



## ISIR Journal of Business and Management Studies (ISIRJBMS)

ISSN: 3048-7684 (Online)

Frequency: Bimonthly

Published By ISIR Publisher

Journal Homepage Link- <https://isirpublisher.com/isirjbms-home/>



### The Concept of Strategic Silence and Its Implications for Organisational Communication

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#### Article History

Received: 25/03/2026

Accepted: 31/03/2026

Published: 02/04/2026

Vol – 3 Issue – 2

PP: -46-54

DOI:10.5281/zenodo.  
19414637

#### Abstract

*Strategic silence has emerged as an important concept in organisational studies, challenging traditional views that silence in the workplace is primarily negative or dysfunctional. This study explores the concept of strategic silence as a deliberate communication behaviour and examines its implications for organisational communication and employee interaction. Strategic silence is the purposeful withholding or timing of communication to achieve specific interpersonal or organisational objectives. Unlike passive silence, which may result from fear or disengagement, strategic silence reflects a conscious decision to regulate communication based on situational awareness and anticipated outcomes. The study adopts an exploratory approach to examine key dimensions of strategic silence, including information withholding, nonreactive silence, disclosure timing, and strategic listening. These dimensions highlighted how employees and organisational actors manage communication processes to improve decision quality, protect sensitive information, and enhance interpersonal relationships within the workplace. Existing literature and empirical findings suggest that strategic silence can enhance the effectiveness of employee voice by ensuring that ideas are communicated at the most appropriate time and in the most constructive manner. The findings contribute to organisational communication and management research by re-conceptualizing silence as a potentially strategic resource rather than merely a barrier to communication. The study concludes that understanding strategic silence can provide valuable insights into communication dynamics, leadership practices, and knowledge management within modern organisations.*

**Keywords:** *Strategic silence, Organisational communication, Information withholding, Disclosure timing, Organisational performance*

#### 1. Introduction

In recent times, organizations operate in an environment characterized by globalization, intense competition, rapid technological change, and increasing demand for effective information management. In such an environment, communication strategies have become essential tools for achieving organizational goals and maintaining competitive positioning. Communication is widely recognized as a fundamental process through which organizational activities are coordinated and strategic decisions are made. (Ashford, et al., 2009). In strategic management and organizational behaviour literature, significant emphasis has traditionally been placed on employee voice which refers to the expression of ideas, opinions, and concerns intended to improve organizational functioning (Brinsfield, 2013). However, contemporary research suggests that silence also plays an important role in organizational communication. Silence

should not always be interpreted simply as the absence of speech; rather, it can represent a deliberate communicative choice influenced by individual intentions and contextual factors (Elizabeth, 2014).

Earlier studies on silence in organizations largely portrayed it as a negative phenomenon. Scholars investigating organizational silence argued that employees frequently choose not to express opinions or concerns because of fear of retaliation, perceived futility of speaking up, or hierarchical barriers within organizations (Edmondso, 2003)). Similarly, (Brinsfield, 2013) highlighted how silence can prevent employees from sharing valuable information that could help organizations address problems and improve performance. These studies emphasized the dysfunctional consequences of silence, including reduced organizational learning, limited innovation, and ineffective decision-making. Despite this dominant perspective, emerging scholarly discussions have

begun to acknowledge that silence may also be purposeful and strategically applied in certain organizational situations. Chad (2013) opined that silence can stem from multiple motives and is not always associated with fear or disengagement. Instead, individuals may intentionally remain silent to manage relationships, control information, or influence outcomes. From this perspective, silence can function as a strategic behaviour rather than merely a passive response to organizational constraints (Bies, 2009).

Within this evolving discourse, the notion of strategic silence has gained relevance as a communication approach in which individuals deliberately regulate when and how they speak (Brinsfield, et al., 2009)). Strategic silence can also be seen as the intentional management of communication through withholding, delaying, or limiting verbal expression to achieve specific personal or organizational objectives. Rather than passive withdrawal, strategic silence represents a conscious behavioural choice that allows individuals to maintain informational control, observe situations carefully, and enhance decision-making effectiveness.

To sharpen the theoretical debate and understanding of strategic silence, this study suggested and explored through several key dimensions that capture different forms of deliberate communication restraint. The first dimension is information withholding. This simply involves the intentional decision not to disclose certain information during interactions. In many organizations, particularly knowledge-driven institutions, information represents a valuable strategic resource (Milliken & Morrison, 2000). The knowledge-based view of the firm advanced by (Grant, 1996), the management and protection of knowledge assets play a critical role in sustaining competitive advantage. Consequently, individuals or organizations may strategically withhold information in order to protect sensitive knowledge, strengthen negotiation positions, or maintain strategic leverage. (Grant, 1996)

The second dimension of strategic silence is known as non-reactive silence. This simply describes the deliberate choice not to respond immediately during communication exchanges. In organizational interactions, individuals may refrain from responding in order to assess the situation, manage emotional reactions, or prevent unnecessary conflict (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009; Harlos, 2001; Hirschman, 1970). This form of silence reflects the ability to exercise restraint and emotional regulation. The concept is consistent with ideas related to emotional intelligence discussed by (Goleman, 1995), who emphasized that self-control and thoughtful responses are important competencies in effective leadership and workplace relationships. This could also be applied to handle criticisms from competitors and the general public. For instance, when organisations or individuals react swiftly to criticisms and oppositions from public, it might completely ruin its image and identity. It therefore takes common sense and wisdom to react at the right time. Passing information to the public space must be well planned and articulated to reduce potential setbacks and damages. (Parke, et al., 2022; Perlow & Williams, 2003).

The deliberate effort to pass or disclose information at the right time is the third dimension known as disclosure timing. It refers to the strategic consideration of when information should be communicated. In many organizational contexts, the effectiveness of communication does not depend solely on the content of the message but also on the timing of its delivery (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). For instance, delaying disclosure until an appropriate moment, individuals may improve negotiation outcomes, reduce uncertainty, or maximize the impact of the information shared (Matsumoto & Ioki, 2024). This shows that silence may serve as a temporary communication strategy that allows individuals to determine the most beneficial moment for disclosure (Morrison, 2014). Disclosure timing is important for both internal and external operations of an organisations. Sometimes board decisions can be disclosed by an employee who might have a privileged information to friends or peers without knowing the implications and adverse effect on the organisations. Top executives and management must be intentional about the appropriate time to disclose information. This shows that one little mistake could cost the company an irreparable loss and total setback of the company's image or identity (Matsumoto & Ioki, 2024; Parke, 2022)

The fourth dimension of strategic silence is known as strategic listening, which involves remaining silent in order to actively listen and gather information from others. Listening has long been recognized as an essential component of effective communication and leadership (Yang, et al., 2025) According to Carl (1957), attentive listening facilitates understanding, trust, and constructive dialogue. In organizational settings, strategic listening allows individuals to interpret verbal and non-verbal cues, understand stakeholder perspectives, and obtain valuable insights that support better decision-making. Although the concept of silence has received increasing attention in organizational research, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on employee silence and its negative consequences. Studies often emphasize issues such as fear of speaking up, suppression of ideas, and barriers to open communication (Morrison, 2014; Detert & Morrison, 2011). Fundamentally, insufficient scholarly attention has been directed toward examining silence as a deliberate strategic behaviour that can be used to manage communication processes and organizational outcomes. For example, most previous studies further treated silence as a general construct without adequately exploring its specific dimensions like the roles of information withholding, non-reactive silence, disclosure timing, and strategic listening as distinct but interrelated elements of strategic silence which remain underexplored in management research (Morrison, 2011; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Pinder & Harlos, 2001).). These limitations are particularly evident in developing economies, where contextual organizational dynamics may shape communication strategies in unique ways. This indicates that there is a significant gap in understanding how strategic silence operates as a purposeful communication mechanism within organizations. Extensive exploratory research is necessary to conceptualize and examine the multidimensional nature of strategic silence and

to determine how its components influence organizational processes and performance outcomes. Addressing this gap will contribute to the advancement of organizational communication and strategic management literature by presenting silence not only as a barrier to communication but also as a potential strategic resource for achieving organizational effectiveness and sustainable competitive advantage.

## 2. Literature Review

This part reviews the literature related to strategic silence and its relevance within organizational studies. It examined conceptual perspectives, theoretical foundations, and empirical studies associated with silence as a communicative behaviour in organizations. The chapter also explores the dimensions of strategic silence such as; information withholding, nonreactive silence, disclosure timing, and strategic listening and discusses how these behaviours influence organizational processes such as decision-making, leadership, communication effectiveness, and knowledge sharing. The chapter also identifies gaps in the literature that justify the need for further research on strategic silence within organizational contexts. Communication is widely recognized as one of the most critical processes in organizational functioning (Edmondson, 2003). Through communication, employees share knowledge, express ideas, solve problems, and coordinate activities that contribute to organizational performance (Milliken, et al., 2003). Traditional organizational behaviour research has largely focused on employee voice, which refers to the expression of ideas, opinions, and suggestions aimed at improving organizational practices (Morrison, 2011). However, scholars have increasingly recognized that silence also plays a significant role in organizational communication (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Morrison, 2011).

Silence within organizations is often misunderstood as disengagement or a lack of participation. Early research frequently portrayed silence as a negative phenomenon associated with fear, power distance, or perceived futility of speaking up (Dyne, et al., 2003; Brinsfield, et al., 2009; Detert & Treviño, 2010).) However, contemporary research suggests that silence can also be intentional and strategic. Strategic silence refers to the deliberate withholding or postponement of communication in order to achieve a specific objective within organizational interactions. Recent research demonstrates that employees sometimes deliberately withhold ideas until they become more relevant, better developed, or more likely to be received positively by managers. When employees combine silence with carefully timed voice behavior, their contributions are often perceived as higher quality and more valuable to organizational decision-making processes. Understanding the strategic role of silence is therefore important for organizations seeking to improve communication effectiveness, leadership practices, and decision-making processes.

## 2.1 Concept of Strategic Silence

Strategic silence can be defined as the deliberate and purposeful withholding of speech or information to achieve a particular communicative or strategic objective. Unlike passive silence, which may arise from fear, disengagement, or lack of confidence, strategic silence involves intentional decision-making regarding when and how communication should occur (Yang & Kung, 2024) Strategic silence functions as a communication strategy in which individuals consciously choose not to speak at a particular moment in order to influence outcomes or improve the effectiveness of future communication. The effectiveness of strategic silence lies in its ability to create space for reflection, observation, and information gathering before responding. Silence can therefore function as an active communicative signal rather than simply the absence of speech.

Within organizational contexts, strategic silence may occur in several situations, including negotiations, decision-making meetings, conflict management discussions, or leadership communication (Yang, et al., 2025). Individuals may remain silent to avoid escalating conflicts, to collect additional information, or to observe how others react to a particular issue. Recent research emphasizes that strategic silence challenges the traditional assumption that silence in organizations is always harmful. Employees sometimes intentionally delay speaking until their ideas align better with organizational goals or managerial expectations. By filtering out untimely ideas, strategic silence can enhance the relevance and quality of employee voice when it eventually occurs. Therefore, strategic silence should be understood as a complex communication behaviour that involves both cognitive evaluation and contextual awareness.

### 2.1.1 Dimensions of Strategic Silence

Strategic silence can be examined through several behavioural dimensions that reflect different forms of communication restraint. For the purpose of this study, four dimensions are proposed and considered, they are; Information withholding, Non-reactive silence, Disclosure timing and Strategic listening. These dimensions represent different ways in which individuals intentionally regulate communication in organizational settings.

### 2.1.2 Information Withholding

Information withholding refers to the deliberate decision not to disclose certain information during organizational interactions. In many organizations, information is a valuable resource that can influence decision-making, power relationships, and competitive advantage. Employees may withhold information for several reasons. For example, individuals may delay sharing information until they have gathered sufficient evidence, refined their ideas, or assessed the potential consequences of disclosure. In strategic contexts, withholding information can also protect sensitive knowledge or maintain negotiation leverage.

Research on organizational communication suggests that information withholding is often influenced by organizational culture and leadership behavior. When employees believe that

managers are receptive to constructive feedback, they may be more willing to share information openly. Conversely, when employees fear negative consequences, they may engage in defensive silence. However, from a strategic perspective, withholding information can also be a deliberate communication strategy aimed at improving the timing and effectiveness of voice behavior. Employees may choose to remain silent temporarily until the issue becomes relevant or until the organizational context becomes more favorable.

### 2.1.3 Non-reactive Silence

Nonreactive silence refers to the deliberate choice not to respond immediately to a statement, question, or event during organizational interactions. Instead of reacting impulsively, individuals may intentionally pause to reflect on the situation before responding. In many organizational contexts, immediate reactions can lead to misunderstandings or escalate conflicts. Nonreactive silence allows individuals to process information carefully and formulate thoughtful responses. This form of silence is particularly relevant in leadership communication and conflict management. Leaders who demonstrate the ability to pause before responding are often perceived as more composed and thoughtful. By delaying their responses, they create opportunities to gather additional perspectives and reduce emotional tension during discussions. Nonreactive silence can therefore function as a strategy for improving decision quality and maintaining constructive interpersonal relationships within organizations.

### 2.1.4 Disclosure Timing

Disclosure timing refers to the strategic decision regarding when information should be communicated. In organizational communication, the effectiveness of a message often depends not only on its content but also on the timing of its delivery. Employees may delay communication until they believe that the information is sufficiently developed or that the audience is ready to receive it. Research suggests that employees evaluate factors such as issue relevance, idea readiness, and audience responsiveness when deciding whether to speak or remain silent. By carefully managing disclosure timing, individuals can increase the likelihood that their ideas will be accepted and acted upon by decision-makers.

### 2.1.5 Strategic Listening

Strategic listening represents another important dimension of strategic silence. Unlike passive silence, strategic listening involves intentionally refraining from speaking in order to observe, interpret, and understand information shared by others. Listening is an essential component of effective communication and leadership. Through listening, individuals gain insights into the perspectives, concerns, and expectations of colleagues and stakeholders. Strategic listening allows individuals to gather valuable information before contributing to discussions. By listening carefully, employees can identify key issues, understand organizational dynamics, and formulate more informed responses. In addition, strategic listening helps build trust and strengthen interpersonal relationships within organizations. When individuals feel that their opinions are genuinely heard, they are more likely to

engage in collaborative problem-solving and knowledge sharing.

## 2.2 Theoretical Parameter

Several theoretical frameworks help explain the emergence and implications of strategic silence in organizations. These theories relevant to this study includes; social exchange theory by (Homans, 1958), knowledge-based theory (Grant, 1996) and communication accommodation theory (Giles, 1973). The social exchange theory suggests that individuals evaluate the potential costs and benefits of their actions before engaging in communication behaviors. Employees may remain silent when they believe that speaking up could damage relationships or create negative consequences (Edmondson, 1999). Strategic silence therefore reflects a calculated decision based on anticipated outcomes of communication behaviour.

The knowledge-based view of the firm emphasizes that knowledge is a critical resource for achieving competitive advantage. Organizations must therefore manage the creation, sharing, and protection of knowledge effectively. Strategic silence can play a role in knowledge management by regulating the flow of information within organizations. Individuals may withhold information temporarily in order to protect sensitive knowledge or to ensure that information is communicated at the most appropriate time (Fast et al., 2014). Communication accommodation theory explains how individuals adjust their communication behaviors to align with social and organizational contexts. Strategic silence may occur when individuals adapt their communication styles to match the expectations or preferences of their audience. For example, employees may remain silent during meetings if they believe that speaking up at that moment would not align with organizational norms or leadership expectations (Fast et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2019).

### 2.3 Organisational Silence and Employee Voice

The concept of silence in organisations gained prominence through research on organisational silence and employee voice (Liang et al., 2012). Organisational silence can be defined as a situation in which employees intentionally withhold information, opinions, or concerns about organisational problems (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Early studies suggested that silence often occurs when employees believe that expressing their views may lead to negative consequences such as punishment, social exclusion, or career limitations (Yang & Kung, 2024; Fast et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2019). Research on employee voice emphasizes the importance of open communication in organizations. Voice behaviour enables employees to share ideas that improve organisational processes, innovation, and performance.

However, the relationship between voice and silence is more complex than previously assumed. Silence does not necessarily represent the opposite of voice. Instead, employees may move between silence and voice depending on contextual factors (Knoll & Van Dick, 2013). Employees often evaluate the potential consequences of speaking before deciding whether to express their opinions (Ryan & Oestreich, 1991; Tourish & Robson, 2006). This evaluation may include

considerations such as managerial receptiveness, organisational culture (Schein, 2010), and the potential impact of the message. Strategic silence therefore reflects a deliberate communication choice rather than simple withdrawal from organisational participation. Recent studies show that employees who effectively combine silence with voice may receive higher performance evaluations from managers (Zhou & George, 2001; Yang & Kung, 2024; Yang et al., 2025). Their contributions are often perceived as thoughtful and well-timed because they have filtered out irrelevant or poorly developed ideas. These findings highlight the importance of examining silence as a strategic communication behaviour rather than merely a negative organisational outcome.

## 2.4 Strategic Silence in Organisational Studies

Strategic silence has become increasingly relevant in organizational research due to its relationship with leadership, decision-making, and communication management (Van Dyne et al., 1995). In modern organizations, where information flows rapidly and decision-making environments are complex, employees must carefully manage how and when they communicate (Weick, 1995). Strategic silence enables individuals to regulate the flow of information within organizational interactions. By choosing when to speak and when to remain silent, employees can influence how their ideas are perceived and how decisions are made.

Research indicates that high-performing employees often demonstrate the ability to balance voice and silence effectively (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Instead of speaking impulsively, they evaluate whether their ideas are relevant to the current situation, whether the idea is sufficiently developed, and whether the audience is receptive to the message. Strategic silence therefore acts as a filtering mechanism that allows employees to present ideas at moments when they are most likely to produce positive outcomes. This approach improves the perceived quality of employee contributions and enhances their influence within organizational decision-making processes. Furthermore, strategic silence can play an important role in leadership communication. Leaders sometimes employ silence deliberately during negotiations or meetings to encourage reflection, gather additional information, or influence group dynamics (Whitener, et al., 1998).

## 2.5 Strategic Silence and Organisational Performance

Strategic silence can influence organisational performance in several ways. First, it improves the quality of communication by ensuring that ideas are presented at the most appropriate time. Second, it enhances decision-making processes by allowing individuals to gather additional information before responding. Third, it promotes constructive workplace relationships by reducing unnecessary conflicts. Organisations that encourage thoughtful communication rather than impulsive expression may benefit from improved

collaboration and knowledge sharing. Strategic silence can therefore contribute to more effective leadership and organisational learning.

## 2.6 Empirical Review

Empirical research on strategic silence remains relatively limited compared to studies on employee voice and organizational silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Milliken et al., 2003; Knoll & Van Dick, 2013). Nevertheless, emerging research provides important insights into how strategic silence influences organizational outcomes (Yang et al., 2025). A study examined how strategic silence affects managerial evaluations of employee voice. (Yang & Kung, 2024). The researchers found that employees who deliberately withhold untimely ideas are often perceived as more thoughtful and strategic when they eventually speak up (Yang et al., 2025). As a result, managers evaluate their contributions more positively and reward them with higher performance ratings.

Another study explored how employees learn to use strategic silence as a communication skill (Wilkinson, et al., 2019). The research showed that individuals who develop the ability to recognize appropriate communication timing and regulate their responses can improve the effectiveness of their voice behavior within organizations. These findings highlight the importance of understanding silence as a dynamic communication strategy rather than a purely negative organisational behaviour.

Empirical research on silence in organizations has expanded significantly over the past two decades. Earlier studies primarily examined silence as a dysfunctional behavior resulting from fear, power imbalance, or organizational climate (Edmondson, 2003; Brinsfield, 2013). However, recent research increasingly highlights the strategic and functional aspects of silence within workplace communication (Yang et al., 2025). Empirical evidence suggests that silence can be both a defensive reaction and a deliberate communication strategy depending on contextual and relational factors (Chad, 2013)

Yang et al., (2025) presented one of the most influential empirical studies on strategic silence was conducted by researchers who examined how silence interacts with employee voice behavior in organizational contexts. In this study, strategic silence was defined as the intentional withholding of ideas or concerns that are perceived as untimely or not yet ready to be communicated. The researchers used a multi-method research design consisting of qualitative interviews, field surveys, and experimental methods to investigate how strategic silence affects managerial evaluations of employees' voice behavior. The results showed that employees who selectively withheld ideas until the appropriate time were perceived by managers as more thoughtful contributors. Consequently, their voice behavior was rated as higher quality, which led to better performance evaluations and greater rewards within organizations. This study provided empirical support for the argument that silence is not always detrimental to

organizations. Instead, strategic silence may serve as a communication mechanism that enhances the effectiveness of employee voice when ideas are eventually expressed. The findings also indicated that employees who effectively use strategic silence consider several contextual factors before speaking up, including the relevance of the issue, the readiness of the idea, and the responsiveness of the intended audience.

Wilkinson et al., (2019) examined how silence influences interpersonal relationships and power dynamics in the workplace. Recent empirical evidence suggests that silence can function as a relational strategy used by employees to protect their social standing and maintain positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors (Yang & Kung, 2024). A multi-wave study conducted in organizational settings found that workplace ostracism can lead employees to engage in defensive silence as a way to prevent further relational damage. Tourish & Robson, 2006). The study revealed that employees who experience social exclusion tend to reduce their willingness to speak up because silence helps them protect their organization-based self-esteem and avoid potential conflict (Zhou & George, 2001).

These findings demonstrate that silence may be influenced by both psychological and relational factors. Employees may adopt silence as a coping mechanism when they perceive that speaking up could damage interpersonal relationships or expose them to negative consequences (Tangirala, & Ramanujam, 2008) Although such silence may initially appear passive, empirical evidence suggests that it often reflects strategic decision-making regarding social interactions in the workplace (Bies, 2009).

In addition to defensive silence, empirical studies have also explored how silence can be developed as a deliberate communication skill (Tourish & Robson, 2006; Morrison, 2014). Some researchers have investigated training programs aimed at helping employees learn when to speak and when to remain silent. Parke et al., 2022; Harlos, 2001) A recent intervention study tested an experiential learning model designed to improve employees' ability to use strategic silence effectively (Yang & Kung, 2024). The results indicated that participants who received training showed increased self-efficacy in regulating their communication behavior and improved confidence in determining the appropriate timing for speaking up. Although the short-term effect on voice behavior was not statistically significant, the study demonstrated that employees who practiced strategic silence reported stronger beliefs that their contributions would be more impactful when delivered at the right time.

Empirical research has also examined the broader relationship between employee voice, silence, and organizational outcomes (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Studies indicate that voice behavior plays a crucial role in organizational learning, innovation, and decision-making (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009; Morrison, 2011). However, the effectiveness of voice depends largely on how and when ideas are communicated. When employees' express ideas prematurely or without

sufficient preparation, their suggestions may be dismissed or ignored by decision-makers. Strategic silence therefore functions as a filtering mechanism that allows employees to refine their ideas before presenting them to management Parke et al., (2022).

Some empirical studies also highlight the role of organizational climate in shaping silence behaviors (Morrison, 2011; Liang, et al., 2012). For instance, research on employee voice and silence suggests that organizational culture, leadership style, and psychological safety influence employees' willingness to speak up. When employees perceive that managers are supportive and receptive to feedback, they are more likely to engage in constructive voice behaviors (Edmondson, 1999). Conversely, when employees believe that their ideas will be ignored or punished, they may engage in silence as a protective strategy.

Empirical findings also indicate that silence and voice are not mutually exclusive behaviors (Milliken et al., 2003). Rather, employees often move between these two forms of communication depending on situational factors. In many cases, employees remain silent temporarily while they observe organizational dynamics or collect additional information before expressing their ideas. This dynamic interaction between silence and voice highlights the importance of considering silence as part of a broader communication strategy rather than treating it solely as a negative organizational phenomenon. Another important empirical insight concerns the relationship between silence and performance outcomes. Research demonstrates that employees who strategically manage their communication behaviors tend to achieve more positive evaluations from supervisors. Strategic silence allows employees to present ideas when they are most relevant and when decision-makers are more receptive to suggestions. Parke et al., 2022). As a result, their contributions are often perceived as more valuable to organizational decision-making processes.

Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that silence may contribute to improved decision quality in certain contexts (Morrison, 2014). When individuals refrain from immediate responses during discussions, they create opportunities to gather additional information and reflect on alternative perspectives. This reflective process can lead to more thoughtful and informed decision-making. In team settings, strategic silence may also encourage others to share their opinions, thereby promoting more balanced and inclusive discussions (Greenberg & Edwards, 2009) Despite these positive implications, empirical research also highlights potential risks associated with silence. Excessive silence can reduce information sharing and limit organizational learning (Brinsfield et al., 2009) When employees remain silent for extended periods, managers may misinterpret their silence as disengagement or lack of competence. Therefore, the effectiveness of strategic silence depends largely on the context in which it is used and the balance between silence and voice (Parke, et al., 2022

Overall, empirical studies provide growing evidence that silence is a complex and multidimensional behavior within organizations (Yang et al., 2025; Wilkinson, et al., 2019). Rather than being purely negative, silence can serve multiple functions, including relationship management, communication regulation, and strategic decision-making. Recent research emphasizes that strategic silence can enhance the effectiveness of employee voice, improve managerial evaluations, and support more thoughtful communication within organizations. (Wilkinson, et al., 2019). These findings highlight the importance of examining silence not only as a barrier to communication but also as a potential resource for improving organizational interactions.

## 2.7 Conclusion

The concept of strategic silence provides an important lens through which organisational communication and employee behaviour can be more comprehensively understood. Traditional organisational research largely emphasized the importance of employee voice while portraying silence as a negative behaviour associated with fear, disengagement, or lack of psychological safety. However, contemporary studies in organisational behaviour and organisational communication demonstrate that silence can also represent a deliberate and strategic form of communication.

Strategic silence represents a complex and multidimensional communication behaviour that extends beyond traditional interpretations of silence in organisations. Recognising silence as a potential strategic resource rather than merely a communication barrier offers new insights into employee behaviour, leadership dynamics, and organisational decision-making. Therefore, the study concludes that understanding strategic silence can provide valuable insights into communication dynamics, leadership practices, and knowledge management within modern organisations.

## 2.8 Theoretical Implications of Strategic Silence in Organisations

Strategic silence has important theoretical implications for the study of organizational behavior, communication, leadership, and knowledge management (Parke, et al., 2022). Traditionally, silence in organizations was treated primarily as a negative phenomenon associated with fear, disengagement, or the suppression of employee voice (Bies, 2009). However, emerging research suggests that silence can also represent a deliberate and strategic communication behaviour (Yang et al., 2025). Recognizing this dual nature of silence has significant implications for several theoretical perspectives within the field of organisational behaviour and organisational communication.

One of the most significant theoretical implications of strategic silence is the reconceptualization of silence itself. Earlier theories of organizational communication often viewed silence as a barrier to learning and innovation. Scholars such as Elizabeth W. Morrison and Frances J. Milliken highlighted how organizational silence can prevent employees from sharing information about problems, thereby

hindering organizational improvement (Elizabeth, 2014). The concept of strategic silence challenges this traditional perspective by suggesting that silence can also be an intentional communication strategy. Instead of simply reflecting fear or disengagement, silence may represent thoughtful judgment regarding when and how to communicate. This theoretical shift broadens the understanding of communication behavior in organizations by recognizing silence as an active and meaningful component of interaction. Strategic silence also extends existing theories of employee voice. Research on employee voice, such as work by (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson, 2003). emphasizes the importance of employees speaking up to improve organizational processes and decision-making.

The concept of strategic silence complements this literature by demonstrating that effective voice behavior sometimes requires temporary silence. Employees may delay expressing ideas until the message becomes clearer, the timing becomes appropriate, or the organizational environment becomes more receptive. Consequently, voice and silence should be viewed not as opposing behaviors but as interconnected components of a broader communication strategy. Strategic silence can also be interpreted through the lens of Social Exchange Theory. This theory suggests that individuals evaluate the potential rewards and risks associated with their actions before engaging in social interactions. Within organizational contexts, employees often assess whether speaking up will produce positive outcomes or negative consequences. Strategic silence may occur when individuals believe that withholding communication temporarily will produce more favorable results in the future. This interpretation highlights the rational and calculated nature of communication decisions in organizations.

Another important theoretical implication relates to the knowledge-based view of the firm, which emphasizes knowledge as a key organizational resource. According to scholars such as Robert M. Grant, organizations achieve competitive advantage through the creation, sharing, and protection of knowledge. Strategic silence contributes to this perspective by demonstrating how individuals regulate the flow of information within organizations. In certain situations, withholding information temporarily may protect sensitive knowledge, prevent premature decision-making, or improve the quality of knowledge sharing when disclosure eventually occurs. Strategic silence also has implications for leadership and communication theories. Leaders often use silence intentionally to influence group dynamics, encourage reflection, or manage conflict during discussions. The ability to pause, listen, and observe before responding can enhance leadership effectiveness and improve decision quality.

From a theoretical standpoint, this suggests that silence can function as a leadership communication tool rather than merely a passive state. It also reinforces the importance of listening and reflective communication in leadership theory. Research on psychological safety—developed by scholars such as Amy C. Edmondson—emphasizes that employees are more likely to speak up when they feel safe to express their

ideas without fear of punishment (Edmondson, 1999) Strategic silence introduces additional complexity to this framework (Parke et al., 2022). Even in psychologically safe environments, employees may choose silence strategically to improve the timing or impact of their communication. Therefore, the presence of silence does not always indicate fear or lack of safety. Instead, silence may reflect thoughtful communication choices influenced by situational and relational factors.

Strategic silence also contributes to theories related to communication timing and message effectiveness. Organizational communication research suggests that the timing of a message can significantly influence how it is perceived by the audience. Strategic silence allows individuals to delay communication until the timing becomes more appropriate, thereby increasing the likelihood that the message will be accepted or acted upon. Theoretically, strategic silence expands traditional organizational theories by redefining silence as an intentional communication behavior. It enriches employee voice theory, complements social exchange and knowledge-based perspectives, and provides new insights into leadership communication, psychological safety, and organizational learning. Recognizing the strategic role of silence therefore contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of communication dynamics within organizations.

## 2.9 Suggestions for Further Research

Further research should continue to explore the contextual factors, cultural influences, and leadership practices that shape the effective use of strategic silence in modern organisations by integrating silence into broader theories of communication and organisational behaviour, scholars and practitioners can develop a more nuanced understanding of how individuals manage communication to achieve both personal and organisational objectives. Empirical research should be extensively carried out to examine the concept of strategic silence and organisational outcomes like performance, effective leadership, competitive advantage etc. Different studies should be carried out both in private and public sectors.

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