experimental threats tend to switch from their liberal views towards traditional conservative views (Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Echebarria-Echabe & Fernández-Guede, 2006; Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007). According to Nail et al. (2009), liberals tend to be inclined towards more conservative views as a defence against threats. This argument has its origins in social psychology related to macro perspective.

Behavioural psychology can also be used as a means to explain the behaviour of individuals in a micro perspective in an organisation (Jost et al., 2003). The current study also found that individuals with liberal views tend to accept the status quo of management in an organisation even though they do not want to remain silent and would like to voice their opinions. However, they endorse the decisions of top management maybe due to other extraneous reasons. Thus, liberals would react by becoming more conservative when facing a threat. According to Nail et al. (2009) who carried out three studies and in Study 1, they showed in-group favouritism of college students with liberal views, and when faced with threats of injustice, they became more conservative. In the second study, they found that liberal students showed conservative attitudes regarding punishment and abortion when facing mortality salience threat. Their third study found that liberal students showed conservative attitude regarding homosexuality when faced with mortality salience threat. It appears therefore, that threats change the liberal’s attitudes to

lean towards a more conservative attitude. Liberals become more psychologically conservative after threats due to motivated social cognition (Nail et al., 2009). Thus, the current study endorses this view and the premise that employees with liberal identity would be silent and accept status quo (possible psychological threats of losing their job) when they actually prefer not to remain silent. The threat to be socially accepted (conformist), not wanting to be highlighted as a whistle blower or psychological fear of losing their jobs might induce the liberals to not voice their opinions or disagree with the higher management.

Figure 2 shows the interaction or moderating effect of social dominance orientation between silence and status quo. High social dominant people usually voice only when they agree with status quo or the top management’s decision but when they do not agree, they tend to remain silent.



Figure 2. Silence and status quo with the moderation of high and low SDO

Shmueli et al. (2019) suggested predictive power using the PLS-Predict, and tested with a 5-fold. They argued that if all the items differences (PLS-LM) were lower than there is strong predictive power and based on Table 8, all the errors of the PLS model were lower than the LM model except ST4. Thus, it can be concluded that the model has a good predictive power.

Table 8  
PLS-predict

	PLS		LM		PLS-LM	
	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE	RMSE	MAE
ST1	0.910	0.678	0.993	0.741	-0.083	-0.063
ST2	0.778	0.576	0.822	0.612	-0.044	-0.037
ST3	0.744	0.557	0.773	0.567	-0.029	-0.010
ST4	0.839	0.684	0.796	0.595	0.043	0.089

## **DISCUSSION**

This research explored the employee liberal and conservative views and its impact on silence and status quo with respect to social dominance orientation in a Pakistani context. It found that liberals do not remain silent directly but silence mediates the relationship between liberal's identity and commitment to status quo. These findings are supported by (Nail et al., 2009) who argued that liberals are reactive but that they become more conservative after experimentally induced threats and threats caused liberals to become like conservative.

Pakistan has an inflation rate of 7.34% with an unemployment rate of 6.140%, GDP Growth rate was 3.3% in 2019 compared with 5.5% in 2018. Current account deficit increased to 6% of GDP in the same year. The country took a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Saudi Arabia, and China. Pakistani currency also faced a 30% devaluation against the US dollar. Various measures however, were taken to stabilise the currency and the current financial position of Pakistan (Statista, 2019; CEIC, 2019). This actually has put the country Pakistan at a vulnerable position and thus during an economic crunch, employees fear the dangers of speaking out. These fears are shaped by their experiences or colleague's experiences, and the evaluation of the current economic situation regarding job insecurity or layoffs. Thus silence becomes more relevant when employees feel that voicing disagreement with status quo may create problems such as extrinsic consequences (Brinsfield, 2013; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken et al., 2003; Dyne et al., 2003). This becomes more relevant, with respect to the findings of this paper. In short, even liberals remain silent due to job security concerns in this time of high inflation and unemployment.

According to Tangirala and Ramanujam (2009), employees tend to speak up instead of remaining silent when they are dissatisfied with the status quo in their organisation. Sometimes, they don't exit the organisation as a reaction to dissatisfaction with the status quo, instead they wait for the situation to improve and remain loyal to the organisation. This notion has also been supported in the literature, which also supports my findings in this research that employees with liberal identity remain silent and accept the status quo, probably because they are loyalists and expect improvement in the future. Loyal employees suffer silently, because they are concerned about the potential disruption caused by bringing their concerns to the surface.

According to Prouska and Psychogios (2018), silence is due to the fear of the consequences. Fear as a motivator for silence has been explored in many studies (Brinsfield, 2013; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Morrison & Milliken, 2000;

Milliken et al., 2003; Dyne et al., 2003). Individuals chose not to speak up because they are afraid of the consequences of voicing their concerns regarding top management's decisions. Fear intensifies during crisis and so does silence. In the short run, they are afraid of being labelled as a troublemaker, affecting their performance appraisals, or damaging supervisor-subordinate relationship (termed as low intensity fear), while in the long-term it may lead to dismissal from job (termed as high intensity fear) (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018).

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This empirical research serves not only as a guide for future research but its findings are useful to managers and practitioners. Managers can encourage upward input and communication, motivate employees to make a positive difference for the firm, involve and consult with them for valuable input, create receptivity and openness for them to participate and give ideas. Employees will want to work for such a place, and companies can retain such valuable employees. Usually employees are reluctant to speak up their minds regarding an action or decision taken by top management or position of authority due to its potential negative consequences (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). This study confirms that even though liberals having high social dominance in the organisation do not tend to speak up, and remain silent, it does not mean they agree with the status quo. Therefore, managers need to take counter balance actions to inhibit such behaviours among individuals. A suggestion is to create anonymous portals or forms for their employees to give suggestions regarding changes for improvement and against wrong actions of the management. Human resource managers must assess different personality types to distinguish between conservatives and liberals identity and then create a person-organisation fit to employ only those candidates who would fit with the culture; for example, a conservative personality is best suited for a bureaucratic organisation while a liberal is most appropriate for a technology based innovative firm. Government organisations mostly consist of bureaucratic and conservative people and those with such tendencies would flourish in such cultures and work environments. Alternatively, they can also identify and then create person-job fit, which is to put the right personality for the right job; for instance, example; a liberal would be best suited to work in an R&D department while a conservative is best suited in a highly formalised job such as a manufacturing department or quality control department.

This study helps organisational leaders to understand their negative leadership behaviours, climate of fear, and a disengaged workforce. Further, employees also benefit from this study by recognising if their voice is effective or not and if they have an image of being a credible source of decisions for their organisation.

One important point which is neglected and must be understood is that voicing an opinion about a serious issue should be presented in a way that does not threaten the recipient and also provides a solution rather than only an information to escalate the issue at hand.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study has used self-report measures which may lead to common bias methods. Additionally, only employees were used as a sample unit for analysing the silence and its subsequent outcome. Future studies can use the data from supervisors, as a twofold study and use observations instead of survey method for data collection. Future research can also use fear as a moderator instead of social dominance orientation, or different types of silence such as defensive, acquiescence, and prosocial silence (Dyne et al., 2003) or the role of servant leadership (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Future studies can be conducted on how employees change their commitment to status quo with succession of the new CEO (an outsider). This study may have common method biasness due to self-report measures in the questionnaire. Future research may use interviews and focused group technique to collect the data. Lastly, the sample of this study was restricted to universities. Future studies can examine other sectors to generalise the research finding. This because the relationships may be valid in one culture but may not be in another. This study may be replicated in an American culture to the population of public-school teachers working with the government. Theories that work for the private sector may not work be applicable government sector and therefore comparative studies may also be carried out. Thus, this study will serve as groundwork for future research.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study focused on how the moral identities such as liberalism and conservatism affect commitment to status quo via silence and social dominance orientation. It has addressed a large gap in the current literature on commitment to status quo; earlier studies only examined this in the context of top executives or CEO's (Hambrick et al., 1993; Geletkanycz, 1997; Chiu et al., 2020; Behr & Fehre, 2019). This study was conducted on employees at lower managerial levels where commitment to status quo usually results from social dominance. Employees who want to be associated with higher level executives and conform to their decisions and actions tend to stay silent and committed to status quo. It is possible that these employees want to be promoted and become part of the higher-level management which is why they remain silent and are committed to status quo.

Further, this study has researched the employee's moral characteristics which are part of one's psychological orientation. Moral identity is organised around an individual's moral traits and values. These are shaped by one's ethics and are central to one's self concept of being. The focus of this study was to delve into the black box of employees by examining the relationship between moral values and commitment to status quo through silence.

Employee silence can create barriers to organisational development and change. It is also a demotivating force for employee productivity. Encouraging voice and employee opinions along with creating organisational culture for support will help implement change successfully. If employees remain silent, management will hold them accountable for something that was created by themselves in the first place (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). It is the responsibility of management to create the atmosphere of trust and eliminate the conditions of silence. It is the role of researchers to help them understand that accurate internal feedback is necessary for organisational wellbeing.

In conclusion, it is important to adopt goals related to employee empowerment and involvement. Employees must feel they are not in danger or voicing out disagreements is useless. Managers should encourage upward communication and hence, this study help managers to apply the climate of voice instead of silence.

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