

"The Silent Barrier: Exploring the Impact of Defensive Silence on Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment"

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How to cite this article: Purvashi Thakur, Dalbir Singh (2024). "The Silent Barrier: Exploring the Impact of Defensive Silence on Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment". *Library Progress International*, 44(1), 638-647

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between defensive silence, affective commitment, and job satisfaction among employees in organizations located in North India. Data were collected from 418 employees using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS and AMOS 21. The findings indicate that defensive silence negatively impacts both job satisfaction and affective commitment. Employees who refrain from voicing ideas or concerns due to fear of negative consequences experience lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This silence inhibits the expression of innovative ideas and constructive feedback, ultimately hindering employee engagement and organizational effectiveness. The study underscores the importance of creating a supportive work environment that encourages open communication and addresses factors contributing to defensive silence.

Keywords: defensive silence, affective commitment, job satisfaction, organisations

Introduction

In the contemporary business environment, employees represent an essential resource that can distinguish an organization from its competitors. Success frequently depends on employees who provide innovative ideas and solutions through the open exchange of their suggestions, given that access to comparable resources is available. This organization seeks individuals who are prepared to propose solutions to current challenges and contribute their inventive ideas with transparency. The lack of communication can significantly undermine the overall operational efficiency of an organization (Brinsfield, 2009). Employee silence hinders organizations from accessing crucial information that could potentially aid in the identification and resolution of issues in advance. However, studies have shown that many organizations do not encourage open communication, ideas, or information. As a result, employees discuss these issues in private, which in turn reinforces the climate of dissatisfaction (Senge, 1999). These studies demonstrate that a person's health and well-being are negatively impacted when they choose to remain silent out of fear of the negative consequences of speaking up.

Employees that seek challenging environments and share expertise and information are more effective for themselves and for their employers (Fatima *et al.*, 2015). Nonetheless, if employees are reluctant to express their opinions and concerns regarding organizational issues, it may result in diminished job satisfaction and commitment (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005). Furthermore, it may elevate workplace stress and depression (Cortina & Magley, 2003), augment absenteeism and turnover rates (Bagheri *et al.*, 2012), inhibit creativity, and diminish staff morale (Pentilla, 2003). It is evident from the above that

employee silence leads to various negative consequences, with one of the most critical being low employee commitment (Irefin & Mechanic, 2014; Nikolaou et al., 2011). According to Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), when people intentionally refrain from speaking up, it leads to a decrease in affective commitment. Allen and Meyer (1990) defined affective commitment as "the emotional attachment to and identification with an organisation, making the employee loyal and attached to the organisation". When individuals become part of an organization, they contribute their own distinct set of talents, expectations, and criteria. They seek an appropriate environment to apply their skills and achieve their established objectives. When a company successfully achieves these goals, the likelihood of employees demonstrating greater commitment to the organization significantly increases (Vakola and Bauradas, 2005).

Locating the factors that lead to employee job satisfaction inside a company is critical for avoiding a downturn in working conditions. Because of this, changes may be made promptly (García-Bernal et al., 2005). According to Judge et al. (2017, p. 357), job satisfaction is "the overall evaluative judgment one has about one's job." Locke (1976, p. 1,300) defines job satisfaction as, "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience." Remaining silent on organizational issues can negatively impact employees' job satisfaction, diminish their commitment to both their roles and the organization, and ultimately lead to a higher likelihood of them intending to leave their jobs (Sarrafoglu and Günsay, 2020).

This study is conducted to see the impact of defensive silence on employees' affective commitment and job satisfaction among the employees of the organisations of north India. Understanding these relations is significant because it will help management of organizations to solve silence related problems of employees which enhances their job satisfaction levels and increases the commitment of employees ultimately positive work environment.

Research objective

1. To examine the relation of defensive silence with job satisfaction.
2. To examine the relation of defensive silence with affective commitment.

Literature review and hypothesis

Employee silence and job satisfaction

When employees are concerned that their suggestions and insights may result in adverse outcomes, they frequently hesitate to share those (Dyne et al., 2003). When employees perceive management as uncooperative and dismissive of their ideas, they may progressively lose their sense of connection, despite their dedication to contributing their best efforts to organizational success (Burris et al., 2008). Research indicates that employee satisfaction diminishes when individuals refrain from voicing concerns due to apprehension about adverse outcomes (Morrison, 2014; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005). This reluctance stems from a disjunction between the desire to articulate work-related concerns and the available opportunities for expression. The presence of a culture of silence within an organization can adversely affect employees' job satisfaction and overall well-being (Malik et al., 2020). Studies show a connection between the perspectives of upper management and supervisors on silence and overall job satisfaction. Negative attitudes displayed by upper management and supervisors can result in employees being hesitant to express their concerns, which in turn diminishes overall job satisfaction (Panahi & Danaeifard, 2010).

H1. Defensive silence has a significant and positive effect on job satisfaction (JS).

Employee silence and affective commitment

Silence among employees is not usually the result of a lack of communication; rather it can be characterised as the intentional concealment of employees' knowledge, opinions, proposals, and advice regarding organizational challenges, as well as the avoidance of vocal or written expression (Tulubas & Celep, 2012). Organizational commitment embodies the experiences of employees within their roles and has attracted considerable attention from academics in the field of Organizational Behavior (Mowday et al., 2013). Putti and Aryee (1990) found

that, among various criteria, communication opportunities serve as the most crucial predictor of organizational commitment. This occurs as transparent communication, mutual trust, and the unrestricted exchange of information and knowledge foster a deeper sense of belonging and connection to the organization. The significance of supervisors' and top management's perspectives on silence is highlighted, as these attitudes can serve as key drivers for employee commitment. Prior studies indicate that defensive silence adversely affects organizational commitment (Deniz et al., 2013), as individuals who suppress their worries due to fear and perceived threats exhibit diminished commitment in precarious circumstances (Wong, 2005).

H2. Defensive silence has a significant and positive effect on affective commitment.

Methodology

A well-organized questionnaire was developed to gather data from the target population, encompassing questions related to defensive silence, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and employee demographics. The focus of our study is on individuals working within the banking sector in organizations located in northern India. We selected a convenient sampling technique to gather data from employees. The questionnaire was distributed to the target population based on convenience sampling. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and subsequently distributed to 500 employees working in banking organizations. A total of 418 completed questionnaires have been received from employees, which are currently being analyzed and considered sufficient for the study.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	247	59
	Female	171	41
Age	18 - 31 Years	133	31.81
	31 - 40 Years	151	36.12
	41 - 50 Years	103	24.65
	Above 50 Years	31	7.42
Marital status	Unmarried	164	39.23
	Married	247	59.09
	Separated/ Divorced	07	1.68
Education qualification	Graduation	113	27.03
	Post-Graduation	142	33.97
	Professional Degree	146	34.93
	Other	17	4.07
Experience	Less than 2 years	97	23.20
	2 - 4 years	117	28.00
	4 - 6 years	132	31.58
	Above 6 years	72	17.22
Annual income	Less than or equal to Rs 3 lakh	65	15.55
	Rs. 300001- Rs 500000	121	28.94
	Rs. 500001- Rs 1000000	178	42.58
	Above 10 Lakh	54	12.91
	Total	418	100

Measures

A five point Likert scale has been adopted in building the survey questions with response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) through to 5 (strongly agree).

Defensive silence. The measurement items for defensive silence were created by Dyne et al. (2003). Example items include: “I withholds relevant information due to fear,” “I avoids expressing ideas for improvements, due to self-protection.” **Affective commitment.** Affective commitment was measured by six item scale (e.g. “I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization.” and “I would be happy to work at this organization until I retire.” that were adapted from Rhoades et al. (2001) study. **Job satisfaction.** To assess job satisfaction six items scale developed by Curry et al. (1986) is used. Example items from this scale include “I find real enjoyment in my job”, “I feel fairly well satisfied with my job.”

Based on the study hypotheses, the conceptual model of the study is shown in figure 1

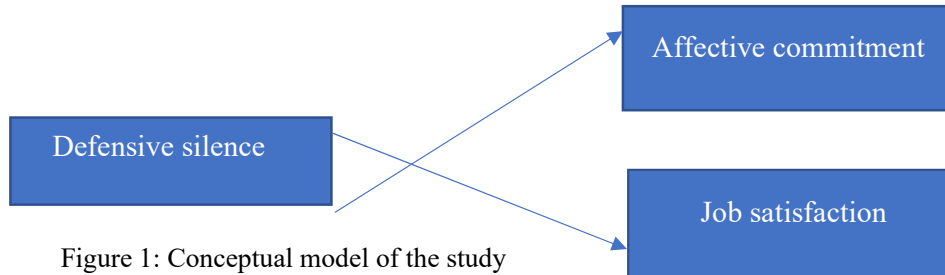


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the study

Analysis and interpretation

All three variables- AC (Affective Commitment), DS (Defensive Silence), and JS (Job Satisfaction) show adequate central trends and suitable degrees of variability according to the descriptive statistics. The data distributions appear to be almost normal, since both the skewness and kurtosis values for each construct fall within the allowed range. The data is suitable for further inferential analysis, as confirmed by these results.

TABLE 2 : Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
DefensiveSilence	418	2.2344	.88405	.748	.119	.470	.238
jobsatisfaction	418	3.6152	.95026	-.608	.119	.196	.238
AC	418	3.7807	.69400	-.319	.119	-.101	.238
Valid N (listwise)	418						

Reliability and Validity

Reliability is typically tested using two indicators: Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). Constructs with Cronbach's alpha values greater than .60 are considered highly reliable (Chaudhary et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2006). Defensive silence possesses Cronbach's alpha of 0.868, job satisfaction has Cronbach's alpha of 0.902, and affective commitment exhibits Cronbach's alpha of 0.865. Consequently, all values reside within the permissible range. Additionally, the constructs with CR values in excess of .70 are also viewed as highly reliable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table 1 that the CR of all constructs exceed .70, ranging from .854 to .904. To assess whether sufficient discriminant validity has been attained, the square root values of AVE in each column should exceed the correlation values present within that column (Alraja and Kashoob, 2019). The findings from this comparison, as shown in Table 6, affirm the existence of sufficient discriminant validity.

Table 3: AVE, CR, MSV Values, and Correlations

	CR	AVE	JS	AC	DS
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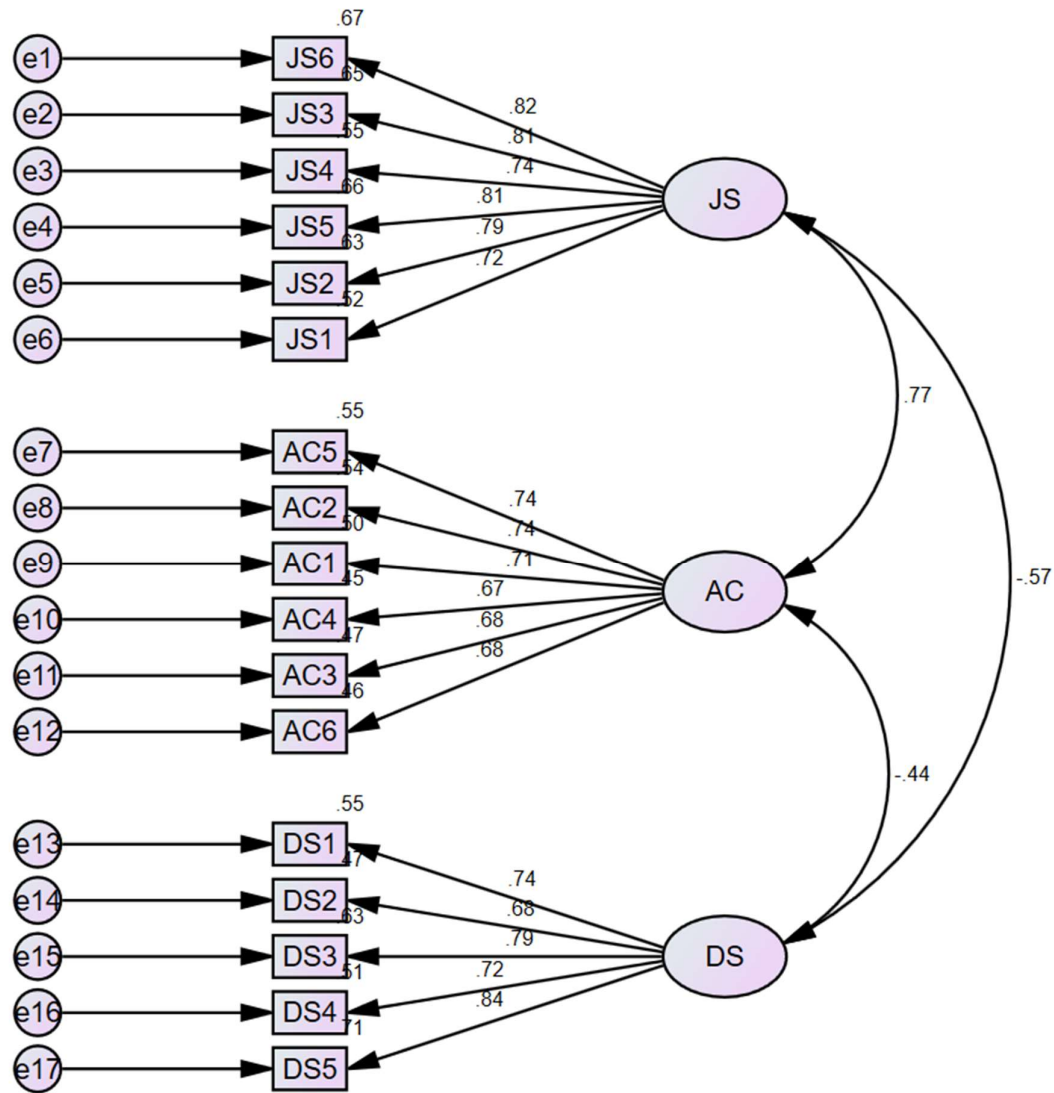
JS	0.904	0.613	0.783		
AC	0.854	0.620	0.775***	0.757	
DS	0.870	0.573	-0.569***	-0.436***	0.757

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess the validity of the study model. The values of the goodness-of-fit indices are presented in Table 11, and they all fall within the acceptable range (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Hair et al., 2006; Kline, 1999). The model fits the data quite well, since all fit indices are above the thresholds. As a result, the suggested structural model is credible and valid for understanding the observed correlations.

Table 4: Model Fit Summary

Fit index	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMR
Acceptable value	<5	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	>0.9	<0.08	<0.08
Model fit score	1.843	0.931	0.913	0.975	0.971	0.046	0.051
Interpretation	Excellent			Excellent		Excellent	

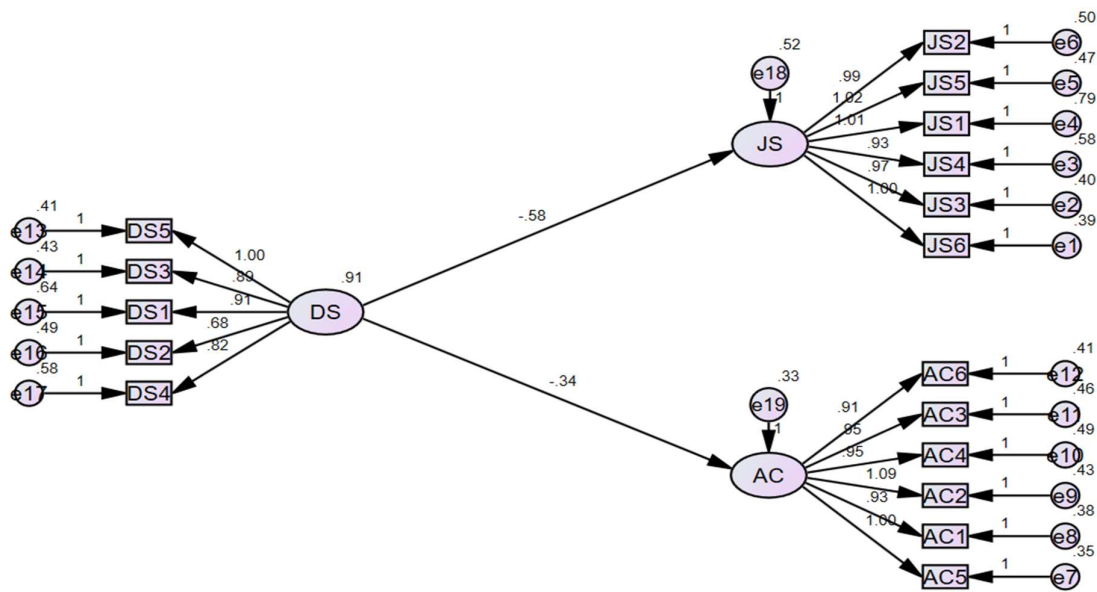
Figure 2: AMOS Output for Measurement Model or CFA: Standardised



DS – defensive silence, JS – job satisfaction, AC – affective commitment

Source: AMOS output

Figure 3: Amos Output of the Structural Model of Job Satisfaction



DS – defensive silence, JS – job satisfaction, AC – affective commitment

Source: AMOS output

This diagram of a structural equation model (SEM) showcases the interconnections among three constructs: Defensive Silence (DS), Job Satisfaction (JS), and Affective Commitment (AC). All observed indicators exhibit high factor loadings on their corresponding latent constructs, demonstrating robust relationships between the items and the constructs. The given model shows negative paths from defensive silence to job satisfaction ($\beta_s = -.58$) and defensive silence to affective commitment ($\beta_s = -.34$). Hence Result of the study demonstrates that DS have a significant and negative relation with JS. Hence H1 is accepted. The analysis also revealed that DS is negatively related to AC. Hence H2 is also supported.

Conclusion and discussion

Research finding revealed that defensive silence have significant and negative relationship with job satisfaction and affective commitment. As it is evident that open communication is strongest predictor of commitment of employees (Putti and Aryee, 1990), but when due to fear of negative consequence employees feel hesitant to speak up then they do not openly communicate their opinions and it results in decrease in commitment of employees towards their organisation. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous research conducted by (Cetin, 2020).

In addition, the study's findings suggest that individuals who opt for silence at work often experience lower levels of job satisfaction (Alarabiat & Eyupoglu, 2022). When individuals in a professional setting cannot voice their opinions, they may experience a misalignment between their personal beliefs and their behavior, as their thoughts and actions may not align. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous research conducted by (Alarabiat & Eyupoglu, 2022). When employees feel hesitant to voice their concern then they find gap between personal beliefs and their behaviour and it negatively impact their general wellbeing and leads to decrease in job satisfaction level of employees. In addition, the extended absence of communication can negatively impact people's general well-being and increase their stress levels (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

In today's globally competitive economy, long-term organisational success demands creativity, adaptability, responsiveness, and teamwork. Innovation and self-initiative are indications of the energy required to safeguard

a business in a changing environment (Williams & Anderson, 1991). In order to survive longer and be prepared to tackle threats in this competitive environment, businesses must harness their human resources, particularly their untapped potentials (Çınar *et al.*, 2013). In today's cutthroat environment, employees are the only component or source that can give an organisation a competitive advantage through their unique ideas and talents (Amponsah *et al.*, 2020).

Implications

In today's complex and highly competitive organizational landscape, it is essential for top-level management to implement policies and practices that empower employees to freely express their opinions and suggestions. Fostering positive, collaborative relationships and creating a supportive workplace culture are crucial to ensuring employees feel comfortable and confident in sharing their ideas, ultimately driving innovation and organizational success.

When an atmosphere of trust is fostered within an organization, employees feel empowered to freely express their ideas and contribute to its growth and development. To enhance this, management should actively involve employees in key decision-making processes, helping them feel like integral members of the organization. This sense of inclusion motivates employees to contribute innovative ideas and suggestions, driving the organization toward greater success.

To minimize the harmful effects of employee silence within an organization, management have to recognize the urgency of fostering open communication. By encouraging and supporting employees rather than criticizing them, leaders can create a more inclusive environment. This approach helps build confidence among employees, empowering them to freely share their opinions and contribute valuable insights on organizational matters.

The findings of this study carry important implications for practice, particularly within the corporate sector, where employees are the driving force behind competitive advantage through their valuable knowledge contributions.

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