

Organizational silence and corporate decision making efficiency in the banking industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on organizational silence and corporate decision making efficiency in the banking industry (Zenith Bank plc, United Bank of Africa and Polaris Bank Ltd, Edo State, Nigeria). The specific directions of this study were to determine the impact of defensive silence, level of trust and communication protocol on corporate decision making. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study was 512 and the sample size was 225 full-time employees of the various banks. Questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents. Correlation analysis was used to analyze the data. The data was presented using tables, and the results were discussed according. Findings show that defensive silence, trust level and communication protocol have a negative impact on corporate decision making of Zenith Bank plc, United Bank of Africa and Polaris Bank Ltd, Edo State. The recommendations of this study were that the management of the various banks should ensure; they encourage employees to participate in decision-making, senior employees should not out rightly dismiss suggestions from junior staff and communication channels should be made easy and flexible for communication flows.

Keywords:

Defensive silence, trust level, communication protocol, corporate and decision making.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations in today's rapidly changing business environment constantly requires employees to share opinions, knowledge, beliefs, and experiences (Liu, Wu, & Ma, 2009). A firm's success is severely weakened if employees are not willing to provide quality input, and thus firms can motivate their employees by making their voice to be heard (Imran, Khan, & Khan, 2020). However, employees tends to most likely filter information they convey upward when they have high mobility aspirations that they do not want to jeopardize and when they lack trust in their supervisor (Vakola, Nikolaou, & Bourantas, 2011). However, sometimes employees withhold job-related ideas, opinions, or information which may benefit other employees or the organization. This form of silence is intentional and proactive, it is primarily focused on superior and subordinate relationship. Subordinates may not speak up when they feel that their information or opinion will embarrass, threaten or cause a sense of incompetence among managers or those in position above them (Van-Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Besides, the negative consequences organizational silence have profitability, it may also have negative consequences on the employees themselves to which co-workers and organizations are being labeled as a potential complainant, losing employees' trust and respect, exposure to the loss of the relationship, therefore employees may choose to remain silent (Cakici, 2008). Some management executives consider organizational silence to be a good development in their organizations, this is because management executives believe there will be no distractions from subordinates. Managers lack confidence in suggestions from subordinates due to their little or no years of experience.

The concept of organizational silence has been a major issue in organizational leadership in recent years. Organizational silence is an employee's behavioral choice that can impair or improve organizational effectiveness. Silence can express consent and share disfavour and resistance, thus becoming a coercive mechanism for individuals and organizations. However, subordinate now see superiors as the one in leadership of an organization to ensure that employees voices not heard, while the management teams see subordinate as individuals who have no creative ideas to offer in the decision-making process. These challenges still affect the efficiency of senior management decision-making process either positively or negatively. However, researcher and management experts are divided on the reasons for organizational silence. To deal with this gap, the researcher decided to investigate the influence of organizational silence and decision making efficiency. The study seeks to identify the impact of defensive silence, employee trust level and communication protocol on decision making efficiency in Nigerian banking industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Organizational Silence

Organizational silence is a situation where organization does not profit from the intellectual contributions of employees, no feedback, problems not identified, information not disseminated, and inadequate solutions to problems. Organizational silence can be defined as the behavior exhibited by employees in an organization without expressing their feelings, ideas,

concerns and suggestions in their workplaces or works for which they are responsible to handle. Organizational silence hinders effective decision-making and limits development, change and performance improvement (Morrison & Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2010). Bowen and Blackmon (2003) argued that organizational silence limits knowledge sharing, collective brainstorming, problem identification and likely solutions to workplace related challenges. Employee silence is described as withholding of important ideas, suggestions and information (Holland, Cooper & Hecker, 2016; Morrison, 2014; Wilkinson, Gollan, Kalfa & Xu, 2018). There are three main types of employee silences based on certain underlying motives. Acquiescent silence which refers to silence from the motive of resignation, communication protocol if based on refusal for superiors to listen to subordinates, however, defensive silence is defined as silence based on fear motive (Khalid & Ahmed, 2015; Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

2.2 Defensive Silence

Pinder and Harlos (2001) refer defensive silence to quiescent silence, they opined that employees may sometimes intentionally omit useful information based on personal fear of the consequences of speaking up. Negative feedback for subordinate employees may be dismissed as inaccurate or their credibility may be challenged, thereby giving negative reputations to subordination. Their view is consistent with Morrison and Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2010) who emphasized that personal emotion of fear as a key motivation for organizational silence. It is consistent with psychological safety and the ability to express oneself as critical prerequisites for speaking in work contexts. Beheshtifar, Borhani, and Moghadam (2012) who built on the work of Pinder and Harlos (2001) and Morrison and Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2010), defined defensive silence as withholding of significant thought, information, or resentments as a form of self-protection, based on fear. This form of silence is deliberate and proactive and is intended to protect oneself from external threats. In the case, employees are aware of the alternatives they have and carefully them, followed by a conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions as the best personal strategy at the moment (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Over time, defensive silence manifests in employees repression, denial, and reaction formation of attitude.

2.3 Level of Trust

Employees feel uncomfortable discussing their work-related concerns with other colleagues and supervisors due to lack of trust (Imran, Khan, & Khan, 2020). They feel that if they discuss their affairs where they have an opposing opinion, they may be perceived as troublemaker and lazy by their supervisor or top management. Therefore, they feel the safe response is to remain silent and avoid the risk of negative results. Trust in the workplace is a very important factor in employees' well-being and organizational success, as an environment of trust assumes that both parties will be safe and carries an implicit message that they have each other's best interests at heart (Soheila, 2021). Management therefore needs to show that they trust employees, because if employees feel that their opinions or suggestions are not being heard or they are being lied to, they will permanently lose their trust and remain silent in their workplace.

2.4 Communication Protocol

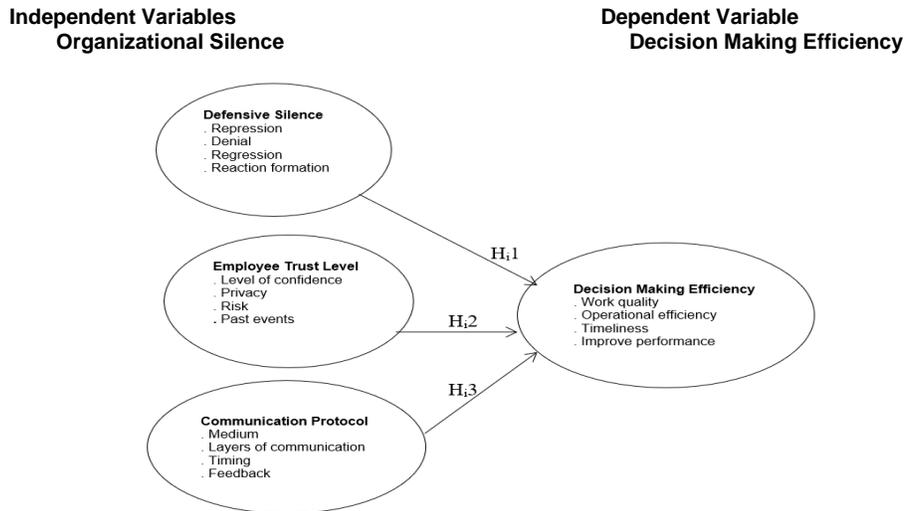
Organizational communication deals with the flow of information upwards, downwards and laterals within an organization to reach specific goals. In some organizations, downward communication channels work well, while upward communication channels are usually neglected (Ebru, 2013). For example, while feedback mechanisms are defined through procedures and guidelines, processes are monitored and managed using performance indicators in organizations whose business activities are driven by a process based management style. Such tools are either misused or completely neglected in organizations management within the classical functional style of management. A healthy and effective communication system established between members of an organization plays an important role in the effective and productive activity of these social structures (Çayak, 2021). Numerous studies have also revealed the importance of communication between organization members (Agarwal & Garg, 2012; Hargie, 2016; Çayak, 2021). However, it is possible to experience communication problems within an organization due to various reasons (Adu-Oppong & AgyinBirikorang, 2014). As a result, organizational staff members are unable to communicate effectively and may be reluctant to express their opinions and suggestions. Thus, a climate of silence will begin to prevail within the organization.

2.5 Decision Making Efficiency

Decision-making is the process through which managers identify organizational problems and try to resolve them (Bartol & Martin, 2020). In the words of Harris (2009), decision-making involves an act of identifying and choosing skillfully from an array of alternatives based on the inclination. Decision-making efficiency comprises various processes that are intermediate steps between thinking and action which are the precursors to behaviour (Alhawamdeh & Alsmairat, 2019). Corporate decision making is an attempt to plan the short and long term future of organizations and increase the likelihood that an organization will be successful. The process of decision-making efficiencies is characterized by novelty, complexity, and openness in an organization. Organizations usually begin with little understanding of the decision situation it faces or the path to its solution, and only a vague idea of what that solution might be and how it will be evaluated when it will be developed based on quality of work, operational efficiency, timeliness and level of performance.

2.6 Conceptual Model

The research model shows the direction of association that exists between the dependent variable (decision making efficiency) and the independent variables (defensive silence, employee trust level and communication protocol) in the model below:



Source: Researchers' Model

2.7 Theoretical Framework

2.7.1 EVLN Model

This study is theoretically considered the account of Hirschman (1970) Exit-Voice-Loyalty-Neglect (EVLN) model. It states that employees in a dissatisfying situation can react in four ways, they may leave the organization (Exit or Silence), raise their voice, stay in the organization and sit tight for conditions to show signs of improvement (Loyalty), and they are connive of the circumstance (Neglect). In assessing the consequences of job dissatisfaction, the concept is based on the principle that job dissatisfaction affects human behaviour and has intrinsic and extrinsic consequences on the worker (Leck & Saunders, 1999). This shows that job dissatisfaction can be anticipate of being detrimental to the company and employees work discontent (Mohammad, Mohammad, Shah & Syed, 2020). This theory is relevant because it explains the dissatisfaction of employees with their supervisors, which in most case can lead to organization silence.

2.8 Empirical Review

Ebru (2013) studied Enigma of silence in organizations: What happens to whom and why? The study was qualitative research and was conducted through face-to-face interviews with 10 employees who work in the marketing and export departments of the company operating in the automotive supply industry. The findings of the study indicate that employees experience the phenomenon of organizational silence. Bordbar, Safari, Rahimi, and Abbasi (2019) examined the effect of organizational silence on human productivity. The statistical population was 25 employees in Arak Tax Organization. The findings showed that organizational silence has a direct and negative effect on human. Managheb et al. (2018) studied the mediating role of organizational silence in the relationship between organizational climate and job performance. A descriptive-correlational method was used in this study. The results of the analyzed data of 183 respondents showed that there was a direct and meaningful relationship between organizational climate and job performance. There was an inverse relationship between organizational climate and organizational silence. Ghanbari and Beheshtirad (2016) in a research titled, "investigating the effect of organizational silence on reducing teamwork and organizational performance based on balanced scorecard (BSC) of Razi university employees, Kermanshah", suggested that organizational silence has a direct effect on teamwork reduction (47%) and reduction organizational performance (52%). Pourakbari (2016) stated that there is a significant relationship between organizational silence of managers and employees. There were no significant differences between attitudes of managers and employees in relation to organizational silence. The results also showed that organizational silence and its indicators have the power of predicting organizational performance at the two levels of managers and employees.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research was based on a descriptive survey design. To confirm the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher asked two experts in the field to rate the efficiency of the instrument in terms of how effectively it measured participants' silence. Participants were instructed to rate themselves using a five-point Likert Scale, with 5 representing "strongly agree" and 1 "strongly disagree" in that order. Based on the collected data, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha to be 0.886, 0.898, 0.879 and 0.863 for defensive silence, trust level, communication protocol and decision making efficiency respectively.

3.1 Data Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

The data presented and analyze was based on findings obtained from the questionnaire distributed to all three banks branches in Edo state, Nigeria. The statistical population of this study consisted of employees of 16 branches of Zenith bank Plc (324 Semployees), 15 branches of United Bank of Africa (142 employees) and 8 branches of Polaris Bank Ltd (46 employees) in Edo State, Nigeria. In order to collect data and test the hypotheses of the study, questionnaire was developed and distributed among 225 employees of the selected banks in Edo State, Nigeria. After removing incomplete questionnaires, 211 valid questionnaires were used for analysis in this study. This shows a response rate of 93.8 percent. The survey used five-point Likert-type items and an open-ended question to measure respondents' perceptions of the effect of organizational

silence on decision-making efficiency of selected banks in Edo State, Nigeria. The need to improve ease of understanding and analysis prompted the use of Pearson Moment Correlation analysis to assess the effect of strategic management of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to test the hypotheses.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics on decision making efficiency (DM)

S/N	Decision Making Efficiency	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	The decision made by supervisors leads to improved quality of work	31 (14.7%)	32 (15.2%)	5 (2.4%)	65 (30.8%)	78 (37%)	3.60	1.474
2	My bank's efficiency is better when junior employees are silence.	32 (15.2%)	29 (13.7%)	10 (4.7%)	70 (33.2%)	70 (33.2%)	3.55	1.451
3	Decisions made by supervisors are timely when subordinates are silence.	30 (14.2%)	40 (19%)	11 (5.2%)	79 (37.4%)	51 (24.2%)	3.38	1.401
4	The profitability is better enhanced when subordinates are silence.	32 (15.2%)	35 (16.6%)	5 (2.4%)	65 (30.8%)	74 (35.1%)	3.38	1.484
	Average Value	31.25 (14.13%)	34 (16.13%)	7.75 (3.68%)	69.75 (33.05%)	68.25 (32.38%)	3.48	1.453

Source: Field survey 2022

The above table measured the extent to which the participants agreed that there has been an increased in decision-making efficiency in the banking sector. The average mean score of the variable measuring decision-making efficiency was 3.48 with a standard deviation of 1.453. It also shows that an average of 65 (30.26%) participants agreed or strongly agreed that decision-making efficiency was low, 138 (65.43%) average participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that decision-making efficiency was high, while 7.5 (3.68%) of the average participants were neutral in their answer. The average mean value of 3.48 is very high and the average standard deviation value was 1.453, which shows the amount of variation among the participants response.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics on defensive silence (DS)

S/A	Defensive Silence	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
5	Repression impacts on subordinate suggestion to senior staff.	35 (16.6%)	24 (11.4%)	10 (4.7%)	68 (32.2%)	74 (35.1%)	3.58	1.476
6	The senior staff refuses to accept reality of the business environment.	30 (14.2%)	34 (16.1%)	5 (2.4%)	65 (30.8%)	77 (36.5%)	3.59	1.469
7	Employees feel threatened when their suggestion does not work out.	34 (16.1%)	26 (12.3%)	10 (4.7%)	67 (31.8%)	74 (35.1%)	3.57	1.473
8	Employees express negative emotions towards some of the banks policies.	32 (15.2%)	38 (18.0%)	11 (4.2%)	75 (35.5%)	55 (26.1%)	3.39	1.428
	Average Value	32.75 (15.53%)	30.5 (14.45%)	9 (4.0%)	68.75 (32.58%)	70 (33.2%)	3.533	1.462

Source: Field survey 2022

From the table above, organizational silence was measured by the degree to which defensive silence affects decision-making efficiency. An average number of the 63.25 (29.98%) strongly agreed or agreed that defensive silence affects decision-making efficiency, 9 (4%) participant were neutral, while an average of 138.75 (65.78%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that defensive silence affects decision-making efficiency. The average mean was 3.533 and the standard deviation was 1.462. The mean value was high and shows that defensive silence affects decision making efficiency in the banking sector with a standard deviation that deviates from the mean no both sides by 1.462.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics on employees trust level (ET)

S/A	Employees Trust Level	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
9	Employees have high level of confidence on their management staff	30 (14.2%)	34 (16.1%)	5 (2.4%)	65 (30.8%)	77 (36.5%)	3.59	1.469
10	Privacy level of staff is high	34 (16.1%)	26 (12.3%)	10 (4.7%)	67 (31.8%)	74 (35.1%)	3.57	1.473
11	Subordinate trust their supervisor for leader direction	31 (14.7%)	32 (15.2%)	5 (2.4%)	65 (30.8%)	78 (37%)	3.60	1.474
12	Past event enhances subordinate trust level on the bank.	39 (18.5%)	36 (17.1%)	11 (5.2%)	60 (28.4%)	65 (30.8%)	3.36	1.519
	Average Value	33.5 (15.88%)	32 (15.18%)	7.75 (3.68%)	64.75 (30.45%)	73.5 (34.85%)	3.48	1.484

Source: Field survey 2022

From the table above, organizational silence was measured by the degree to which employees trust level influence corporate decision-making. An average number of the 65.5 (31.06%) strongly agreed or agreed that the level of employees trust affects decision-making efficiency, 7.75 (3.68%) of the average participants were neutral, while 138.25 (65.3%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that the level of employees trust affects decision making efficiency. The average mean was 3.48 and the standard deviation was 1.484. The average mean value was high, and it shows that employees trust level negatively influences decision making efficiency of Zenith bank plc, United bank plc and Polaris bank ltd with a deviation from mean to both sides by 1.484.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics on communication protocol (CP)

S/A	Communication Protocol	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Deviation
13	The medium communication is accessible to junior employees	32 (15.2%)	38 (18%)	11 (5.2%)	75 (35.5%)	55 (26.1%)	3.39	1.428
14	There is little or no embargo on the communication process	51 (24.2%)	41 (19.4%)	20 (9.5%)	51 (24.2%)	48 (22.7%)	3.02	1.524
15	Information delivery is very timely	31 (14.7%)	26 (12.3%)	10 (4.7%)	69 (32.7%)	75 (35.5%)	3.62	1.444
16	The feedback mechanism is very effective	32 (15.2%)	38 (18%)	11 (5.2%)	75 (35.5%)	55 (26.1%)	3.39	1.428
	Average Value	36.5 (17.33%)	35.75 (16.93%)	3.25 (6.15%)	67.5 (31.98%)	58.25 (27.6%)	3.355	1.456

Source: Field survey 2022

The above table measured organization's silence no the extent to which communication protocol influences decision-making efficiency. An average number of 72.25 (34.26%) strongly agreed or agreed that communication protocol influence decision-making efficiency, 3.25 (6.15%) of the average participant were neutral, while 125.75 (59.58%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that the communication protocol influence decision-making efficiency. The average mean was 3.36 and a standard deviation was 1.456. The average mean value was high, which means that communication protocol negatively affects the decision-making efficiency of zenith bank, United bank plc and Polaris bank ltd deviates from the mean value to both sides by 1.456.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The hypotheses are stated in the null form to guide the direction of the study.

- i. H₀: There is a significant relationship between defensive silence and decision making efficiency in Nigeria banking industry.
- ii. H₀: Employee trust level has a direct impact on decision making efficiency in Nigeria banking industry.
- iii. H₀: There is a significant relationship between communication protocol and decision making efficiency in Nigeria banking industry.

Table 5
Correlations

		DM	DS	ET	CP
DM	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	211			
DS	Pearson Correlation	-.513**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	211	211		
ET	Pearson Correlation	-.692**	-.544**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	211	211	211	
CP	Pearson Correlation	-.185**	-.595**	.040	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	-.562	
	N	211	211	211	211

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field survey 2022

The above correlation table revealed a moderate negative relationship (-0.513**, P < 0.000) between defensive silence and decision making efficiency of Zenith bank plc, United bank plc and Polaris bank plc branches in Edo state. The level of employees trust has a strong negative relationship of (-0.692**, P < 0.000) with decision making efficiency in the banking industry. Communication protocol has a weak negative relationship of (-0.185**, P < 0.004) on decision making efficiency. The results of the correlation table show that all the independent variables have a negative relationship with the dependent variable. So it means that all the null hypotheses were rejected while all the alternate hypotheses were accepted. The findings are consistent with Bordbar, Safari, Rahimi, and Abbasi (2019), Managheb, Razmjoei, Gharbi, Hosseini and Amiranzadeh,

(2018), Ghanbari and Beheshtirad (2016) and Pourakbari (2016), who all concluded that organization silence has a negative relationship of corporate decision making.

4.1 Summary of Findings

Findings from the tested hypotheses show that there are evidence of the existence of a linear negative relationship between organizational silence (defensive silence, trust level and communication protocol) and the corporate decision proxy (decision making). Therefore, alternative hypotheses were adopted which reveal a negative relationship between defensive silence, trust level and communication protocol on decision-making efficiency. The table of descriptive statistics shows that majority of respondents agreed that organizational silence have a negative effect on management decision making.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Employees are dissatisfied with the organization's decision-making process, it was evident in their responses to the filled questionnaire. The participation of subordinate employees in management decision-making is not supported in organizations. Employees' morale in the organization has dropped overtime, this situation has led to a drop in employees productivity, which is evident in their responses. The relationship between organizational silence and corporate decision making is negative. When employees are satisfied with the decision-making process, they become more committed to their jobs.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are therefore made;

- i. The bank's management should ensure good decision-making process that incorporate suggestions from its employees to boost their morale.
- ii. The company's management should prioritize their subordinate suggestions because it will enhance employees' morale to be more committed to their work.
- iii. The company management should support an upward communication process from subordinates to superiors.

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