

How employee voice helps community engagement

When employees feel they cannot speak up, there can be negative consequences for society as a whole. We need to foster more trusting and collaborative work environments.



April 1, 2016

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It happens more than managers think: employees refrain from voicing an opinion about a major issue out of fear or because they believe their opinion will not matter.

Consider this comment from an employee of an IT company who participated in a research study: “I raised a concern about some policies and I was told to shut up and that I was becoming a troublemaker. I would have pursued (the issue) further but presently I can’t afford to risk my job. This has made me go into a detached mode, making me a yes-man.”

As work in organizations gets increasingly knowledge-based, information-sharing has become essential for problem-solving and innovation. When employees don’t feel safe to speak up about problems or concerns, it can mean the loss of valuable information for a company.

From a societal point of view, silence at work has other potential costs. Employees who don’t feel safe to speak up about problems or concerns can experience stress, anxiety and lack of motivation on the job.

Apart from the obvious effect these negative emotions, moods, attitudes and beliefs will have on employees at work, they can also spill over into other domains of employees’ lives.

For example, if employees come to believe that it is useless to bring up problems with their managers, they may generalize this belief to other human interactions they have outside of work, lessening their motivation to participate in the institutions in their communities.

So what gives rise to employee silence, and how can it be tackled if it’s already a problem?

This article will look at some of the causes of employee silence and how such silence can come to permeate an organization.

We will then argue that organizational silence can have far-reaching consequences for communities and society at large, due to the powerful role that companies play in shaping the attitudes, behavior and skills of their people.

Finally, we will suggest how managers can avoid the problem of silence by facilitating upward communication in their workplaces.

A version of this article is published in [IESE Insight 29 \(Q2 2016\)](#).

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