



Beyond Positive Employee Behavior: The Employee Contribution Paradox and Organizational Silence in Sustainable Workplaces

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Abstract

Organizations often encourage employees to demonstrate commitment by helping colleagues, taking initiative, and contributing beyond their formal responsibilities. Although such behaviors can benefit organizations, problems may arise when additional contributions become perceived obligations rather than voluntary choices. Employees may continue to demonstrate positive workplace behavior while becoming reluctant to express concerns, question decisions, or suggest improvements. This thesis examines this tension through the proposed concept of the *employee contribution paradox*: the possibility that expectations for additional contributions may coexist with reduced willingness to speak up. Drawing on research on organizational citizenship behavior, citizenship pressure, employee voice and silence, and psychological safety, the thesis develops a conceptual framework connecting perceived citizenship pressure with employee silence. It further proposes psychological safety as a potential moderator of this relationship. The central argument is that encouraging employees to contribute more may not be sufficient to create a sustainable workplace if employees do not also feel able to communicate concerns. The proposed framework provides a foundation for future empirical investigation and offers implications for management practices that seek to balance employee contribution, open communication, and organizational learning.

Keywords

employee voice, employee silence, organizational citizenship behavior, citizenship pressure, psychological safety, sustainable workplace, management practices.



1. Introduction

Organizations often value employees who do more than fulfil their formal job responsibilities. Helping colleagues, sharing knowledge, taking initiative, and voluntarily supporting organizational activities are commonly associated with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which concerns discretionary actions that contribute to organizational functioning (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). Such behaviors can support cooperation and organizational effectiveness, making them important to management research and practice (Podsakoff et al., 2000). However, the value of additional contribution depends partly on whether employees perceive it as voluntary or expected. Bolino et al. (2010) demonstrated that employees can experience pressure to behave like “good soldiers” and that citizenship pressure is associated with negative outcomes, including job stress, work–family conflict, and intentions to quit. Similarly, Vigoda-Gadot (2006) challenged the assumption that citizenship-related behavior is always voluntary or beneficial by examining its compulsory dimension. These studies suggest that visible extra-role behavior should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of employee well-being or a healthy work environment. A related issue concerns employee voice and silence. Employee voice involves communicating suggestions, concerns, and work-related information that may help improve organizational functioning, whereas employee silence involves withholding information, opinions, or concerns that could otherwise be expressed (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Silence is therefore not necessarily evidence that employees have no concerns or ideas; it may reflect their decision not to communicate information they consider relevant (Morrison, 2014).

These two areas of research raise an important question: **Can organizations encourage employees to contribute more while unintentionally making them less willing to speak up?** The question is particularly relevant when employees believe that



they must demonstrate commitment by accepting additional responsibilities but are uncertain about how managers will respond to disagreement or criticism (Bolino et al., 2010; Morrison, 2014). This thesis explores that possibility through the proposed concept of the *employee contribution paradox*. The term describes a potential tension between expectations for additional employee contributions and employees' willingness to communicate concerns. It is introduced as an analytical framing rather than an established or validated psychological construct. The proposed argument builds on existing research rather than claiming that the relationship between pressured citizenship and employee silence has never been studied. He et al. (2018), for example, directly investigated compulsory citizenship behavior and employee silence, finding a positive relationship in their two-wave study and examining emotional exhaustion and organizational identification as part of the explanatory framework. The present thesis extends this discussion conceptually by proposing psychological safety as an additional potential moderator and considering the implications for sustainable workplace management. Accordingly, the objective is to develop a conceptual framework linking perceived citizenship pressure with employee silence and to propose psychological safety as a condition that may influence the strength of this relationship. The framework is intended to guide future empirical investigation; it does not report new data or claim that the proposed hypotheses have already been tested.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. From Organizational Citizenship Behavior to Citizenship Pressure

Organizational citizenship behavior traditionally refers to discretionary actions that support the social and organizational environment in which formal job tasks are performed (Organ, 1988). The broader OCB literature has examined different forms of citizenship behavior, their antecedents, and their potential consequences for individuals and organizations (Podsakoff et al., 2000). Nevertheless, additional contribution should



not be treated as a single, uniform experience. Employees may help colleagues because they genuinely want to, because they identify with their organization, or because they believe that refusing requests could have negative consequences. These different motivations matter because similar observable behaviors may arise under different conditions (Bolino et al., 2010; Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). Bolino et al. (2010) examined citizenship pressure and found that pressure to engage in citizenship behavior was associated with both increased OCB and negative employee outcomes. Their findings indicate that additional contribution and employee strain are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Vigoda-Gadot (2006) similarly discussed compulsory citizenship behavior as a potentially problematic dimension of the "good soldier" expectation. Building on this literature, **perceived citizenship pressure** is defined in this thesis as an employee's perception that they are expected to contribute beyond their formal responsibilities and may experience negative consequences if they decline. This working definition draws on research concerning citizenship pressure and compulsory citizenship behavior (Bolino et al., 2010; Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). The distinction between voluntary contribution and perceived pressure is central to the proposed framework. An employee who willingly assists a colleague may experience the behavior as a meaningful choice, whereas an employee who believes that refusal would damage their reputation may experience the same behavior as an obligation. Research on citizenship pressure supports the importance of examining the demands surrounding extra-role behavior rather than considering only whether the behavior occurs (Bolino et al., 2010). Consequently, the present framework does not treat OCB itself as the proposed source of employee silence. Instead, it focuses on perceived pressure surrounding additional contributions. This distinction helps separate the potentially beneficial effects of voluntary citizenship behavior from the possible difficulties associated with



expectations that employees feel unable to refuse (Bolino et al., 2010; Vigoda-Gadot, 2006).

2.2. Employee Voice and Silence

Employee voice and silence are important topics in organizational research because employees may possess information about problems, risks, and opportunities for improvement that is not readily available to managers. Morrison (2014) reviewed research on the factors influencing employees' decisions to communicate or withhold work-related information. Van Dyne et al. (2003) further conceptualized employee voice and silence as multidimensional constructs, demonstrating the importance of distinguishing between different forms and motives. Employees do not necessarily remain silent because they lack ideas or concerns. Their decisions may reflect their expectations about whether speaking up will be useful, whether their message will be taken seriously, and whether communicating it may have undesirable interpersonal consequences (Morrison, 2014). Silence can therefore prevent organizations from receiving information that could otherwise help them recognize and address workplace problems (Morrison, 2014). The relationship between compulsory citizenship behavior and employee silence has already been examined directly. He et al. (2018) found that compulsory citizenship behavior was positively related to employee silence in their study of employees in China's manufacturing sector. They also reported that emotional exhaustion mediated the relationship and that organizational identification shaped aspects of the proposed process. Their findings provide an important empirical foundation for considering how pressured extra-role expectations may be associated with employees' decisions to withhold information. The present thesis builds on this evidence while asking a more specific question: might the relationship between perceived citizenship pressure and employee silence differ depending on whether employees feel safe expressing concerns? This question connects the citizenship



pressure literature with research on psychological safety and interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). The distinction is important for the proposed contribution. The thesis does not claim to introduce the citizenship pressure–silence relationship for the first time. Rather, it proposes psychological safety as an additional boundary condition for future investigation and considers the implications of that possibility for sustainable workplace management.

2.3. Psychological Safety as a Potential Moderator

Psychological safety concerns whether individuals believe that they can take interpersonal risks, such as asking questions, acknowledging mistakes, or expressing concerns, without facing inappropriate negative consequences. Edmondson (1999) introduced an influential account of team psychological safety and found that it was associated with learning behavior in work teams. Edmondson and Lei (2014) subsequently reviewed the development of psychological safety research and its relevance to interpersonal risk-taking and organizational processes. Psychological safety is relevant to employee voice because speaking up can involve uncertainty about how other people will react. Employees may hesitate to question decisions if they anticipate embarrassment, rejection, or damage to important workplace relationships. Research on voice and silence identifies perceived consequences and the organizational context as relevant to employees' decisions about whether to express their views (Morrison, 2014). The present thesis proposes that psychological safety may influence how employees respond to perceived citizenship pressure. Where employees believe that they can raise concerns without being unfairly penalized, they may be more willing to communicate problems even when doing so challenges existing expectations. Where employees perceive greater interpersonal risk, they may be more inclined to withhold their concerns. This proposed argument draws on the established relationship between psychological safety and interpersonal risk-taking, together with research on the factors



associated with voice and silence (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Morrison, 2014). In the proposed framework, psychological safety is therefore treated as a **moderator**, not a mediator. A moderator is a variable expected to influence the strength or direction of a relationship between two other variables. The question here is whether the association between citizenship pressure and employee silence may be weaker when psychological safety is higher. This is a proposed theoretical relationship, not an established empirical conclusion about these specific variables. The proposal also differs from the boundary condition examined by He et al. (2018), whose study considered organizational identification in the relationship between compulsory citizenship behavior, emotional exhaustion, and silence. The present thesis instead identifies psychological safety as a potential additional condition to test. Whether it explains meaningful variation beyond previously examined factors remains an empirical question.

3. The Employee Contribution Paradox

The proposed *employee contribution paradox* describes a possible tension between encouraging employees to make additional contributions and maintaining an environment in which they feel able to express concerns. The idea builds on evidence that citizenship pressure can accompany both higher citizenship behavior and negative employee outcomes, as well as research showing that employees may withhold relevant information rather than speak up (Bolino et al., 2010; Morrison, 2014). The paradox does not imply that helping colleagues, taking initiative, or accepting additional responsibilities is inherently harmful. Organizational citizenship behavior has long been studied as a form of contribution that can support organizational functioning (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). The concern arises when employees perceive additional contribution as compulsory and feel that questioning expectations may carry interpersonal or professional risks (Bolino et al., 2010; Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). Consider



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VOLUME-1, ISSUE-7, 2026**

an employee who regularly helps colleagues, accepts extra tasks, and agrees to requests from a supervisor. These actions may be interpreted as signs of commitment. However, if the employee believes that refusing additional work would damage their reputation, they may feel unable to discuss workload problems. If the employee also anticipates negative reactions to disagreement, they may choose not to raise concerns about unrealistic deadlines or inefficient practices. This example illustrates the proposed argument using the concepts of citizenship pressure, employee silence, and psychological safety; it is not an empirical finding from the present thesis (Bolino et al., 2010; Edmondson, 1999; Morrison, 2014). The example highlights why visible contribution alone may not provide a complete picture of employees' workplace experiences. An employee can perform extra-role tasks while withholding information that might be valuable to the organization. Research on citizenship pressure and employee silence makes this possibility worthy of investigation, although it does not establish that all employees experiencing citizenship pressure will become silent (Bolino et al., 2010; He et al., 2018). The proposed concept should therefore be treated as an analytical framing, not as a validated construct or a claim that a wholly new phenomenon has been discovered. Its value will depend on whether it helps clarify the relationship between pressured contribution, employee voice, and workplace conditions beyond what can already be explained by existing concepts (Bolino et al., 2010; He et al., 2018; Morrison, 2014). The connection to sustainable workplace management follows from this concern. A workplace assessment that considers only visible helping and extra-role contribution may overlook whether employees can communicate difficulties or raise concerns. Research on OCB provides a foundation for understanding the value of additional contribution, while research on employee voice and psychological safety highlights the importance of employees' opportunities to communicate and participate in learning (Edmondson, 1999; Morrison, 2014; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000).



The proposed framework brings these discussions together by asking whether contribution expectations and the conditions for speaking up need to be considered jointly.

4. Proposed Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The proposed framework contains three central variables: perceived citizenship pressure, employee silence, and psychological safety. Perceived citizenship pressure is the predictor, employee silence is the outcome, and psychological safety is proposed as a moderator. The selection of these variables is grounded in research on citizenship pressure, compulsory citizenship behavior, voice and silence, and psychological safety (Bolino et al., 2010; Edmondson, 1999; He et al., 2018; Morrison, 2014). The first proposed relationship is a positive association between perceived citizenship pressure and employee silence. This expectation draws on research showing that citizenship pressure can have negative consequences and that compulsory citizenship behavior has been found to be positively related to employee silence (Bolino et al., 2010; He et al., 2018). The hypothesis is stated as an association because the present thesis does not test a causal relationship.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Perceived citizenship pressure is positively associated with employee silence.

The second proposition concerns the potential moderating role of psychological safety. Research has established the relevance of psychological safety to interpersonal risk-taking and learning, while voice and silence research identifies anticipated consequences as relevant to employees' communication decisions (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Morrison, 2014). Based on these findings, the thesis proposes that higher psychological safety may weaken the positive association between citizenship pressure and employee silence. This specific moderating relationship requires empirical testing.



Hypothesis 2 (H2): Psychological safety moderates the positive relationship between perceived citizenship pressure and employee silence, such that the relationship is weaker when psychological safety is higher.

The two hypotheses are proposed for future investigation and should not be interpreted as confirmed findings. The framework also does not assume that citizenship pressure will affect all employees in the same way. Existing research has considered other explanatory mechanisms and boundary conditions, including emotional exhaustion and organizational identification (He et al., 2018). These factors, together with workload and leadership practices, may be relevant to future tests of the proposed framework. An empirical study could examine the hypotheses using established measures of citizenship pressure, psychological safety, and employee silence. Researchers would need to assess the reliability and validity of the measures and choose an appropriate statistical approach for testing the proposed interaction. Where feasible, data collected at different time points or from different sources could help address concerns associated with measuring all variables from the same respondent at one time. These are proposed methodological directions rather than procedures already undertaken in this thesis. The framework would also benefit from comparisons with existing constructs and models. In particular, future research could investigate whether perceived citizenship pressure and compulsory citizenship behavior are sufficiently distinct in the selected measurement approach, and whether psychological safety explains additional variation beyond boundary conditions previously studied by He et al. (2018). Such work would help determine the framework's explanatory value and clarify the contribution of the proposed employee contribution paradox.



5. Theoretical Contribution and Practical Implications

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

The proposed contribution has three parts. First, the thesis distinguishes between employees' additional contributions and the pressure they may experience to provide them. This distinction is supported by research showing that citizenship pressure can be associated with increased OCB as well as negative outcomes, and by theoretical work on compulsory citizenship behavior (Bolino et al., 2010; Vigoda-Gadot, 2006). It encourages researchers and managers to consider the conditions under which extra-role behavior occurs rather than interpreting all such behavior as equally voluntary. Second, the thesis connects citizenship pressure with employee silence while acknowledging the existing empirical evidence. He et al. (2018) already investigated compulsory citizenship behavior and silence, identifying emotional exhaustion as a mediating mechanism and organizational identification as a boundary condition. The present framework proposes psychological safety as an additional potential moderator, drawing on its established relevance to interpersonal risk-taking and learning (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). The contribution is therefore an extension to be examined, not a claim that the basic relationship is new. Third, the thesis introduces the employee contribution paradox as an analytical framing for considering how expectations for additional contribution may coexist with reluctance to speak up. The framing connects research on citizenship pressure with scholarship on voice and silence (Bolino et al., 2010; Morrison, 2014). Whether it adds value beyond existing terminology will need to be assessed through theoretical comparison and empirical investigation. The proposed direction also relates to the author's earlier research on sustainable workplaces. Khusanova et al. (2019) examined transformational leadership, psychological empowerment, organizational citizenship behavior, and the moderating role of office design in organizations in Uzbekistan. That study provides a relevant background for



examining organizational conditions associated with positive employee behavior. However, it did not test the relationship between citizenship pressure and employee silence or examine psychological safety as a moderator of that relationship. The present thesis therefore develops a related but distinct research direction rather than treating the earlier study as direct evidence for the proposed hypotheses.

5.2. Practical Implications for Sustainable Workplace Management

The framework suggests several questions for managers seeking to encourage employee contribution while maintaining open communication. These implications are theory-informed propositions, not tested recommendations from the present thesis. **First, organizations should distinguish voluntary contribution from perceived obligation.** Citizenship pressure research shows that expectations for extra-role behavior can have negative consequences, even where employees demonstrate citizenship behavior (Bolino et al., 2010). Managers may therefore benefit from considering whether employees feel able to discuss competing priorities, explain workload limitations, or decline additional requests without fearing unfair consequences. **Second, employee voice should be recognized as a form of contribution.** Voice research emphasizes that employees may communicate suggestions, concerns, and information about problems that are relevant to organizational functioning (Morrison, 2014). Consequently, an employee who raises a concern or questions an unrealistic target should not automatically be interpreted as uncooperative. A management approach that values only agreement or willingness to accept more work may overlook potentially useful information (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne et al., 2003). **Third, managers should consider psychological safety when encouraging employees to speak openly.** Psychological safety is associated with interpersonal risk-taking and learning behavior in teams (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Managers can draw on this research by inviting alternative



viewpoints, responding constructively to concerns, and avoiding unnecessary blame when employees identify problems. These practices are consistent with the general principles of psychological safety, although their effects on the specific relationship proposed in this thesis would need to be investigated. Finally, the proposed framework encourages organizations to consider employee contribution and open communication together. OCB research highlights the value of extra-role behavior, while voice and silence research shows that employees' willingness to communicate relevant information is another important aspect of organizational life (Morrison, 2014; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). From this perspective, sustainable workplace management should consider not only whether employees are contributing, but also whether the working environment allows them to express concerns and discuss difficulties. These implications do not suggest that psychological safety necessarily eliminates the consequences of citizenship pressure. Instead, they identify a question for future research: whether employees can be encouraged to cooperate and take initiative without feeling that they must remain silent about problems. This question follows from the proposed framework and the existing literature on citizenship pressure, employee silence, and psychological safety (Bolino et al., 2010; Edmondson, 1999; He et al., 2018).

6. Conclusion and Future Research

This thesis examines a potential tension between expectations for additional employee contributions and employees' willingness to express concerns. Drawing on research on organizational citizenship behavior, citizenship pressure, employee voice and silence, and psychological safety, it proposes the employee contribution paradox as an analytical framing for investigating this tension (Bolino et al., 2010; Edmondson, 1999; Morrison, 2014; Organ, 1988). The conceptual framework proposes that perceived citizenship pressure is positively associated with employee silence and that



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psychological safety may weaken this association. These propositions build on existing research, including the direct examination of compulsory citizenship behavior and employee silence by He et al. (2018). The specific moderating role proposed for psychological safety, however, remains to be tested. The thesis contributes to the discussion of sustainable workplace management by emphasizing that visible employee contribution should not be considered in isolation from employees' willingness to communicate concerns. Research on OCB establishes the relevance of additional contribution, while research on voice and silence highlights the importance of employees' decisions to express or withhold work-related information (Morrison, 2014; Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000). The proposed framework brings these perspectives together to examine whether pressure to contribute may coexist with reluctance to speak up. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the framework is conceptual and does not provide new empirical evidence for either hypothesis. Second, the employee contribution paradox is a proposed analytical framing, not a validated construct. Third, the relationship between citizenship pressure and silence may be influenced by other factors, including emotional exhaustion and organizational identification, which have been examined in previous research (He et al., 2018). These limitations mean that the framework should be treated as a basis for further investigation rather than as a set of established conclusions. Future research could test the proposed hypotheses, examine the distinctiveness of perceived citizenship pressure and compulsory citizenship behavior, and determine whether psychological safety adds explanatory value beyond previously examined boundary conditions. Researchers could also investigate whether the proposed relationships vary across organizational and cultural contexts. Such studies would help clarify the scope of the framework and establish whether the employee contribution paradox provides a useful extension to existing research. Ultimately, the central argument is that encouraging employees to do more may not be enough to



support a sustainable workplace. Organizations also need to understand the conditions under which employees feel able to communicate honestly, raise concerns, and contribute to improvement. This proposition provides a foundation for further research into the relationship between employee contribution expectations, psychological safety, and organizational silence.

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