Kristina Höly, Sebastian Starystach, and Ragna Heyne

Introduction

The present anthology is the result of the international conference "The Silence of Organizations—How Organizations Cover up Wrongdoings", which was held in Heidelberg in October 2019. The conference took place in and was funded by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, whose aim was to give young scientists the opportunity to independently organize international, interdisciplinary scientific conferences. This generous support provided us with the opportunity to design an event that enabled a scientific dialog on forms of silence in organizations across disciplinary and national borders.

Our idea for the conference originated from the observation that although organizations and especially business corporations are increasingly regulated and prosecuted for their (alleged) wrongdoings, there is a never-ending supply of new scandals of all colors: be it child abuse in the Catholic Church, the Diesel scandals, manipulation of transplantation lists, killing of patients or most recently the Wirecard scandal. In all these cases, the responsible organizations tried to cover up. Even well-founded accusations concerning illegal behavior were swept under the organizational carpet. This behavior seems counter-intuitive since—besides the enormous pain inflicted on the victims—organizations regularly also do harm to themselves, when the ongoings are uncovered and prosecuted. Consequences then can range from an extensive loss of societal trust to state sanctions threatening the organizations' existence. Therefore, the question arises whether tighter regulations and prosecution are effective to combat crime, corruption, and other forms of wrongdoing in organizations since they neither effectively prevent wrongdoing nor do they incentivize an honest dealing with its consequences.

There is a plethora of research done on this topic, which highlights that one central cause for organizational wrongdoing and its cover-up is rooted in organizational deep structures, especially informal norms and (sub)cultures. In this context, the concept of organizational silence, which focuses on these informal norms and culture, especially caught our attention. Silence in organizations is considered one of

the main moderators to explain why organizational wrongdoing can still flourish in our society despite tightening regulations, increased efforts of compliance and relentless prosecution. As a culture or informal set of rules, it prevents employees from speaking up or even incentivizes them to actively cover up wrongdoings by organizations. However, we observed when researching silence in organizations that although much work has been done, an interdisciplinary perspective and a corresponding integrative theoretical framework were missing.

This led us to invite scholars from various disciplines to deepen our understanding of silence in organizations and to lay the groundwork for an integrative approach. Here, we focused deliberately on the analysis of silence as a cultural or structural phenomenon and not as the result of individual deviant actors. The following questions guided our efforts:

- Which factors of organizational culture increase the willingness to tolerate, to stay silent about or to cover up misconduct within organizations?
- Which forms of silence exist? Is there evidence that looking away and helping to cover up wrongdoings of others are connected, or are these different social phenomena?
- How and why do organizational cultures develop forms of silence, that is which function do they serve since they can potentially backfire?

Following these research questions, the contributions of international researchers from various academic disciplines as well as from organizational practice focused on the theoretical development of the concept of silence in organizations, empirical case studies, and the elaboration of implications for combating silence in day-to-day business. These analyses regarding the quality and the extent of silence in corporations, churches, political parties, sports associations, hospitals, and the police were presented and discussed in front of a broad audience. The event confirmed our assumption that there is no lack of instructive knowledge about silence, but that more theoretical and interdisciplinary integration is needed and that organizational dynamics of silence pose great challenges to actors from the most diverse areas of society and on a transnational scale.

Since we intend to integrate the given insights outside the disciplinary box, we therefore aimed to identify and theoretically classify explanatory factors of silence in organizations in order to create the basis for a systematic investigation of the phenomenon from the perspective of an integrated organizational science.

The contributions of this anthology show that silence in organizations is a central part of what one might call organizational self-regulation. It plays a central role in coping with the problem of collective action, but at the same time opens the door for deviant actors or groups to instrumentalize this functional structure for individual benefits or illegal organizational purposes.

The anthology begins with three contributions that provide a theoretical framework. First, the contribution by *Dr. Michael Knoll* from the Psychological Institute at

Chemnitz University of Technology summarizes central results of the current research on organizational silence. From the perspective of organizational psychology, manifestations, motives, and influencing factors of organizational silence are discussed; in addition, the contribution outlines necessary steps for theoretical integration. Central to the potential development of organizational silence are both "cultural artifacts" (such as policies) and values that are dominant within an organization. Since Knoll conceptualizes organizational silence as a multilevel phenomenon, he also stresses that silence can occur between different levels (e.g. pressure from a manager) as well as within one level of the organization (e.g. pressure from coworkers). Furthermore, it is important to note that organizational silence comes in different forms dependent on an individual's motivation for staying silent: "disengaged silence" can be very different from "diffident silence". On a collective level, organizational silence is best understood as a process since every person or group of people has an individual learning history that influences their behavior, and members of an organization often develop shared "implicit voice theories" about when breaking silence is risky or inappropriate. Between environmental factors, individual learning histories, and social dynamics that influence the structure and culture of organizations, organizational silence thus appears to be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

Then follows the contribution of *Prof. Markus Pohlmann* from the Max Weber Institute for Sociology at the University of Heidelberg which deals from an organizational sociological perspective with the question of why even capital crimes in organizations can remain undetected for a long time. In this context, he examines the explanatory reach of rational choice theory and neo-institutionalism using two extreme cases of collective silence: patient killings in hospitals and the sexual abuse of minors in the German Catholic Church. On the one hand, his analysis highlights that organizational effects are at work that can influence the interaction between rational egoists and thereby the outcome of suboptimal cooperation and collective default. On the other hand, he points in particular to the significance of informal norms in organizations, which can promote and endow collective silence with recognition and thus contribute to its legitimation in organizations. He hypothesizes that this does not require embedding in total institutions at all but can be a concomitant of regular organizations.

In a third theoretical contribution, *Dr. Sebastian Starystach and Dr. Kristina Höly* from the Max Weber Institute for Sociology at the University of Heidelberg analytically differentiate between individual and organizational deviance on the one hand and individual and organizational silence on the other. They argue that the combination of both analytical categorizations offers the possibility of building archetypes or idealtypes as to how silence and wrongdoing can be interconnected. Based on this heuristic, they analyze the case of the "German Transplant Scandal". The analysis supports their assumption that it is central to understand silence in organizations not as isolated but always in the context of the kind of wrongdoings it covers up. The case analysis shows that the informal norms which struc-

tured the organizational deviance also influenced the corresponding dynamic of silence.

Subsequently, the empirical side of the phenomenon is examined more closely. The focus of this section lies on studies of silence in organizations that make the forms and consequences of silence in organizations of different social spheres tangible.

Opening this section, *Bastian Kückelhaus, Iris Kranefeld,* and *Prof. Gerhard Blickle* from the Psychological Institute of the University of Bonn use the concept of Machiavellianism as a personality trait to explain the behavior of individuals with a tendency towards amorality, insensitivity, and manipulation within organizations. Such individuals often disguise their counterproductive tendencies early on in their career, so that deviant behavior only emerges when the individuals are already highly integrated into the respective organization. With its theoretical approach mainly centered around psychological factors that promote wrongdoing within organizations on an individual level, it contributes to an understanding of the social dynamics that result in organizational silence: where a deviant Machiavellian individual has been part of an organization for a long time (and has thus acquired a certain level of both trust and power within the organization) it becomes increasingly difficult for other members to speak out about said individual's misconduct. Thus, Machiavellian individuals with good social skills and high impulse control that manage to mask their counterproductive tendencies for long periods of time can often rely on an organization's implicit power structures to uphold silence in their favor and create climates of silence.

Dr. Steve Conway and *Prof. Louise Westmarland* of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Open University UK present data from a recent survey of British police officers and police support staff. The main research question is whether, under what circumstances, and through what means the respondents would report misconduct observed among colleagues—and thus break silence within the organization. Among the main features of police culture that promote organizational silence seems to be a camaraderie between the officers resulting from a unique combination of social solidarity and social isolation that police officers experience on duty. Further enhanced by the potential danger as well as the "rites and rituals" of police work, group solidarity among police officers is both a vital aspect of police culture and a substantial obstacle to the reporting of misconduct within the police force—especially where such misconduct is of benefit to the organization as opposed to that of an individual officer. Even though police officers' attitudes towards reporting misconduct have seemingly shifted over the past decades to at least some degree (especially concerning drunk driving and excessive use of force), the "Blue Code of Silence" thus appears to still be active in police culture despite recent regulatory efforts such as the implementation of a Police Code of Ethics.

Prof. Ajay K. Mehra, Senior Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, India, subsequently provides information on party and election campaign financing in India as well as on the growing presence of individuals with a criminal his-

tory in Indian politics, which has increasingly become the focus of national and international criticism due to its lack of transparency and the infusion of illicit funds. In the context of Indian politics, practices of silence seem to be present on the level of individual political parties as organizations as well as on the larger systemic scale of the political system itself. Despite efforts on an institutional level as well as stemming from civil society, political parties seem to go to great lengths in order to uphold organizational silence. It is important to note in this context, that this "organizational silence" refers not only to an unwillingness to disclose the origins of a parties' funding but also to extensive efforts to thwart any attempt at structural reforms.

Afterwards, *Prof. Dieter Dölling* from the Institute of Criminology at the University of Heidelberg presents the results of a research project on sexual abuse offences in the German Catholic Church and the Church's reaction to these acts. Findings on the number and type of crimes committed, as well as on the persons affected and accused are presented. The underlying causes of these crimes are also discussed, with a focus on the Catholic Church's reaction to exposed crimes and possible explanations for this reaction. Most importantly, allegations made by victims of sexual abuse against priests seem to have been viewed by its members mainly as a threat to or an attack on the institution of the Catholic Church. In this context, protecting the Church was deemed more important than protecting victims, and thus priests were mostly relocated rather than prosecuted. Another important factor that contributed to the failure of attempts at establishing protective concepts seem to have been "clerical power structures". Furthermore, the church's sexual morality and the way of life of the priests may also have contributed to creating the scenario in which such numerous instances of sexual assault could occur and be swept under the rug for an extended period of time.

Prof. Ilse Hartmann-Tews of the Institute for Sociology and Gender Studies at the German Sport University Cologne then discusses elements of the social structure of (professional) sport and its organizations on the basis of online surveys of sports clubs and national sports associations as well as interviews with prevention officers and victims. Her paper concludes that these structures seem to be favorable not only for incidents of sexualized violence but also for the silence of the organizations in question. Of particular importance to the emergence of organizational silence in this context are certain dominant mindsets that are very common in sports organizations, such as the positive image of sport, a narrative of male dominance (that is specifically present in sports organizations through dominant values such as "toughness"), the power imbalance between coach and athlete, and the strong sense of membership trust and loyalty within sports organizations. Despite regulatory efforts, these mindsets (which are vital to sports organizations' culture) have made it particularly difficult to establish normative structures that promote breaking organizational silence. Without such normative structures, it is extremely difficult for victims of sexualized violence to find ways of speaking out despite dominant mindsets promoting organizational silence.

These studies show that silence in organizations is to be understood as an integral part of the reality of state, church, and leisure-oriented organizations. Thus, combating the structures that perpetuate this silence represents a particular challenge. Therefore, the anthology also includes the perspectives of organizational practitioners: Prof. Martin Zeier and Markus Jüttner, whose contributions focus on practical implications as well as possible solutions for the silence in organizations.

Markus Jüttner (Vice President Compliance, E.ON SE), in his contribution as a practical expert, outlines challenges, opportunities, and alternative concepts for dealing with organizational silence. He argues that the reason for never-ending scandals lies in the propensity of corporate compliance to view the fight against crime as a legal matter which can best be solved with the help of best-practice measures. These measures may protect the respective organization in case of a scandal since a state-of-the-art compliance system was implemented, but they do not address the root causes of corporate crime and the propensity of employees to stay silent. The root causes for these are to be found in the organizational deep structure in toxic structural elements. He concludes that to prevent crime and silence in organizations, an "invisible hand" in the form of the absence of toxic structural elements is needed, rather than focusing on best-practice compliance measures. Therefore, he argues that uncovering toxic structural elements, and then eliminating them with the help of structural prevention is the core task of serious compliance to prevent corporate crime and silence. Against this background, compliance officers are required to counteract the dilution of the compliance task by other topics as well as to withstand the constant appeal of consultants for "more is better" and the "latest best practice pressure".

Finally, *Prof. Martin Zeier,* Medical Director of the Kidney Centre at the University of Heidelberg, discusses the so-called "German Transplant Allocation Scandal", in which patients who were on the waiting list for a liver transplant were deliberately pushed forward at various German transplant centers. Using this example, Zeier discusses factors that could have led to deviations from rules in the allocation of donor organs and their initial toleration in isolated cases. In addition to the general shortage of donor organs and unsatisfactory control mechanisms, he emphasizes the high degree of expertise required of personnel in the complex field of transplant medicine, which on the one hand creates team spirit, but on the other hand also leads to intense competition for the best minds. Zeier refers to studies that have shown that employees tended to adhere more to instructions of their boss than to official guidelines and regulations. Quite often, looking away from deviations was linked to the intention of protecting the patients' well-being. Zeier places particular emphasis on organizational measures to prevent deviations from rules and to break existing dynamics of silence, such as the introduction of an independent control system and a multiple-eyes principle. He calls for an increase in outcome quality for the patients with the help of multi-center studies, and advocates for a "scientific control" of transplant medicine.

The contributions provide both theoretical and practical insights into phenomena of silence in organizations and the concealment of wrongdoings in organizations in various societal domains. Based on them, we pledge for a more holistic and interdisciplinary view of silence which should take a closer look at the interconnectedness between wrongdoings and silence in organizations since their frames of reference are often enough associated via informal norms. Organizational-psychological approaches provide here a deep understanding about the influence of concrete organizational structures and norms on individual behavior, which can aggregate to a climate of silence. The social science perspective on the other hand can provide a case-based understanding of the dynamics of informal norms in organizations, which can also be the root cause for deviance and silence in organizations.

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