Section I

Theoretical Framework

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Silence in Organizations—
What We Need to Know, What We Know,
and What We Don't Know

Abstract   The conference from which this book arose showed that organizational members' withholding of ideas, questions, opinions, and concerns is an issue in many contexts and is approached from diverse perspectives. The chapter discusses what organizational research may contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon. I wrote this chapter with three aims in mind. First, I wanted to present a framework which can guide exploration and practitioner attempts to overcome silence in organizations ("What we should know"). This framework considers silence and its antecedents and effects at the individual, team-, organizational, and societal level. Second, I wanted to provide a focused review of existing knowledge on silence and its antecedents and effects (i.e., "What we know"). To give the scattered research focus, I organized this review along the following seven principles: Silence can be detrimental, motives for silence are manifold, silence is affected by factors at different levels, silence is a process, silence has many faces, silence is contagious, and silence is not always a conscious choice. Third, I wanted to point at blind spots within our current knowledge (i.e., "What we do not know"). I use the seven principles to illustrate how blind spots might be detected knowing that my list is not exhaustive. I believe that these three ways of approaching silence in organizations—an integrative framework, a review of existing knowledge, and the identification of unanswered questions—are useful for researchers and practitioners in their attempts to advance knowledge on silence in their respective areas.

Keywords   silence, voice, organization, multi-level, review

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies,
but the silence of our friends (Martin Luther King).

Introduction

At the conference from which this book arose, practitioners and researchers from a broad range of countries linked silence to topics such as malfeasance and corruption in office and administration, sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church, maltreatment and murder of patients in hospitals, sexualized violence in sports organizations, corporate compliance, police integrity, manipulations in the allocation of liver transplants, and unsafe, unethical or poor quality care. The talks and the respective chapters included in this book show that—with respect to antecedents, manifestations, and outcomes of silence—there are factors that are relevant in each of the addressed cases and settings, and that there are factors that are rather idiosyncratic. The talks furthermore mirrored the diverse (theoretical and practical) approaches to and scattered evidence on silence in organizations that have been applied in recent years (see Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009; Knoll, Wegge, Unterrainer, Silva, & Jønsson, 2016; Morrison, 2014).

While diversity in approaches is valuable at early stages of theoretical development, when a concept matures and aims at application, research is advanced by integrating and eventually aggregating knowledge (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). This, however, is a delicate endeavour. Taking a too narrow perspective may cause one to neglect processes and influences that appear outside the scope of issues that are directly associated with silence. Indeed, the cases reported in this book show that in practice, for example, a shortage in personnel, a competitive culture, and opportunities to easily swap employers contribute to silence in organizations. On a conceptual level, taking a too narrow focus may cause one to neglect that a number of family-like concepts have received research attention in diverse disciplines (e.g., voice, issue-selling, principled organizational dissent, withdrawing, facades of conformity) which may provide insights into the organizational phenomenon that we observe as silence. In this chapter, I approach this endeavour of an amenable integration in three ways.

First, I offer a model of silence in organizations that can function as a framework for exploring new and integrating existing knowledge on antecedents, manifestations, and consequences of silence, and that can also guide practitioner attempts to overcome silence ("What we should know"). I present this model at the beginning of the chapter so it can guide thinking about factors and processes involved in silence, maybe even invite the reader to position her or his individual experience and knowledge on the topic. Second, I use the model as the scene on which I present my subjective review of existing knowledge on the topic (i.e., "What we know"). I condense this knowledge into seven principles to make it more tangible

(see Table 1). Third, I will point at blind spots within these seven principles (i.e., "What we do not know"). I believe that these three ways of approaching this important area of research and practice—an integrative framework, a review of existing knowledge, and the identification of unanswered questions—are useful for us to proceed in our respective areas.

Silence in Organizations—An Integrative Framework

Silence denotes "the withholding of any form of genuine expression about the individual's behavioral, cognitive, and/or affective evaluations of his or her organizational circumstances to persons who are perceived to be capable of effecting change or redress" (Pinder & Harlos, 2001, p. 334). Thus, while it exists in the absence of speech (Scott, 2018), silence is "anything but" (Tannen, 1985) nothing happening. While silence in organizations does not include someone remaining silent due to a lack of knowledge or ideas, it includes those (vocally) agreeing while (in fact, silently) disagreeing and those who refuse to ask (although they have questions) or do not express their concerns and doubts.

When speaking about silence in organizations, it deems helpful to consider that organizations are a multi-level context in which several layers are nested within each other (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). As a consequence, silence in organizations is an aggregated phenomenon. On the one hand, it comprises a combination of decisions, motives, and interests of the individual member of this organization; on the other hand, silence emerges from a combination of contextual factors that—as an integrated whole—lead organization members to withhold their views. Of course, this duality of individual and contextual factors leading to silence is artificial and should be treated as a heuristic. In reality, organizational members and organizational context (at least as it is perceived by its members) are interwoven in a dynamic interplay. Figure 1 (which is an adaption of Knoll et al., 2016, which, in turn, was inspired by Dragoni, 2005, and Morrison & Milliken, 2000) is my attempt to illustrate this multi-level approach in an abstract form.

One consequence of this multi-level approach is that silence may occur at different levels, an idea that derives from the two articles that introduced silence to organizational research. Specifically, Morrison and Milliken (2000) coined the term *organizational silence* in their attempt to "explain why the dominant response within many organizations is for employees (en masse) to remain silent" (p. 707). Pinder and Harlos (2001), in turn, focused on the employee level and identified two types of *employee silence*—acquiescent and quiescent silence—which capture discrete emotional and cognitive states of an individual that withholds his/her view. As I will discuss later in this chapter, one is a state of tension and the other a state of despair. Notably, while employee silence focuses on the individual level, its causes are not supposed to be rooted in the individual alone, but may lay in higher-level factors
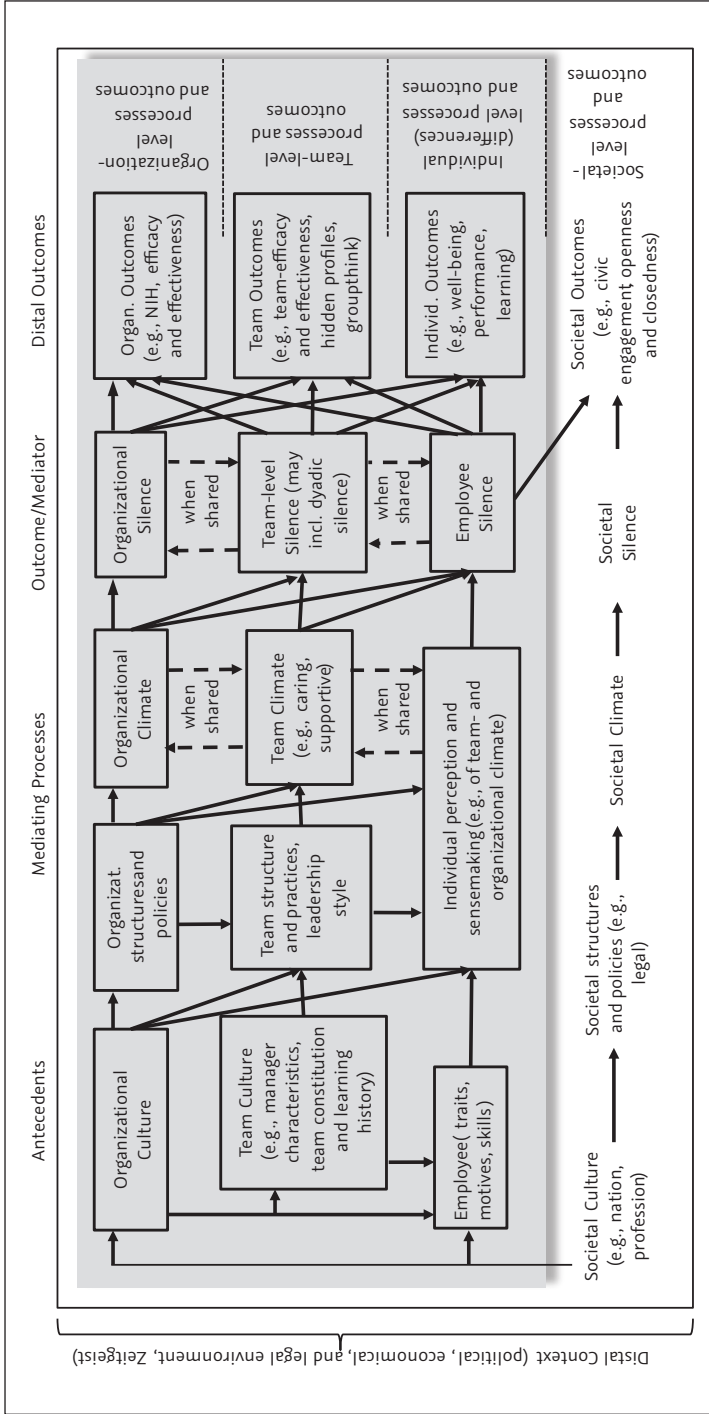
Figure 1 An integrative framework of silence in organizations (modified from Knoll et al., 2016, p. 177). The most important same- and cross-level effects are included, but reverse paths are omitted due to clarity concerns. The shading is supposed to illustrate a figure-ground-distinction.

that are situated at the team-, organizational or cultural level. To give an example that can be situated in Figure 1, imagine working in an organization with a weak culture that does not provide values and thus tolerates your supervisor treating colleagues, customers, patients and the like unfairly and unethically, and who is not responsive to your ideas and concerns. In such an environment, you are likely to perceive the organizational climate as non-supportive and your supervisor as hostile—two perceptions that are likely to result in silence.

While the concepts of organizational and employee silence have received considerable research attention, silence could emerge in-between the two levels (e.g., at the team level or dyadic level between an employee and his or her supervisor) and/or above the organizational level. Silence as a phenomenon that may exist above the organizational level, for example, societal level silence, is addressed in sociological, historical, and anthropological studies. Examples include Sheriff's (2000) study on the refusal to address ethnic-based discrimination in Brazil, Fontes' (2007) work on Latino victims' refusal to speak about abuse to the police, and work on the so-called blue wall of silence in police (Trautmann, 2000) and white walls of silence in medical professions (Gibson & Singh, 2003). Note that when speaking about silence in organizations, societal level characteristics are likely to not directly affect silence but are mediated by more proximal levels such as organizational culture and leadership style (Hackman, 2003). Again, as mentioned above and visible in Figure 1, lower-level factors are not independent from higher-level factors as evident in the finding that different leadership styles are likely to flourish in different countries (House et al., 2004).

Figure 1 portrays silence at the different levels as hubs or hinges connecting antecedents and outcomes occurring at diverse levels. Given the example above, the employee who remained silent due to an unsupportive organizational climate and a hostile supervisor is likely to suffer from the situation, for example, by experiencing frustration and fear in specific situations, and ruminate on the situation after work (Knoll, Hall, & Weigelt, 2019). Besides these individual-level effects, the employee's withholding of ideas and concerns is likely to impede team-learning and decision-making (team-level effects; Janis, 1972) and (directly or indirectly via poor team-level learning; Edmondson, 1999) hamper organizational development and effectiveness (organization-level effects; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The most important same- and cross-level effects (both up- and downward) are included in Figure 1, but reverse effects are omitted due to clarity concerns. With respect to reverse effects (or feedback loops), it is likely that the frustration which employees experience after remaining silent further reduces their contribution to team learning which, again, hampers organizational effectiveness (see Perlow & Repenning, 2009). In the following, I will come back to this figure time and again to organize what we do and do not know about antecedents and outcomes of silence at the several levels. While this model may be helpful to build a comprehensive approach to silence in organizations (and beyond), one may select specific parts of it when analysing specific cases or aims at understanding/addressing silence in a specific context.

What we know and what we do not know about silence in organizations

In the following, I will introduce seven principles that I think are useful to organize existing knowledge on silence in organizations that has been developed in organization science, social, clinical, and developmental psychology, ethnography, and communication, historical, and political science. As can be seen in Table 1, for each principle, I also point out blind spots that need to be addressed.

What we know	What we do not know (exemplary questions)
Silence can be detrimental	What are the benefits of silence to individuals and organizations? This might help understand why silence is so often tolerated.
Motives for silence are manifold	Which motives are active/dominant at a given time or and in a given context? How are the motives triggered or suppressed?
Silence is affected by factors at different levels	What is the influence of peers? What about managerial silence? What about cultural (e.g., nation, profession) influences? How do factors at different levels interact? Are some factors (situated at which levels?) stronger than others?
Silence is a process	How do individuals, teams, and organizations gain or lose momentum with respect to voice/silence? Are there stages that are less/more open to intervention? How do organizations or institutions develop cultures and climates of silence?
Silence has many faces	What happens if members with diverging views or those who noticed wrong-doings leave teams and/or organizations? How do voice and silence show in social media?
Silence is contagious	Are some people more contagious/susceptible? How are self-reinforcing dynamics/spirals broken that strengthen the grip of silence in organizations?
Silence is not always a conscious choice	What are the influences of early and secondary socialization on implicit beliefs and mental models? How do primary and secondary socialization interact (e.g., does primary socialization pave or block the way for intervention in secondary socialization)? How can we address non-conscious information processing that makes silence endure?

Table 1 Seven principles of what we know about silence in organizations (and some remarks on what we do not know, yet)

Silence is detrimental, isn't it?

A central reason for introducing the concept of organizational silence was the observation of university professors Elizabeth Morrison and Francis Milliken (2000) that in their respective organizations, critical issues were not expressed. They did not only experience personal unease in their situation, but they feared that the inability to express ideas, concern and the like will fossilize their organizations. About the same time, Craig Pinder and Karen Harlos (2001) identified the concept of employee silence as a central issue when they tried to understand harassment and abuse in the Canadian military. These two articles already provide a great deal of

information on the detrimental effects of silence in organizations, particularly with respect to the levels we see in Figure 1.

With respect to the individual employee, Knoll and colleagues (2019) showed in a longitudinal study that remaining silent at work due to fear of negative consequences and resignation resulted in burnout symptoms deindividuation and emotional exhaustion. While the processes that are responsible for the negative relationships between employee silence and health and well-being have not yet been shown empirically, suggestions have been made by clinical and developmental psychologists for a long time (Harter, 1997; John & Gross, 2004; Winnicot, 1960). In these works, it is proposed that self-regulation demands and rumination are directly detrimental, and that a number of negative indirect effects occur due to silence's detrimental effects on relationships and enduring inefficacies of work processes, and toxic climates (Perlow & Repenning, 2009). From the organizational behavior and developmental psychology literature, one can also derive that silence hampers individual learning and development (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Team-level effects of silence have not been central in organization research, yet. Social psychological research, in turn, using concepts such as groupthink and hidden profiles (Janis, 1972; Strasser & Titus, 1985), revealed that silence can hamper information sharing and the decision-making process, leads to poor use of unique information and dissent, and eventually poorer decisions. Silence furthermore prevents collective elaborations on, for instance, work-life-balance arrangements that would benefit every group member, but remain hidden because they are not openly communicated (Perlow, 2012). In a similar vein, diversity is not used in teams because the diverse viewpoints are not expressed (Syed, 2015). Finally, examining surgery teams, Edmondson (1999) showed that collective learning and eventually team performance relies heavily on open communication.

The effects on organizations are similar to those on teams with respect to information sharing and detection of errors leading Morrison and Milliken (2000) to the statement that organizational silence hampers sustainable organizational development. With respect to organizations, the negative effects of silence may be even more dangerous. On the one hand, the negative effects can affect more people as the negative effects are not specific to team members but may spread across the organization. Further, organizational silence can have stronger effects than individual or team silence on people outside the organization. For example, research on work design—which is usually defined top-down and established at the organizational level—proposes that if employees feel not able to participate in decision making, they will not only suffer in silence and not contribute to team-learning, but will also less likely engage in civic duties after work (Weber, Unterrainer, & Schmid, 2009).

In sum, media reports and rigorous research using a broad range of methods revealed that silence is negatively related to individual and collective well-being and detrimental to organizational development, it inhibits the detection of errors, con-

tributes to the endurance of negative behaviors such as bullying and harassment, eventually resulting in toxic workplaces and suffering way beyond organizational boundaries. While these detrimental effects have been the reason for introducing silence as a discrete concept into organizational research, and also for organizing the conference that this book emerged from, arguing as if silence were always detrimental would not do justice to the complex and ambiguous phenomenon (Scott, 2018; Tannen, 1985; Valle, 2019). That is why we need to be open to the potential positive effects that silence may have and understand that benefits and harm may manifest at different points in time and/or at the same time at different levels of analysis. I want to briefly elaborate on this issue but see this as an underdeveloped facet of silence I organizations.

The nature of conversation and communication as an interaction includes that it cannot succeed without silence, and omitting certain (taken-for-granted) information is an essential element of professional and efficient decision making. Silence can also be a form of self-determination and justified resistance (Collinson, 1994; Covarrubias, 2015; Kurzon, 1995). Think of situations in which individuals may want to defend against attempts to take their knowledge away assuming that sharing their implicit knowledge may eventually make them obsolete. Or think of situations in which individuals want to conceal an aspect of themselves, for example, their sexual orientation or a chronic disease because they think revealing it could make achieving their goals difficult if not impossible. Asking for a right to remain silent may be premature though because the benefit at one level (i.e., the individual who conceals her sexual orientation and achieved her individual goals) could leave detrimental conditions intact to the harm of others (i.e., negative group-level effects of invisible minorities). Moreover, at times, individuals are unable to overcome the state of silence despite their suffering and knowing that prolonged silence will see their relationships, teams, and organizations perish.

More research is needed on how to cut (or untie) the Gordian knot that links positive or at least (avoiding negative) effects at the individual level with detrimental effects at the collective level. We need to consider the individual struggles and rights but acknowledge that the silence of one or few often causes harm to others—as emphasized in the entry quote.

Motives for silence are manifold

Exploratory studies were the starting point for systematically identifying employees' reasons for remaining silent at work. Drawing on interviews, Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin (2003) identified fears and beliefs as central reasons for remaining silent. They found support for Morrison and Milliken's (2000) initial suggestion that one main reason for remaining silent is fear of negative consequences for oneself including fear of being labeled or viewed negatively by others, fear of

damaging relationships, and fear of retaliation and punishment by superiors. Also in line with Morrison and Milliken (2000; and Pinder & Harlos, 2001), feelings of futility emerged as a second central reason for remaining silent at work. Notably, about a fifth of respondents in Milliken et al.'s interviews mentioned that they feared negative consequences for others. Individual characteristics such as a lack of experience and a lack of tenure were also mentioned. In a more recent attempt to identify motives for remaining silent, Brinsfield (2013) found support for Milliken et al.'s findings, with fear of negative consequences for oneself and one's relationships and resignation seemingly most important. However, Brinsfield also found evidence for disengaged silence (i.e., not wanting to be involved) and diffident silence (i.e., feeling insecure and uncertain, avoiding potentially embarrassing oneself).

Based on these exploratory studies, conceptual articles suggested typologies of silence motives, and subsequent research supported their validity. Knoll and van Dick (2013), for example, drew upon van Dyne, Ang, and Botero's (2003) tripartite model of silence that is based on fear, resignation and prosocial motives (i.e., employees withhold their views in order to not embarrass a colleague or supervisor or protect colleagues or supervisors from harm), and added opportunistic silence. The letter type of silence, that was informed by research on knowledge hiding and hoarding (Connelly, Cerne, Dysvik, & Skerlavaj, 2019), addresses that employees withhold their views to protect a knowledge advantage or try to avoid an additional workload. Finally, based on elaboration, Bies (2009) proposed to consider further motives for remaining silent at work including silence for domination, revenge, blame management, focused reflection, and disguise.

While identifying new motives will remain a research task, applied research and practitioner interest could use existing frameworks to identify which motive or combination of motives is most prevalent, for example, in specific countries, occupations, or in a specific organization of interest. The chapters of this book provide excellent opportunities to exercise this step as they provide in-depth descriptions of a diverse range of organizations (e.g., hospitals, sports clubs, the church) and domains (e.g., medical, pedagogical, sports, law enforcement). Thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the situations and personal sensemaking processes would deepen our understanding of different types of silence, and provide insights into how and when specific motives are activated or suppressed, and how the motives interact. In-depth descriptions are available for quiescent and acquiescent silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001), but have not been realized for other motives, yet. In this journey, qualitative research could be complemented by quantitative studies such as Knoll and colleagues' (2019) longitudinal study on the bidirectional relationship of silence with health and by experimental research. For example, the Kirran, O'Shea, Buckley, Grazi, & Prout (2017) experimental study on distinct relationships between silence motives and emotions provided important insights into the ambiguous nature of prosocial silence.

Silence is affected by factors at different levels

Knowledge on the motives and reasons employees have for withholding their views is important because these are the proximal triggers for silence. The many other factors that have been related to the occurrence of silence, for example non-responsive supervisors or factual constraints, are more distal factors that operate indirectly through the individual motives. Besides offering an opportunity to organize potential outcomes of silence in organizations, Figure 1 also allows for organizing the factors that are likely to cause or at least facilitate silence indirectly. An organizing scheme is important to keep track of the many studies and potential reasons that research and media reports revealed (for more detailed reviews on voice and silence, see Chamberlin, Newton, & LePine, 2017; Knoll et al., 2016; Morrison, 2014), and to guide focused intervention attempts.

When it comes to antecedents of silence, the classical distinction between person and situation (Mischel, 1977) seems useful. With respect to factors within the person, self-esteem, experience, and personal initiative are often mentioned (e.g., Morrison, 2014). While these factors are situated within the individual, we should not forget that individual employees are the result of a learning history. This learning includes primary socialization at home and in school and secondary socialization when individuals enter organizations and take roles. The relative influence of outside and inside organization socialization is not well understood, with Detert and Edmondson (2011) emphasizing primary and Gioia (1992) emphasizing secondary socialization as important antecedents of silence. Knoll, Neves, Schyns, and Meyer (2021) suggested a model of how primary and secondary socialization may both affect silence but rigorous empirical support is lacking, yet.

Socialization within organizations is driven by factors of an organization's culture (Schein, 2017). These include concrete context factors such as policies and practices which Schein labels cultural artefacts, but also the values that are dominant within an organization and which guide behavior. Whether organizational policies and practices constitute voice opportunities or barriers is often the starting point when it comes to overcoming silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). This is evident, for example, in research on the so-called "deaf ear syndrome" (e.g., Harlos, 2001). Organizational voice opportunities as antecedents of silence in organizations are also emphasized by researchers from the human resource management and employee relations scholars (see, for example, Wilkinson, Donaghey, Dundon, & Freeman, 2015) with the latter putting stronger emphasis on the role of meta-organizational institutions such as unions as voice opportunities.

The context factor that received most research attention are direct supervisors or managers. Managers directly influence silence by either encouraging and being responsive to voice, or by being hostile and defensive when employees approach them with ideas or concerns. The issue-selling literature provides elaborate studies on how employees make sense of superiors' mood and interests before challenging the status quo (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993). A second way through which team

managers affect employee silence is indirect, for example, by shaping a team's culture (e.g., structures and values) and climate in a way that it is either facilitating or hampering employee voice. Edmondson's (1999) study on surgery teams is a good example for how a team leader's openness and encouragement create a climate in which it is safe to take risks and speak up. Finally, upper echolons (Hambrick, 2007) develop organizational policies, but lower-level managers interpret and transform policies and thus mediate and moderate higher-level influences (Dragoni, 2005; Lord & Dinh, 2014).

While managers are often viewed as a barrier for speaking up due to their formalized power to retaliate, coworkers are a potential source of pressure that does not rely on formal authority (Barker, 1993; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Liu, Nauta, Yang, & Spector, 2018). Therefore, more comprehensive conceptualizations and measures could consider that coworkers might not always appreciate peers who question the status quo. Another area where knowledge is limited is whether silence tendencies vary systematically between national cultures (Knoll, Götz et al., 2021; Morrison, 2014) and industries or whether cultural features in some industries make voice or silence more likely. In their seminal article on organizational silence, Morrison and Milliken (2000) proposed that silence is more likely in mature and stable industries but should be less prevalent in high-velocity environments because those need to adapt quickly and thus consider alternatives and innovation. Furthermore, there are some industries where silence is rather often mentioned as a major issue, for example, health care and law enforcement (as visible in metaphors such as white and blue walls of silence; Gibson & Singh, 2003; NHS, 2017; Trautman, 2000; see also Conway & Westmarland; Pohlmann; Starystach & Höly; Zeier in this volume).

Silence is a process

The decision regarding whether to express or withhold one's views is made in a particular situation. However, it would be very narrow to focus on the situation alone. One reason for this cautionary note is that every individual and group at any time is a result of a unique learning history (e.g., Schein, 2017). Another reason is that individuals and groups are able and willing to anticipate future events and the consequences their behavior is likely to have (although the tendency to do so differs; Zacher & Frese, 2009). Thus, the decision regarding voice or silence is better conceptualized as a point in an unfolding process. In an elaborate case study, Perlow and Repenning (2009) provide an excellent example for such an unfolding process. Based on participatory research, the authors follow a start-up firm from on-set to closure, watching it deteriorate due to their founding members' inability to come to terms with new managers they brought in to help them manage their growth. Their tendency to withhold their views—ironically intended to protect relationships that

deemed vital for the firm's survival—led to disaster. Figure 2 illustrates how such a process could look in a rather abstract form. In the following, I will describe the stages of the process briefly, emphasizing that at every stage, personal and situational factors may divert employees from engaging in voice eventually leading towards silence.

As can be seen in Figure 2, during the process leading to voice or silence, an employee engages in a number of cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral operations such as perceiving, focusing attention, evaluating, memorizing, acting,
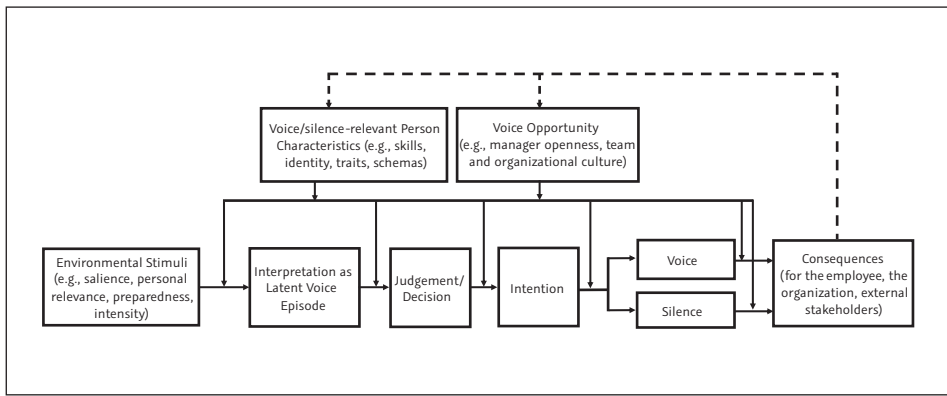

Figure 2   A process view on voice/silence (modified from Morrison, 2011; Rest, 1986). Dotted lines signify anticipation and feedback loops.

speaking or remaining silent, and evaluating the costs/benefits of having engaged in either voice or silence. The process starts with a stimulus that is interpreted in a way that voice is an option (i.e., a latent voice episode is experienced; Detert & Edmondson, 2011). This could include the perception that patient mortality is higher if a particular nurse is on the shift or that a meeting or strategy is not effective anymore (see Pohlmann in this volume). Drawing on behavioral ethics research (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011; Moore & Gino, 2015; Trevino, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006), I think failure to interpret a situation as a latent voice episode (i.e., lacking *awareness*) is a potential detour that may lead to silence and thus needs to be considered in models on understanding voice and silence. Each stimulus has specific qualities (e.g., intensity, distinctiveness in relation to its context) and it competes with other stimuli for an individual's attention. Notably, the stimulus does not need to be temporarily close to the interpretation of a latent voice episode. For example, as visible in the #metoo movement (Prasad, 2018), being confronted with a case of sexual harassment in the media may make oneself aware that one has been subject to harassment oneself or has observed a similar behavior shown by the perpetrator some years ago. Thus, current media attention may create a latent voice episode. As can

be seen in Figure 2, personal and context conditions influence whether a stimulus is interpreted as a latent voice episode.

If the individual comes to the conclusion that voice is an option in a particular situation, he or she needs to decide whether voice or silence are appropriate responses (i.e., *judgment stage*). Drawing on Morrison's (2011) model, whether voice or silence are conducted is influenced by person and context factors and their interaction. Recent meta-analyses by Chamberlin et al. (2017) and Sherf, Parke, and Isaakyan (2020) are useful starting points to identify person and context factors that facilitate or inhibit voice and silence—some of them were mentioned earlier in this chapter. As has been shown in behavioral ethics research and also in the bystander literature (Bazerman & Tenbrunsel, 2011; Harlos & Knoll, 2018; Moore & Gino, 2015), a decision to act does not necessarily manifest in the respective behavior. One barrier is that individuals are not motivated to implement their decision. Thus, we need to consider that a decision is followed by an *intention* to act accordingly (Rest, 1986). However, even if this intention to speak up is given, there are further barriers that may result in silence. Employees may lack the confidence or skills to speak up and context factors may interfere and let voice go flat (e.g., Brinsfield, 2013; Harlos, 2001).

If the individual finally engages in voice or silence, positive and negative consequences can follow. Recent reviews and meta-analyses provide insights into the consequences of voice and silence (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Morrison, 2014; Sherf et al., 2020), however, this might not be what employees expect based on their lay theories (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Notably, the consequences of voice/silence behaviors will influence employees' perceptions of context factors such as voice opportunities, but also voice-relevant person characteristics such as skills (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Grant, 2013). In the case that voice did not make a difference and fell on deaf ears, employees will estimate their context differently (i.e., less responsive). When employees engaged in voice, even if it was not successful, they learned something and thus increased their competencies in issue-selling (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). However, they may also become frustrated and drift into learned helplessness (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Depending on the response they received from their supervisor and colleagues, they will re-evaluate whether voice is useful or futile. Maybe they will see their expectations supported, maybe they are in for a surprise.

The preceding description focuses on the individual passing through an unfolding process leading to voice or silence and their respective consequences. The focus on the individual is due to the fact that a majority of research on voice and silence as a behavior is rooted in psychology or organizational behavior research. Much of this process can be derived from existing knowledge on processes leading to helping and ethical behavior (or their absence). Less is known, in contrast, about organizational dynamics leading to voice, silence, and their respective consequences. Addressing the organizational level was the focus of Morrison and Milliken's (2000) pioneering article. Subsequent research, however, did focus on the team and individual level. It is thus a research gap to test and further develop Morrison and

Milliken's proposed sequence. The authors suggested that organizational and environmental characteristics (e.g., a low-cost strategy, industry maturity, and reliance on contingent workers) shape (mediated through managers' implicit beliefs) organizational structures and policies (e.g., centralized decision making, lack of upward feedback mechanisms). Structures and policies, in turn, facilitate a climate of silence in which withholding one's view becomes the norm. Morrison and Milliken also elaborate on collective sensemaking processes and their underlying interactions and communication that help to create and reinforce this climate of silence.

Again, examining organizational processes leading to climates and cultures of silence may start with thick descriptions of the history and development of organizations and institutions which seem particularly prone to featuring such climates and cultures (e.g., Enron, Volkswagen, French Telecom; Allard-Poesi & Hollet-Haudebert, 2017; Ewing & Bowley, 2015; Maxfield, 2016; Perlow & Williams, 2003). The chapters by Convey & Westmarland; Dölling; Hartmann-Tews; Kückelhaus et al.; Mehra; Zeier in this volume provide further opportunities to identify paths into cultures and climates of silence, and the chapters by Pohlmann; Starystach & Höly provide hints for extending the theoretical framework to draw upon. Based on (organizational) historical analyses, it may become possible to create experiments or observe quasi-experimental developments to identify how and when individuals, teams, and organizations gain or lose momentum with respect to voice or silence. This knowledge will inform practitioners about whether there are stages that are less/more open to intervention.

Silence has many faces

When employees face situations like the ones that are subject to the chapters in this book, they may either address these issues or remain silent. These options, however, include more than speaking up or keeping quiet. Voice and silence should not be reduced to a vocal act and the absence of it. As Hirschman (1970) proposed, voice denotes any attempt to challenge the status quo. Thus, voice can be expressed via formal (e.g., talking to an ombudsperson or employee representative) and informal channels (e.g., chats with supervisors or mobilizing peers), it may be done within (e.g., grievance system) or outside the organization (e.g., whistleblowing), individually and/or collectively (e.g., via unions or social movements like #metoo), and it might be vocal (e.g., speaking up in a meeting) or non-verbal (e.g., refusing to comply or making a stand, for example, by not leaving one's seat in a bus). If there are many ways to initiate change, are there also many ways to avoid challenging the status quo?

Indeed, Hirschman (1970) observed that besides trying to initiate change (i.e., voice), individuals (e.g., employees, customers, citizens) get out of the situation, which could mean leaving a relationship, organization, or country (i.e., exit). More-

over, individuals could further contribute in their role as, for instance, a partner, employee, citizen, even if they disagree or think something should change (i.e., loyalty). Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn, (1982) and Farrell (1983) further extended Hirschman's exit-voice-loyalty model by including cases in which individuals remain members, customers, or citizens, but reduce the efforts they invest into their relationship, organization, or country (i.e., neglect). Figure 3 shows these four (ideal) types of responses to latent voice episodes. It also shows that, with the exception of voice, all responses constitute faces of silence.
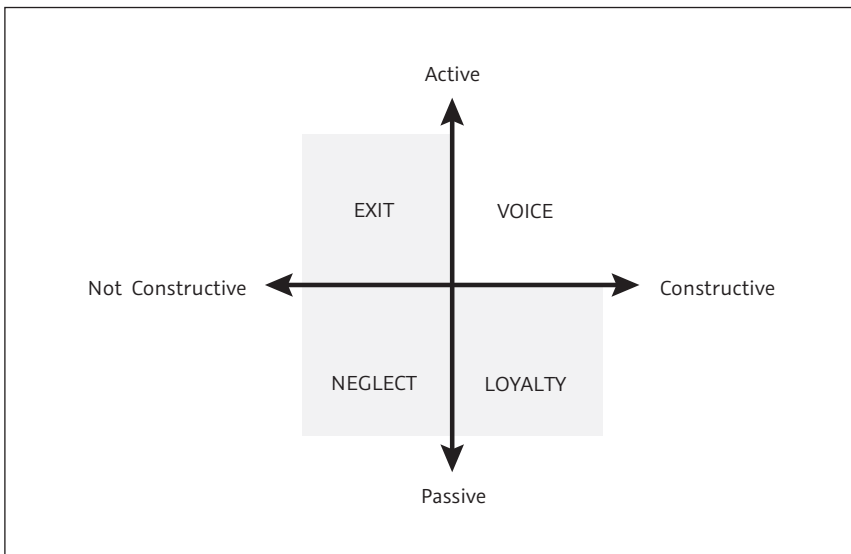

Figure 3 A functional approach to voice and silence based on the exit, voice, loyalty and neglect framework by Rusbult et al. (1988, p. 601). Shaded areas signify silence.

So far, voice and silence research focused on whether employees spoke up or remained silent. At times, researchers even infer the presence of one from the absence of the other (for a discussion of this fallacy, see Knoll & Redman, 2016; Sherf et al., 2020). A broader perspective is needed to acknowledge that in reality, employees may search and find a range of ways to both express or withhold their views. Debra Meyerson's (2003) studies on tempered radicals are rare examples that show the spectrum of activities employees engage in to make change happen without vocally speaking up. So far, no similar approach has provided an integrative view on activities employees engage in to withhold their views. However, there is research focusing on a range of withholding behaviors that may contribute to filling this research gap, including creating facades of conformity, knowledge hiding, micro-politics, and influence tactics (e.g., Connelly et al., 2019; Hewlin, 2003).

A functional perspective (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999) may provide the theoretical framework for integrating the diverse responses that might result in silence. Functional approaches focus on the similarity of effects while allowing for a diversity of causes and antecedents. Using this approach, everything that conceals an opinion, question, concern or the like, and that does not challenge the status quo results in silence. One example are employees who are confronted with a critical situation but keep mum, for example, remain silent in a meeting or are a passive observer when bullying happens. Another example is when an employee who openly agrees while secretly disagreeing (protective voice; van Dyne et al., 2003; see also Bies, 2009). In such a situation, there is no vocal silence but functionally, the status quo is not challenged. Such a situation is problematic as observers might think the respective employee is agreeing and perpetrators feel encouraged (Harlos & Knoll, 2018). The critical issue is also not addressed and thus endures in cases in which organization members who noticed unethical issues leave. This was the case when members left the Canadian Forces after observing mistreatment (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Moreover, it does not need to be the observer or the victim who leave the situation. Post-hoc analyses of wrongdoings revealed that at times, moving the person who is supposed to be the reason for the critical issue allows wrongdoings to endure although in another setting, organization, or branch. For example, priests who engaged in abuse were moved to other districts (Denef, 2014) and the so-called "Todesengel", a nurse who killed 17 people (see Pohlmann in this volume), was free to start employment in another hospital after irregularities raised eyebrows in prior employments. For the organization—or at least the branch as was the case for the Catholic Church—the status quo changed, but the issue has not been addressed and can—as is visible in the case of the Todesengel (see Pohlmann in this volume)—cause further harm in other organizations.

Silence is contagious (as may be voice)

When entering a latent voice episode (see Figure 2), employees consider how managers and colleagues, maybe even family members or the public are likely to respond if they speak up or remain silent (Dutton et al., 2001). They consider the response of those whose behavior or idea is challenged (e.g., the manager who established the procedures whose efficacy is questioned, or the colleague who is accused of bullying). They consider those who are supposed to act upon voice, and they consider bystanders, observers, and others who are indirectly affected by voice or silence (e.g., other managers in the company, further victims of harassment, the general public that may become involved as an ally or opponent when it comes to implementing the change that is initiated by voice). As those who enter a latent voice episode consider these other 'players', challenging the status quo is a *social act*.

One implication of social acts is that individuals are influenced by others' behavior, and that their own behavior affects others' behavior and experience (Bandura, 1991). Research on social influence and persuasion offers insights in the ways majorities and minorities can change opinions and behavior (e.g, Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; De Dreu, De Vries, Franssen, & Altink, 2000). Majorities can achieve compliance when recipients of messages are not well-informed and use the majority opinion as orientation. Majorities can achieve conformity if recipients know better or hold a different opinion, but fear negative consequences or feel unease when diverging from the majority. Using the term spiral of silence, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) described not just a simple act of conformity or compliance, but proposed a process of how majorities influence the public opinion in a way that minorities are marginalized. According to Noelle-Neumann, people first scan their environment to determine the dominant opinion. If they hold the dominant opinion, they express it more readily. If they hold a minority opinion, in turn, they are more willing to withhold their views. As a consequence, the dominant opinion becomes even more dominant as representatives of this opinion are vocal and present in public. The minority opinion, in turn, becomes even more marginalized over time as it disappears from the public sphere.

Both social psychological research on majority and minority influence as well as research on the spiral of silence can inform our understanding of silence in organizations. They suggest that silence, but also voice, can become contagious in a self-enforcing process. When the majority prefers to remain silent, it is even more difficult for individuals to break the silence. This is one reason for why negative acts such as discrimination endure in institutions. However, this research can also explain why and how opinions shift, and practices that have been tolerated for a long time are overthrown—as is visible in the removal of confederate statues and racist names. Minority influence suggests that if one person disagrees (ideally persistently and without selfish motives, De Dreu et al., 2000), the majority or neutrals are trying to understand why this individual diverges potentially raising questions to what was formerly taken for granted. The divergence of one (trustworthy person) can also encourage others who hold diverging viewpoints to come out and express their opinions and concerns, potentially showing that there are many with diverging viewpoints or negative experiences. The #metoo movement and several other movements that address domestic violence, abuse in institutions, corruption, and inappropriate practices are examples that can be studied during their life course for how not only silence but also voice can be contagious (Deutsches Jugendinstitut, 2015; Prasad, 2018).

I believe we need more research revealing the dynamics through which silence becomes the norm and marginalizes diverging viewpoints and options. While field experiments are the gold standard (Eden, 2017), they are seldom available. However, silence and voice mechanisms can be observed in the process at times, for example, when following the #metoo movement and investigations into abuse in the US gymnastics team. A rigorous analysis of case studies—ideally informed by theo-

retical and conceptual knowledge on, for example, social influence, social movement research, and path dependencies—is also useful to examine contagion processes, path dependencies and the likes. Examples are offered in this book (e.g., Dölling; Hartmann-Tews). In the context of business organizations, Perlow and Repenning's (2009) case study is a valuable source for understanding dynamics of silence as is Bowen and Blackmon's (2003) work on vertical spirals of silence (which complement Noelle-Neumann's, 1974, horizontal spirals). Aggregative theory development could identify similarities and differences in the dynamics responsible for silence. It is likely that there is not merely one path to silence but many—which again can be understood when taking a functional approach (see above). Equally valuable are case studies which show how dynamics that marginalized minorities, and diverging viewpoints were broken and countered. One example is Perlow's (2012) case study on how collective attempts to improve work-private life balance questioned taken-for-granted beliefs about availability of consultants. Revealing how movements such as the #metoo movement gained momentum should provide further insights into the dynamics that often involve several levels (e.g., individual motives, organizational structures, societal attention or neglect) and that do not follow "traditional views of linear causality but emergent processes, non-linear dynamics, lock-ins, tipping points, path dependencies, self-reinforcing processes, contagion, and unintended outcomes of intentional behavior" (Knoll et al., 2016, p. 175).

Silence is not always a conscious choice

When introducing the concept of silence in organizations earlier in this chapter, I emphasized that it describes the active withholding of information, questions, or concerns but does not include the mere absence of voice, for example, due to a lack of ideas. Research on voice and silence almost entirely draws on the assumption that the decision to remain silent is a conscious choice (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Morrison, 2014). Conscious choice emerges from deliberate processing of information, for example, managerial openness or the voice opportunities provided by the organization. Thus, employees intentionally apply what they know about the potential impact speaking up may have and the degree of psychological safety within their team or organization. However, a large deal of human behavior is based on automatic information processing (e.g., Bargh & Ferguson, 2000). As described in dual-process models of human information processing and behavior (Baumeister & Bargh, 2014; Deutsch & Strack, 2006), individuals often do not deliberately elaborate on all the available information, but draw upon well-learned associations of external stimuli with their existing knowledge structures. As a consequence, well-learned knowledge structures such as schemas, scripts, and implicit theories replace or bypass deliberate decision making and guide employees' behav-

ioral responses to situational cues. Notably, employees may lack awareness of the impact these mental structures have in their decision (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon & Topakas, 2013). As is the case for research on organizational behavior in general (see Pratt & Crosina, 2016), research on voice and silence in organizations did neglect this second process for long. This is problematic, at least because attempts to overcome silence mostly address deliberate processing of information and may not reach causes of silence that are non-conscious.

This picture has changed rather recently. In a seminal conceptual article, Kish-Gephardt, Detert, Trevino, and Edmondson (2009) emphasize that employees who once remained silent due to fear of negative consequences develop habits to not only remain silent when confronted with a critical situation but also avoid such situations in the first place. Thus, even if the reasons that once justified remaining silent (e.g., a hostile supervisor) are not present anymore, employees remain silent due to their habit of doing so. Moreover, Kish-Gephardt et al. argued that there is an evolutionary priming that makes us refrain from questioning those who hold a higher status within our group.

Detert and Edmondson (2011) suggested, based on interview studies, that during socialization, individuals develop certain beliefs that make silence a likely response when confronted with authority figures. Specifically, the authors suggest that individuals learn during early socialization from being around their parents, teachers, and sports coaches that questioning authority figures is neither valued nor appropriate. As a consequence, individuals develop so-called implicit voice theories—taken-for-granted beliefs about when and why speaking up at work is risky and/or inappropriate. Detert and Edmondson developed a measure to assess five implicit voice theories (e.g., the theory that challenging the status quo will offend those who initially installed it, and the theory that the one who points at a problem needs to be able to provide a better solution) and showed that implicit voice theories explained variance in silence above and beyond traditional antecedents' managerial openness and organizational voice opportunities.

Knoll and colleagues (2020) replicated this finding and additionally found that implicit voice theories can be shared among team members and within organizations. This is an interesting extension in two ways. First, the finding that implicit voice theories are shared opens a way to examine "the basic layer (i.e., its underlying taken-for-granted assumptions; Schein, 1990) of cultures of silence that are proposed to immunize communities and groups against rational arguments, and that cause their members to withhold information and views even in the absence of coercion (Sheriff, 2000)" (Knoll et al., 2020, p. 24). Understanding cultures of silence is important given what we know about silence among members of not just organizational but also professional, religious, ethnic, and even national cultures (see Dölling; Jüttner; Mehra; Pohlmann; Starystach & Höly; Zeier in this volume). The second interesting extension that Knoll and colleagues (2020) suggested is based on their finding that team-level shared implicit voice theories were related to team-

manager openness. Knoll et al. interpreted this finding in a way that employees' implicit voice theories are not entirely determined by early socialization (as Detert & Edmondson, 2011, suggested), but can be affected by the experience they had in their current organization. Thus, being subject to a hostile manager might result in the development of implicit knowledge structures such as schemas and scripts which manifest silence as an automatic, taken-for-granted, response.

The influence of non-conscious factors on silence in organizations is unchartered territory to a large extent but offers a way to complement traditional approaches that focused on deliberate decision making. Little is known, yet, about the origins of implicit voice theories and their malleability. We need to know under which circumstances knowledge structures that were formed prior to the entry in their current organization endure or change. We also need to know more about the processes and circumstances under which collectively-held implicit theories emerge and can be changed.

Conclusion

The chapter aimed to provide some guidance regarding current knowledge ("What we know") and knowledge gaps ("What we do not know") with respect to silence in organizations (see Table 1 for a summary). My framework (see Figure 1) is intended to help the reader organize his or her knowledge and maybe integrate the approaches, observations, and ideas that are subject to the other chapters of this book. I also hope to provide some impetus for future research and interventions. In my view, it is important to understand that silence is a multi-facetted concept and occurs in a broad range of contexts (e.g., professions, organizations, cultures). It is furthermore important to understand silence as a process (and not merely as a result) that affects and involves many levels (i.e., intra-individual, inter-individual, team-, organizational, societal level). To gather silence in its respective contexts (which is—in my view—a precondition for overcoming detrimental silence) requires research that resembles this complexity. These endeavours could combine etic and emic approaches (Morris et al., 1999)—as known in cultural research. Etic approaches provide theories and tools (e.g. designs, measures) that are developed for broad usage, and that may make findings from diverse fields, organizations, and settings comparable with the eventual aim of accumulative theory-building and evidence-based interventions (Rousseau, 2020). Emic approaches, in turn, examine "thoughts and actions primarily in terms of the actors' self-understanding— terms that are often culturally and historically bound" (Morris et al., 1999, p. 782). These studies provide in-depth insights into peculiarities of specific settings which might tailor interventions but also make cumulative research aware of blind spots and required adjustments. While I believe both approaches can help us to extend our knowledge and opportunities to address silence in organizations, we also need

integrative attempts and forums such as the conference "The Silence of Organiza-
tions—How Organizations Cover up Wrongdoings" in Heidelberg from which this
book arose.

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