

The 9th International Conference on Cognitive Science

Antecedents and outcomes of voice and silence behaviours of employees of tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria

Malami Umar*, Zaiton Hassan

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, 94300 Sarawak

Abstract

In collectivist cultures with a high degree of the Power Distance Index (PDI), an expression of voice by employees in the form of opinions and suggestions on work related issues are a task as difficult as doing away with the turban of a *Tuareng* man. Silence is prevalent as employees feel culturally bonded not to take up issues with what is now popularly referred to as “*Oga at the top*” in the Nigerian context. This study investigates through the use of interview, why middle cadre administrative employees in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions feel reluctant to voice opinions and suggestions on work related issues to the person(s) above them in organisation hierarchy. This study uses cultural dimensions to explore the antecedents and outcomes of voice and silence behaviours of middle cadre administrative employees in Nigerian tertiary educational institutions. 26 employees selected across tertiary institutions from the North-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria were interviewed. The finding reveals that the cultural values of absolute loyalty and respect for the superior is the chief reason followed by fear of negative label, being marked rebellious or antagonist as well as inability to rise to top positions. Employees believe this will continue for a reasonably long time, because culture more than any other thing influence employee voice on work related issues.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).
Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of the Universiti Malaysia Sarawak.

Keywords: Voice, silence, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The health of an organisation is determined by how well decisions are taken within that organisation. The wellness of decisions depend much, on how employees contribute in bringing new ideas, suggestions and necessary corrections. The ability of employees to open up and come up with useful suggestions and corrections is dependent on how superior officers permit and encourage the voice in organisations. Silence may seem reasonable if employee fears that voice may land him/her in trouble. When the superior’s reaction is likely to be negative, it makes sense not to take up issues to the top for fear of negative reaction [1]. However, organisational decisions suffer where employees withhold vital information and/or opinions capable of enhancing the quality of decisions and performance of the task at hand.

The culture of the society in which an organisation operates exerts a lot of influence on how employees perceive their work, relate with others and discharge their responsibilities. According to value-belief theory [2], the values and beliefs held by members of cultures influence the degree to which the behaviours of individuals, groups, and the

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +06-082-581539; fax: +60-082-581567.
E-mail address: malamicaptain@yahoo.com; ummiyyas@yahoo.com