

Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs*

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ABSTRACT Employees often have ideas, information, and opinions for constructive ways to improve work and work organizations. Sometimes these employees exercise voice and express their ideas, information, and opinions; and other times they engage in silence and withhold their ideas, information, and opinions. On the surface, expressing and withholding behaviours might appear to be polar opposites because silence implies not speaking while voice implies speaking up on important issues and problems in organizations. Challenging this simplistic notion, this paper presents a conceptual framework suggesting that employee silence and voice are best conceptualized as separate, multidimensional constructs. Based on employee motives, we differentiate three types of silence (Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and ProSocial Silence) and three parallel types of voice (Acquiescent Voice, Defensive Voice, and ProSocial Voice) where withholding important information is not simply the absence of voice. Building on this conceptual framework, we further propose that silence and voice have differential consequences to employees in work organizations. Based on fundamental differences in the overt behavioural cues provided by silence and voice, we present a series of propositions predicting that silence is more ambiguous than voice, observers are more likely to misattribute employee motives for silence than for voice, and misattributions for motives behind silence will lead to more incongruent consequences (both positive and negative) for employees (than for voice). We conclude by discussing implications for future research and for managers.

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INTRODUCTION

Silence is golden; The squeaky wheel gets the grease;
The silent treatment; Speak your mind;
The silent feedback; Talk is cheap;
The silent majority; Speak up – tell it like it is.

Behaviourally, silence and voice appear to be polar opposites. Yet, both behaviours are complex and multidimensional in nature, as indicated by the contrasting meanings embedded in the idioms and clichés presented above. Superficial comparison of silence and voice might suggest that intentionally withholding ideas (silence) is the opposite of expressing ideas (voice). The purpose of this paper is to show that employee silence (intentionally withholding ideas, information, and opinions with relevance to improvements in work and work organizations: Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Pinder and Harlos, 2001; Scott, 1993) is not necessarily the anti-thesis or absence of voice (intentionally expressing relevant ideas, information, and opinions about possible improvements: Frese et al., 1999; LePine and Van Dyne, 1998; Rusbult et al., 1988; Van Dyne et al., 1995; Withey and Cooper, 1989; Zhou and George, 2001).

In the first part of the paper, we draw on past research and theory in communication, ethics, social psychology, and management to examine differences in silence and voice and present an initial conceptual framework of silence and voice as separate, multidimensional constructs. We argue that the key feature that differentiates silence and voice is not the presence or absence of speaking up, but the actor's motivation to *withhold versus express ideas, information, and opinions* about work-related improvements. The framework emphasizes three specific employee motives based on existing management literature on silence and voice: disengaged behaviour based on resignation, self-protective behaviour based on fear, and other-oriented behaviour based on cooperation, resulting in three types of silence and three types of voice. We integrate our conceptualization with prior work on silence and voice by incorporating existing constructs into our framework. We extend research by proposing additional categories of silence and voice based on a more fine-grained consideration of the employee motivations behind the behaviour: disengaged behaviour, self-protective behaviour, and other-oriented behaviour.

Current management research characterizes employee silence as either Acquiescent (i.e., disengaged behaviour based on resignation) or Quiescent (i.e., self-protective behaviour based on fear) (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Building on research in other disciplines, we propose that the conceptualization of employee silence can be extended to include ProSocial motives (i.e., silence that is proactive and other-oriented, based on altruism and cooperation). In the case of employee voice, current research typically regards voice and related speaking up types of behaviour such as championing, taking charge, and

issue selling as ProSocial (i.e., speaking up that is constructive and intended to contribute positively to the organization: Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Frese et al., 1999; Graham, 1986; Howell and Higgins, 1990; LePine and Van Dyne, 1998; Morrison and Phelps, 1999; Withey and Cooper, 1989; Zhou and George, 2001). Extending prior work, we propose that employee voice can also reflect motives of disengagement (which we label Acquiescent Voice) or self-protection (which we label Defensive Voice).

In the second part of the paper, we apply the conceptual framework and present propositions predicting the effects of silence and voice on observers and the resulting consequences for employees. Emphasizing fundamental differences in behavioural cues provided by silence and voice, we propose that attributions of employee motives by observers will differ for silence and voice. Applying basic attribution processes and stressing the more ambiguous overt cues provided by silence compared to voice (Johannesen, 1974), we posit that observers will more likely misattribute employee motives for silence compared to voice and that employees will more likely face outcomes that are incongruent with their actual motives (positive and negative incongruence) for engaging in silence compared to voice. In sum, we propose that silence and voice are multi-dimensional and can be differentiated based on overt behavioural cues, observer attributions, and consequences to the employee.

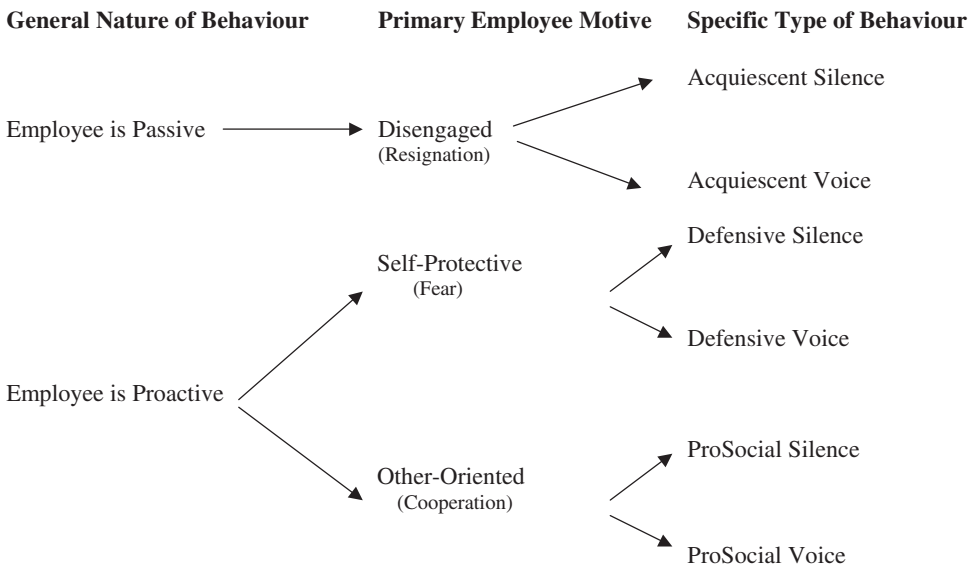
SILENCE AND VOICE – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the first section of the paper, we acknowledge existing conceptualizations of silence and voice and position existing research in a new conceptual framework. We start by clarifying what we mean by silence and voice and by specifying the boundary conditions of our theory building. As our first boundary condition, we focus specifically on purposeful forms of silence and purposeful forms of voice where the focus is on the actor's motivation to *withhold versus express ideas, information, and opinions* about work-related improvements (rather than on the presence or absence of speaking up behaviour). Thus we do not assume that the absence of voice implies the presence of intentional silence. Second, we do not include extreme instances of mindless behaviour that does not involve intentional or conscious decision-making. Rather, we argue that each behaviour we address in this paper represents the conscious and deliberate decision of an employee. Third, we limit our consideration of silence and voice to situations where employees have ideas, information, and opinions about improvements with relevance to their work and/or work organization. Thus our theorizing excludes situations where employees do not have relevant ideas, information, or opinions. For example, sometimes employees are silent because they are uninformed or have no opinion. Fourth, we focus on employee silence and voice behaviours that occur in face-to-face interactions in work organizations. In these settings, supervisors, peers and subordinates

are observers who make attributions regarding employee motives in enacting behaviours of silence and voice in face-to-face interactions. Finally, we suggest that the processes we describe in this paper are most likely to occur when silence or voice is unexpected (Jones and Nisbett, 1972).

As evident by these boundary conditions, we do not intend for our framework to be comprehensive. Instead, we view it as an initial step toward a more refined conceptualization of silence and voice that differentiates types of silence and types of voice – based on employee motives (disengaged, self-protective, and other-oriented). We also emphasize that our framework and categories are purposefully simplified to heighten comparisons. Thus, although we focus on three basic motives drawn from the existing literature (disengaged behaviour, self-protective behaviour, and other-oriented behaviour), we realize that silence and voice can be based on other motives and also often represents a complex amalgam of motives. In sum, we focus on purposeful, individual level employee behaviours that occur in face-to-face interactions in work organizations.

We differentiate six specific behaviours based on three employee motives. Figure 1 depicts our three focal categories of employee motives (disengaged, self-protective, and other-oriented) and the three types of silence (Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and ProSocial Silence) and three parallel types of voice (Acquiescent Voice, Defensive Voice, and ProSocial Voice). Figure 1 also highlights passive versus proactive behaviour; and within the category of proactive behav-



Question 1: Is the employee more passive or more proactive?

Question 2: If proactive, is the employee more self-protective or more other-oriented?

Figure 1. Employee motives as critical characteristics of silence and voice

Table I. Examples of specific types of silence and specific types of voice

<div style="text-align: center;">Type of Behaviour →</div> <div style="text-align: center;">↓ Employee Motive</div>	EMPLOYEE SILENCE: Intentionally withholding work-related ideas, information, and opinions	EMPLOYEE VOICE: Intentionally expressing work-related ideas, information, and opinions
Disengaged Behaviour Based on Resignation Feeling unable to make a difference	ACQUIESCENT SILENCE Examples: Withholding ideas based on resignation Keeping opinions to self due to low self-efficacy to make a difference	ACQUIESCENT VOICE Examples: Expressing supportive ideas based on resignation Agreeing with the group due to low self-efficacy to make a difference
Self-Protective Behaviour Based on Fear Feeling afraid and personally at risk	DEFENSIVE SILENCE Examples: Withholding information on problems based on fear Omitting facts to protect the self	DEFENSIVE VOICE Examples: Expressing ideas that shift attention elsewhere based on fear Proposing ideas that focus on others to protect the self
Other-Oriented Behaviour Based on Cooperation Feeling cooperative and altruistic	PROSOCIAL SILENCE Examples: Withholding confidential information based on cooperation Protecting proprietary knowledge to benefit the organization	PROSOCIAL VOICE Examples: Expressing solutions to problems based on cooperation Suggesting constructive ideas for change to benefit the organization

our: self-protective versus other-oriented behaviour. Thus, although the three forms of silence assume the employee is intentionally withholding relevant ideas, information, and opinions and although the three forms of silence provide the same behavioural indicators (no speech acts), these behaviours can be differentiated based on the extent to which employee motive is more or less passive versus proactive and the extent that proactive behaviour is primarily self-protective versus other-oriented. The case is parallel with voice. Although the three forms of voice assume the employee is expressing relevant ideas, information, and opinions, we argue that these behaviours can be differentiated based on employee motive (more or less passive versus proactive and the extent that proactive behaviour is self-protective or other-oriented). Table I illustrates these concepts with examples and shows similarities and differences in the various forms of silence and voice.

Employee Silence

Employee silence pervades organizations (Johannesen, 1974; Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Pinder and Harlos, 2001; Scott, 1993). Yet the concept is elusive and there is relatively little academic research on employee silence. For example, Morrison and Milliken noted that silence is a powerful force in organizations but that it has not received the rigorous research attention that it deserves. Pinder and Harlos commented that while silence is pervasive, it has generally been neglected

by researchers. Even when silence has been acknowledged, most researchers have assumed that it is a relatively simple, unitary concept. We suggest two general reasons for the little attention given to silence in prior research. First, many view silence as the absence of speech (essentially a non-behaviour). When speech does not occur, the absence of behaviour is not particularly obvious and does not attract attention. Second, and related to this first point, the absence of behaviour is more difficult to study than more overt and more obvious behaviour (Johannesen, 1974). These challenges, however, should not deter researchers from conceptualizing and examining employee silence as an important behaviour that has implications for employee and organizational performance.

Even though there is not a large amount of research on silence in the management literature, two conceptualizations are particularly relevant to our focus on silence as it relates to voice. Pinder and Harlos (2001) defined employee silence as withholding genuine expression about behavioural, cognitive, and/or affective evaluations of organizational circumstances to people who seem capable of changing the situation. These authors differentiated two basic forms of silence: Acquiescent Silence (passive withholding of relevant ideas, based on submission and resignation) and Quiescent Silence (more active withholding of relevant ideas in order to protecting the self, based on fear that consequences of speaking up will be personally unpleasant). In their research, Pinder and Harlos emphasized unjust situations and focused specifically on factors that would cause employees to break the silence and speak up.

Taking a different approach, Morrison and Milliken (2000) defined organizational silence as a collective phenomenon where employees withhold their opinions and concerns about potential organizational problems. They argued that in an organization with a systematic culture of silence, employees do not express their ideas and do not speak the truth due to fear of negative repercussions and due to beliefs that their opinions are not valued. Although these two approaches differ in their level of conceptualization and their particular focus (Pinder and Harlos focus on individual employee silence as a response to injustice; Morrison and Milliken focus on organizational level silence as a response to fear and a culture of silence), both definitions emphasize withholding as the core element of silence. Similarly, both approaches emphasize reasons why employees don't speak up (exercise voice) more often.

Outside of the management literature, two other bodies of research (ethics and communication) are noteworthy in their treatment of silence. Interestingly, these approaches do not focus on silence as the absence of voice. Instead, they emphasize circumstances when silence is valuable and appropriate. Adopting a philosophical and ethical framework, Bok (1983) focused on secrets (intentionally concealing information) and the philosophical and ethical issues associated with conscious decisions to withhold relevant information. Contrasting appropriate concealment (such as trade secrets, professional confidences, insider information,

private data, and secret ballots) with abusive concealment (such as malicious deception, consumer fraud, insider trading, and false advertising), Bok stressed the importance of using personal judgment and moral standards in everyday life for deciding what to express and what to withhold. Also relevant to our focus on silence and voice is the philosophically based work of Nyberg (1993) who argued that telling the truth at all times is not only unrealistic but also impractical. Instead, he proposed that concealing and withholding information (silence) are essential because some measure of concealment is essential to high quality interpersonal relationships. For example, no one wants to know all of another person's thoughts because the sheer volume of inputs would be overwhelming. Similarly, most people would prefer not to know every time that a close friend or family member has a negative or critical thought.

The communication literature also emphasizes positive aspects of silence – viewing it as a critical component of social interaction. For example, Scott (1993) described silence and speaking as two dialectical components of effective communication. Without both silence and voice, effective communication is impossible because no one would be listening. Viewing conversation as a cooperative endeavour, Grice (1989) proposed that effective communication requires four basic judgments of what to communicate and what to withhold (quantity, quality, relevance, and clarity). Similarly emphasizing the judgment required in determining what to express and what to withhold, Turner et al. (1975) argued that honesty is not always the best policy and that instead concealment and deception (withholding or hiding relevant information) are 'mandatory' in everyday conversation. Strauss (1969) argued that social relationships could not exist without hypocrisy and conventional masking or withholding of thoughts and feelings. Finally, the politeness literature and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) stress the value of silence in upholding cultural norms about appropriate versus inappropriate conversation.

In sum, while the existing literature on silence stresses the key role of withholding, we argue that differences in the employee reasons or motives for withholding indicate the benefits of differentiating types of silence (and not combining them into one general construct). Traditional conceptualizations of silence emphasize relatively passive behaviour. All forms of silence, however, do not represent passive behaviour, and all silence is not merely the opposite of voice (Scott, 1993). Instead, as suggested by Pinder and Harlos (2001), silence can be active, conscious, intentional, and purposeful. This is an important point because it highlights the complex and multidimensional nature of silence. Some forms of silence are strategic and proactive – conscious, purposeful, and intentional – such as when employees protect confidential information by withholding it from others. Another example is when employees proactively withhold comments about proprietary company information. Thus, we contrast silence that is intentional but passive (based on resignation) with silence that is intentional and proactive.

In the next three sections, we provide a more detailed description and discussion of three forms of silence, followed by similar descriptions for three parallel forms of voice. Table I summarizes these comparisons.

Acquiescent Silence

When most people label another person's behaviour as 'silent', they often mean the person is not actively communicating. As noted above, however, we limit our conceptualization of silence to situations where employees have relevant ideas, information, and opinions and yet choose not to express these ideas. We do not view silence as the mere absence of voice and instead propose that different forms of silence are driven by different employee motives. Drawing on Pinder and Harlos' (2001) conceptualization, the first form of silence we consider is Acquiescent Silence. We define Acquiescent Silence as withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation. Thus, Acquiescent Silence suggests disengaged behaviour (Kahn, 1990) that is more passive than active.

In developing this notion of silence, we draw from both the management and communication literatures. A classic illustration is Hirschman's (1970) view of neglect as a form of passive behaviour characterized by low levels of involvement. Consistent with this, empirical work on employee neglect in organizations emphasizes silence as a key characteristic of neglect and inaction (Farrell, 1983). Pinder and Harlos (2001) summarized the management literature view of silence as the opposite of voice and a form of inaction that is often interpreted as endorsement or passive acceptance of the status quo. Applying this to our focus on employees who have relevant ideas, information, and opinions, Acquiescent Silence represents those who are fundamentally disengaged. They are resigned to the current situation and are not willing to exert the effort to speak up, get involved, or attempt to change the situation.

Table I illustrates examples of Acquiescent Silence, which describe intentionally passive and uninvolved behaviour. For example, an employee could withhold his/her ideas for change based on the belief that speaking up is pointless and unlikely to make a difference. Alternately, an employee might keep opinions and information to him/her self, based on low self-efficacy assessments about personal capability to influence the situation. In both of these examples, silence is a result of fundamental resignation. When employees believe they don't make a difference, they disengage and are not likely to contribute ideas or suggestions proactively. For example, an employee could withhold comments during a departmental meeting based on an unwillingness to exert the effort to get involved. Finally, Acquiescent Silence could also include intentionally passive behaviour and withholding information based on a feeling of resignation and the sense that meaningful changes are beyond the capabilities of the group.

Defensive Silence

Pinder and Harlos (2001) used the term *Quiescent Silence* to describe deliberate omission based on personal fear of the consequences of speaking up. This is consistent with Morrison and Milliken's (2000) emphasis on the personal emotion of fear as a key motivator of organizational silence. It is also consistent with psychological safety (Edmonson, 1999) and voice opportunity (Avery and Quinones, 2002) as critical preconditions for speaking up in work contexts. Building on the work of Pinder and Harlos/Morrison and Milliken, we define *Defensive Silence* as withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions as a form of self-protection, based on fear. *Defensive Silence* is intentional and proactive behaviour that is intended to protect the self from external threats (Schlenker and Weigold, 1989). In contrast to *Acquiescent Silence*, *Defensive Silence* is more proactive, involving awareness and consideration of alternatives, followed by a conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions as the best personal strategy at the moment. For our framework, we adopt the label *Defensive Silence* to avoid potential confusion with the multiple meanings of quiescence (such as compliance or agreement).

In comparing our conceptualization of *Defensive Silence* with *Acquiescent Silence*, we draw on Pinder and Harlos' distinction between *Acquiescent* and *Quiescent Silence*. While acquiescence connotes passive resignation, quiescence is fundamentally different because it is based on fear of speaking up and fear of the consequences of making suggestions for change. The *Mum Effect* is an example of self-protective silence (Rosen and Tesser, 1979; Tesser and Rosen, 1975). The *Mum Effect* occurs when people refrain from delivering bad news or when they delay delivering bad news to avoid personal discomfort, defensive responses of recipients, or negative personal consequences (i.e., 'kill the messenger'). In these examples, silence is similar to our conceptualization of *Defensive Silence* because it is motivated by active avoidance and self-protective motives.

Table I provides specific examples of *Defensive Silence*. This includes withholding information based on fear that expression of ideas is personally risky. Another example is omitting facts about problems that should be corrected in order to protect the self. This self-protection motive might be based on fear of being held responsible for the problem. Similarly, *Defensive Silence* could include hiding personal mistakes as a form of self-protection.

ProSocial Silence

Thus far, our description of *Acquiescent* and *Defensive Silence* draws on prior management literature on silence (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Pinder and Harlos, 2001). In this section, we now extend existing conceptualizations of silence

by proposing a third type of silence that to our knowledge has not yet been addressed in the literature. Here we focus on ProSocial Silence. In developing this notion, we draw on the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) literature which describes ProSocial forms of employee behaviour (Organ, 1988). We define ProSocial Silence as withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization – based on altruism or cooperative motives. Like organizational citizenship, ProSocial Silence is intentional and proactive behaviour that is primarily focused on others (Korsgaard et al., 1997). Like OCB, ProSocial Silence is discretionary behaviour that can not be mandated by an organization. Like Defensive Silence, ProSocial Silence is based on awareness and consideration of alternatives and the conscious decision to withhold ideas, information, and opinions. In contrast to Defensive Silence, ProSocial Silence is motivated by concern for others, rather than by fear of negative personal consequences that might occur from speaking up.

In their comprehensive review of the OCB literature, Podsakoff et al. (2000) identified seven dimensions of OCB. Of these, Sportsmanship has direct relevance to ProSocial Silence. Sportsmanship is defined as the ProSocial absence of complaints; tolerating the inevitable inconveniences and impositions of work without whining and grievances (Organ, 1988). We suggest that this absence of complaints (withholding) is a form of silence. Since it is ProSocial, it is other-oriented. Thus the lack of complaints (silence) represents a shift away from immediate personal interests with the explicit other-oriented objective of showing patience and courtesy to others (Kowalski, 1996). Although, as noted by Podsakoff and colleagues, Sportsmanship has not received a lot of research attention, results suggest that it is a distinct construct with antecedents that differ from those of other forms of OCB (Podsakoff et al., 1996).

Table I provides specific examples of ProSocial Silence. For example, an employee could show cooperation and other-oriented behaviour by protecting proprietary knowledge for the benefit of the organization. Similarly, ProSocial Silence could include withholding information because it is confidential and not meant for general discussion or distribution. An employee could have an opinion about an impending corporate decision and not be in a position to discuss this opinion with others. A final example is protecting confidential and private information – such as not revealing insider information to outsiders, not communicating personal information about others inappropriately, and not breaking confidences. In each of these examples, the employee proactively and intentionally must decide not to reveal specific ideas, information, or opinions, based on concern for the organization and with the motive of benefiting the organization.

Having described the three types of silence in our framework (Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and ProSocial Silence), we now move on to a discussion of three parallel types of voice (Acquiescent Voice, Defensive Voice, and ProSocial Voice).

Employee Voice

Like silence, voice is pervasive in organizations. Unlike silence, voice has attracted more academic scrutiny. The management literature contains two major conceptualizations of voice. The first approach uses the term voice to describe speaking up behaviour such as when employees proactively make suggestions for change (Farrell and Rusbult, 1992; Frese et al., 1999; LePine and Van Dyne, 1998; Rusbult et al., 1988; Van Dyne et al., 1995; Withey and Cooper, 1989; Zhou and George, 2001). The second uses the term voice to describe the presence of due process procedures that enhance justice judgments and facilitate employee participation in decision making (Bies and Shapiro, 1988; Folger, 1977; Lind et al., 1990). Although both definitions of voice have merit and address important managerial issues, we focus in this paper on the first conceptualization (voice as an employee behaviour rather than an organizational process) since our interest is in comparing and contrasting silence and voice as two important employee behaviours.

In reviewing the literature on voice as employee behaviour, we make two primary observations that suggest the importance of developing a more fine-grained conceptualization of voice. First, the literature contains a variety of terms to describe employee voice behaviours. Perhaps best known is the voice work that is part of the EVLN (exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect) framework (Farrell, 1983; Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult et al., 1988; Withey and Cooper, 1989). Additionally, there is a growing amount of research that focuses specifically on voice (proactive and constructively intended speaking up behaviour) outside of the EVLN framework (Avery and Quinones, 2002; LePine and Van Dyne, 1998; Van Dyne et al., 1995; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998; Zhou and George, 2001).

In addition to this research that uses the specific voice label, there are a number of other voice-like conceptualizations in the literature that emphasize speaking up and making suggestions. Civic Virtue, a form of Organizational Citizenship, includes suggesting modifications in policies and speaking up about issues for the benefit of the organization (Graham, 1991; Organ, 1988; Robinson, 1996; Robinson and Morrison, 1995). Another similar construct is Advocacy Participation which Van Dyne et al. (1994) defined as constructive and proactive voice such as expressing high standards, challenging others, and making suggestions for change. Consistent with this positive, change-oriented focus, George and Brief (1992), Zhou and George (2001) and Frese et al. (1999) focused on Constructive Suggestions (actively proposing ways to improve individual, group, or organizational functioning). Championing, Taking Charge, and Issue Selling are also other relevant prosocial behaviours involving speaking up that is intended to benefit the larger collective (Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Howell and Higgins, 1990; Morrison and Phelps, 1999). Finally, Parker (1993) used the term Reformist Dissent to describe proactive expression of disagreement that occurs within the parameters of organizational rules and norms. In sum, these constructs, although not explicitly

labelled 'voice', refer to verbal expression of ideas, information, and opinions with the positive motive of making cooperative contributions to the organization. Thus they are proactive, positive, and other-oriented.

Our second observation is based on the empirical literature which generally indicates that measuring and predicting voice is elusive. We suggest that this may be because voice is a multi-dimensional construct and yet empirical research has focused on more general forms of voice as a unitary concept. For example, Withey and Cooper (1989) observed that of the four behaviours in the extended version of Hirschman's (1970) model of responses to dissatisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1988), voice was the most difficult to predict. In commenting on this, Withey and Cooper speculated that different types of voice may have been combined into one construct and thus confounded prior research. Similarly, Rusbult and colleagues (1988) emphasized the complexity of voice. In discussing their results, they observed that their main effect predictions of voice were relatively weak and that the high personal costs associated with voice may require more complex conceptualizations. To date, we are unaware of any empirical research that differentiates types of employee voice behaviour. Thus, our voice framework can be viewed as a response to the Withey and Cooper suggestion for more fine-grained conceptualizations of employee voice with the goal of facilitating more focused empirical work on voice.

In summary, the term voice has been used in the literature to represent the intentional expression of work-related ideas, information, and opinions. Following the three part framework we have presented on silence, we suggest that a more precise conceptualization of voice is now needed and should enhance researchers' ability to differentiate forms of voice and conduct more refined empirical analyses. Returning to the framework illustrated in Table I, the next section describes three specific types of voice (ProSocial Voice, Defensive Voice, and Acquiescent Voice), based on the same three motives we considered in our treatment of employee silence (other-oriented based on cooperation, self-protective based on fear, disengaged based on resignation). We start by build on the existing Organizational Citizenship Behaviour literature to discuss ProSocial Voice (Robinson, 1996; Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998; Van Dyne et al., 1995) and then extend prior conceptualizations of voice by proposing Defensive Voice and Acquiescent Voice as overlooked, but important forms of voice.

ProSocial Voice

The majority of the literature on voice positions it as positively-intended behaviour. To differentiate this other-oriented form of voice from self-protective voice and from disengaged voice, we use the term ProSocial Voice. Framing voice as a form of OCB, LePine and Van Dyne (1998) defined voice as non-required behaviour that emphasizes expression of change-oriented comments with a motive to improve rather than merely criticize the situation. More specifically, we define

ProSocial Voice as expressing work-related ideas, information, or opinions based on cooperative motives. Thus, this particular type of voice behaviour is intentional, proactive, and other-oriented. Its primary focus is to benefit others, such as the organization.

ProSocial Voice is similar to ProSocial Silence because it is proactive, intentional, and requires effort. It is discretionary behaviour that can not be required by an organization. In fact, according to Organ (1988), speaking up and making suggestions for change may be one of the more noble forms of Organizational Citizenship because it involves personal risk. This is because many employees in organizations (especially those with power) are comfortable with things the way they are and prefer to maintain the status quo (Nemeth and Staw, 1989). Thus, ProSocial Voice is not necessarily perceived positively by all observers.

Table I provides specific examples of ProSocial Voice. This includes expressing solutions to problems so that others in the group or organization can benefit. It also includes creative suggestion of alternatives and ideas for change, such as when the group encounters problems with a project. These proactive expressions of voice are other-oriented and not intended primarily to benefit the self. Thus they are cooperative in orientation.

Defensive Voice

Our conceptualization of ProSocial Voice was drawn from existing literature on voice as a form of Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. We now extend the conceptualization of voice by proposing two additional types of voice that, to our knowledge, have not yet been considered in the literature. We derive these conceptualizations of voice by applying Morrison and Milliken's (2000) distinction between silence based on fear (Acquiescent Silence) and silence based on feeling unable to make a difference (Defensive Silence) to parallel forms of Voice (Acquiescent Voice and Defensive Voice). We note that this contrast between behaviour based on resignation and behaviour based on fear is consistent with the distinction between Acquiescent Silence and Quiescent Silence proposed by Pinder and Harlos (2001). In sum, we suggest that extending conceptualizations of voice to include voice based on the motives of disengaged resignation and self-protective responses to fear will enrich our ability to differentiate types of voice and enhance our ability to do empirical work on the previously elusive concept of voice. First we consider voice that is based on fear and then shift to voice that is based on self-protection.

Motive is the key characteristic that differentiates Defensive Voice from ProSocial Voice. ProSocial Voice is other-oriented and based on cooperative motives such as altruism. In contrast, Defensive Voice is self-protective. Schlenker and Weigold (1989) define self-protective behaviour as characterized by safe, secure decisions; taking less personal responsibility; and attributing outcomes to external factors. Thus, if employees fear punitive consequences as a result of discussing

problems, they will typically react by engaging in defensive behaviours intended to protect the self (Maurer, 1996). This could include assertive responses such as trying to shift attention and blame to others through the use of Defensive Voice. Similarly, Arkin and Shepperd (1989) identify excuses, justifications, and disclaimers as self-protective strategies where voice is used as a response to feeling threatened. Thus, voice can be used to protect the self through a variety of defensive communications (such as proposing ideas that focus on other topics or shifting attention to other people). The key unifying characteristic behind these behaviours is their orientation toward protecting the self from feared and undesired consequences (Jones and Pittman, 1982; Ryan and Oestreich, 1991). Applying these characteristics to voice, we define Defensive Voice as expressing work-related ideas, information or opinions – based on fear – with the goal of protecting the self.

In addition to using the management literature on silence as a basis for considering defensive forms of voice, we also draw on the communication literature. Two different communication perspectives emphasize the importance of managing what is communicated to others. Information manipulation theory (McCornack, 1992) proposes that individuals regularly manipulate information contained in their communications on four dimensions (amount, veracity, relevance, and clarity). The goal behind these decisions about what to include in expression of voice is presenting positive aspects of self-relevant information, sometimes in response to feelings of fear, in order to influence the attributions made by others. Similarly, Turner and colleagues (1975) emphasized the importance of information control during verbal communication. They discuss a variety of techniques including half-truths, diversionary responses, distortion, exaggeration, and outright lies as intentional techniques people use to control information in a manner that protects the self.

Table I illustrates examples of Defensive Voice. Overall, these examples convey the impression of self-protective behaviour. For example, an employee could emphasize positive features of a product and divert attention away from problems so that customers are unaware of flaws in the person's work. An employee could proactively communicate an unrealistic delivery date for a rush shipment, knowing that other areas would be held responsible for the late delivery. Finally, Defensive Voice also includes situations where employees emphasize explanations, accounts or excuses that take credit for accomplishments and blame others for problems with the work.

Acquiescent Voice

We now focus on our third and last form of voice: Acquiescent Voice. Again, we draw on the motives for silence that have been stressed to date in the management literature and apply them to voice. Above we focused on self-protective voice motivated by fear and now we focus on disengaged voice based on resignation. We label this Acquiescent Voice (see Table I). Thus, Acquiescent Voice is the verbal

expression of work-related ideas, information, or opinions – based on feelings of resignation. Acquiescent Voice is disengaged behaviour that is based on feeling unable to make a difference. Thus it results in expressions of agreement and support based on low self-efficacy to affect any meaningful change (i.e., low voice instrumentality: Avery and Quinones, 2002). Like ProSocial Voice and Defensive Voice, Acquiescent Voice is based on intentional expression of ideas, information, and opinions that are relevant to the work. Acquiescent Voice differs, however, because it is a less proactive behaviour. We draw from the management and social psychology literatures to illustrate this behaviour with two examples (Abilene Paradox and Pluralistic Ignorance).

The Abilene Paradox (Harvey, 1988) describes situations where people communicate agreement (conformity) and do not take the time or make the effort to communicate their own ideas. In the classic Abilene Paradox example, no one really wanted to drive 53 miles to Abilene (in an unair-conditioned car, to eat greasy food, in a bad cafeteria), but no one spoke up and admitted that they didn't want to go. Later when they returned from this unpleasant experience, each hot and frustrated person tried to blame others for the trip. Since no one really wanted to go, no single person was responsible and no one individual could be blamed. Instead, each person's acquiescence and failure to communicate accurately caused the group to do something that no one wanted to do. Other examples include saying 'that's fine with me' (to avoid having to take the time required to develop a better alternative) or saying 'whatever you think' (to avoid responsibility for fixing a problem). A second example with relevance to Acquiescent Voice is Pluralistic Ignorance (Isenberg, 1980). Although pluralistic ignorance was initially conceptualized at the group level, the idea has similarities to what we label Acquiescent Voice. Pluralistic Ignorance occurs when each person assumes that their own perspective is the only one that differs and so they express agreement with others. In reality, no one agrees with the position on the table and so the group's position becomes increasingly extreme but is at odds with the views of most members. Pluralistic Ignorance is like Acquiescent Voice because individuals express agreement rather than their own thoughts, others remain ignorant, and the group makes decisions based on erroneous assumptions and information.

Table I provides specific examples of Acquiescent Voice. This includes expressing support for a project (despite personal doubts) based on feelings that past suggestions for change and recommendations to consider new approaches were ignored. Thus the primary motive driving this form of voice is one of resignation. Another example is automatically supporting management proposals, even when employees have relevant knowledge and expertise indicating problems with the approach. Finally, employees could go along with the group based on feelings of low self-efficacy for voice and feeling unable to make a difference in outcomes.

To summarize, we have proposed and described three different types of silence (Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and ProSocial Silence) and three parallel

types of voice (Acquiescent Voice, Defensive Voice, and ProSocial Voice). As presented in Figure 1, these behaviours differ in two primary ways. First is the extent to which the employee is more passive versus more proactive. Second, we further delineated proactive behaviours based on self-protective versus other-oriented motives. Thus, the framework proposes parallel forms of silence and voice based on three general categories of employee motives (disengaged; self-protective, other-oriented). Overall, we conclude that even though silence and voice may appear to be polar opposites at the behavioural level, each is a separate, multidimensional construct when we look more closely at employee motive.

CONSEQUENCES OF SILENCE AND VOICE TO EMPLOYEES

In this second section of the paper, we build on the differences in the conceptual framework to develop propositions on the accuracy of observer attributions for motives behind employee silence and employee voice. We also posit differential consequences to employees arising from observer accurate attributions or misattributions of employee motives for silence and voice.

Observer Attributions of Employee Motive for Silence and Voice

The framework presented in the previous section proposes that silence and voice can be differentiated by employee motives (disengaged, self-protective, or other-oriented). Extending this, we now suggest that when studying employee silence and voice at the workplace, it is not sufficient to focus attention solely on the employee's perspective (Jones and Nisbett, 1972). Rather, we must also consider motives as *perceived and attributed* by observers (peers, supervisors, or subordinates) because employee behaviours at work are regularly interpreted by co-workers, supervisors, and subordinates. Therefore, it is critical that we focus on observer attributions (specifically inferences about employee motives for silence and voice) since attribution theory suggests that observer reactions (such as rewards and punishments at work) are influenced by imputed motives.

Attribution theory suggests that people possess an inherent tendency to search for causes of observed behaviours, either their own or of others. Initially proposed by Heider (1958) and later extended by Jones and Davis (1965) and Kelly (1972), attribution theory emphasizes the active role observers take in drawing inferences, assigning meanings, and inferring underlying motive behind observed behaviours. Attribution theory also highlights the importance that inferred attributions of motives have in influencing observer reactions to actor behaviour. For example, if supervisors or peers attribute another employee's motive as based on other-oriented cooperation, they will judge the observed silence or voice more favourably than if they attribute disengaged or self-protective motives.

Figure 2 depicts a model of consequences to employees for engaging in silence and voice based on ambiguity of behavioural cues and observer attributions. The

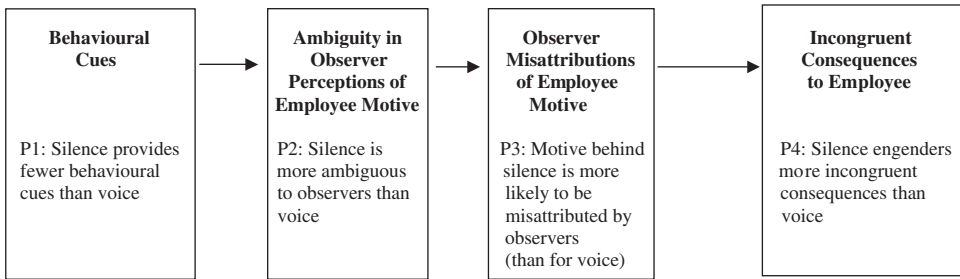


Figure 2. Behavioural cues, ambiguity, attributions, and consequences to employees of silence and voice

model includes three key relationships. First, the model stresses that employee silence and voice provide different behavioural cues to observers based on the presence or absence of speech cues. Second, the model highlights the effects of behavioural cues on observer perceptions of ambiguity of employee motives and subsequent attributions and misattributions of employee motives. The third part of the model examines the consequences to employees resulting from observer reactions. Here we consider the extent to which consequences are congruent versus incongruent with employee motives. In the sections below, we elaborate on this model and present propositions for each set of relationships.

Behavioural Cues Inherent in Employee Silence and Voice

Although both silence and voice can be associated with a rich array of non-verbal cues, the most fundamental behavioural difference between silence and voice is the relative amount of overt behavioural cues provided by the two behaviours. According to Sarafino (1996), overt behavioural cues are different from covert cues because overt cues refer to external actions amenable to observation; they can be described and recorded by the actor *as well as* by observers. In essence then, overt cues are what people say and do. Verbal and non-verbal (motor) behaviours represent the two most basic forms of overt behaviours. Verbal behaviour requires language and speech acts while motor or non-verbal behaviour involves kinesics or body movement. In contrast, covert behaviours such as thoughts and feelings are not visible to observers. Accordingly, observers typically rely on overt behavioural cues for making attributions and inferences about covert thoughts and feelings of employees, such as motives.

In terms of overt cues, the most obvious difference between silence and voice is the presence of overt speech acts in voice. When someone articulates ideas, information, and opinions, they provide a richer manifestation of behavioural cues to observers (compared to silence). For example, when an employee speaks up, observers such as supervisors, peers, and subordinates can pick up the message content (words) as well as a variety of subtle speech cues (such as lexical diversity tone of voice, rate of speaking, variety of inflection, overall loudness: Giles and

Street 1994; Smith and Shafer 1995; Street and Brady 1982; Street et al., 1983). Thus, the message content of the suggestion together with speech cues convey information about employee motives, affect, and cognitions.

When speaking up, employees also project various overt non-verbal behaviours. Non-verbal cues associated with speech acts serve as back-channels. They occur at the same point in time as specific message content and reinforce key points (Brunner, 1979). The three most common forms of non-verbals or back-channels include gestures (Ricci Bitti and Poggi, 1991), gaze direction (Kleinke, 1986), and facial expressions (that co-occur with speech acts). Therefore, in addition to the message delivered in a speech act and the subtle speech cues (such as tone and pace), voice also allows back-channel communication (body language) that provides observers with an additional channel of overt cues they can use in sense making and in the attribution process. Finally, voice also allows observers to make inferences based on general employee body language (not necessarily associated with specific words in the message).

In contrast to voice, silence (withholding relevant ideas, information, and opinions) provides relatively fewer overt cues for observers to use in inferring motives. When an employee is silent, observers do not have access to speech acts, subtle speech cues, or back-channel communication cues. Undoubtedly, observers have access to overt, non-verbal cues associated with silence such as discernible facial expressions, hand gestures, or other bodily movements. In fact, research on non-verbal communication and body language shows that non-verbal cues can be very rich in information (Mullen et al., 1986). Moreover, because non-verbal behaviours are often difficult to suppress, observers may be able to rely on non-verbal cues to make inferences and attributions of the target (DePaulo, 1992). Nevertheless, we argue that compared to employees who express ideas, information, and opinions verbally, intentionally silent employees may also self-regulate their non-verbal behaviours and may convey a relatively more stoic demeanour such that facial expressions, hand gestures, and other movements may not vary noticeably during the course of an interaction (Rinn, 1984; Siegman and Reynolds, 1983). In sum, we propose that employee silence offers fewer inherent and overt cues (than voice) for observers to use in inferring employee motive.

Proposition 1: Employee silence provides fewer overt behavioural cues to observers than employee voice.

Ambiguity in Attributing Employee Motive

As a direct result of the absence of speech acts for employee silence (no words, speech cues, or back-channel communication), we further posit that observers will find the cognitive task of attributing employee motives for silence more ambiguous than for voice. Salazar (1996) defined ambiguity as the level of equivocality

or the number of alternative explanations for an event or behaviour. We focus on ambiguity as the equivocality in observer attributions for employee motive based on the behavioural cues provided by employee silence and voice.

We note that silence and voice both contain elements of ambiguity and that there is equivocality for observers in interpreting both behaviours. For example, Bavelas et al. (1990) and Eisenberg (1984) stressed the ambiguity in verbal communication and argued that under some circumstances, actors strategically evoke ambiguity to produce better and more effective communication. In comparing silence and voice, however, we argue that there generally is less ambiguity in attributing employee motive for voice because the overt cues of speech acts (message content, speech cues, back-channel communication) and the overt cues of non-verbal behaviour provide observers with more cues from multiple channels. These overt cues offer observers a variety of information to use in assessing the underlying motives behind employee use of voice behaviour.

In contrast, when employees remain silent, the primary overt cues available for observers to use in making their inferences or attributions about employee motive are non-verbal. According to DePaulo and Friedman (1998), nonverbal cues are more difficult to interpret in general and therefore more ambiguous for two reasons. First, people are often unaware of their nonverbal behaviour. As a result, nonverbal behaviour can be inconsistent with actor motives. For example, an employee could be sitting silently in a meeting and frowning fiercely. Although the employee might be unaware of the frown, an observer might interpret the combination of a frown and silence as disagreement with the content of the group discussion. In reality, the employee might be supportive of the issue, but frowning due to a headache. Second, nonverbal behaviour often evokes several possible interpretations or multiple meanings and is therefore ambiguous (Salazar, 1996). For example, an employee might react to a manager's request by smiling and sitting silently. Perhaps the smile connotes a positive response to the assignment or perhaps the smile connotes general discomfort and deference to the manager's power (Ekman et al., 1988). In sum, we propose that (compared with voice), silence conveys fewer overt cues (no words, no speech cues, and no corresponding back-channel non-verbals). Instead, silence provides only non-verbal behaviour for observers to use in their interpretations. As a result, employee motive is more ambiguous to observers for silence than for voice. Accordingly, we propose that:

Proposition 2: Observers will experience greater ambiguity in attributing employee motive for silence than for voice.

Accuracy of Observer Attributions

In assessing the degree of accuracy in observer attributions for motive behind employee silence and voice, it is important to understand how observers cogni-

tively identify, narrow, and determine motives of those they are observing. According to Jones and Davis's (1965) theory of correspondent inferences and Kelly's (1972) theory of covariation principle, the key ingredient for accurate attribution of actor motive is the presence of clear, overt behavioural cues that allow observers to identify a single unique, distinctive, and non-common effect corresponding to the behaviour. Thus, if observers can discern only one or a very few unique, non-common effects to an actor's behaviour, then they are more likely to attribute actor motives accurately than if they can discern many unique, non-common effects to the behaviour (see Gilbert, 1998).

Recall that in Proposition 2, we argued that observers will experience greater ambiguity in attributing motive for employee silence than for voice because silence provides fewer overt behavioural cues and these cues seem more subtle and more ambiguous to observers than those of voice. For example, lacking a range of overt behavioural cues, peers might infer that co-worker silence connotes disagreement, when in fact it represents agreement. Building on the logic in Proposition 2 and based on the theory of correspondent inference and the covariation principle of inferring motives, we expect observers to experience more difficulty in pinpointing unique, non-common effects for silence than for voice. Therefore, they are more likely to misunderstand silence and misattribute employee motives for withholding ideas, information, and opinions. Similarly, supervisors might infer that subordinate silence indicates disengaged behaviour when in actuality the employee is thinking deeply about solutions to a work problem. In both of these cases, verbal communication would have provided more overt behavioural cues, making employee agreement and problem solving efforts clearer to observers. Accordingly, we posit that observers will find it more difficult to attribute employee motives accurately when assessing silence than voice.

Proposition 3: Observers will be more likely to misattribute motive when assessing employee silence than employee voice.

Employee Consequences Resulting from Observer Attributions and Misattributions

In the previous three propositions, we contrasted silence and voice based on their behavioural cues, the ambiguity experienced by observers in attributing employee motives, and the likelihood of misattribution for employee motive. In the next section, we focus on the consequences to employees as a result of these attributions for the employee motive behind silence and voice. More specifically, we consider the consequences of accurate attributions (i.e., observer attributions of employee motives are the same as employee actual motives) and inaccurate attributions or misattributions (i.e., observer attributions for employee motives are different from employee actual motives).

Table II. Consequences to employees based on observer attributions and misattributions

		Observer Attributions of Employee Motives		
		Disengaged	Self-Protective	Other-Oriented
Actual Employee Motives	Disengaged	Accurate Attribution	Misattribution	Misattribution
		[1,1]	[1,2]	[1,3]
		Misattribution	Accurate Attribution	Misattribution
	Self-Protective	[2,1]	[2,2]	[2,3]
		Misattribution	Misattribution	Accurate Attribution
		[3,1]	[3,2]	[3,3]
	Other-Oriented			

Note: For accurate attributions, consequences to the employee will be congruent with employee motive.
For misattributions, consequences to the employee will be incongruent with employee motive.

To understand potential consequences more completely, we map personal consequences to employees based on the possible combinations of employee motives and observer attributions in our framework. The matrix in Table II crosses three actor motives (disengaged, self-protective, and other-oriented) with three observer attributions for actor motives (disengaged, self-protective, and other-oriented). This results in nine combinations, with each cell identified uniquely by standard matrix format of $[x,y]$ where x represents row number and y represents column number. As elaborated below, we suggest that accurate attributions will lead to employee consequences that are generally congruent with employee behaviour and that misattributions will lead to employee consequences that are incongruent with employee behaviour.

Accurate Attributions (where x equals y)

The three cells on the diagonal where $x = y$ (i.e., cells [1,1], [2,2], and [3,3]) represent accurate attributions where observer attributions for employee motive are congruent with employee motives. In these instances, observer views of employee motives (imputed motives) are the same as employee actual motives. Thus, for example, if an employee intends for a specific instance of silence to be other-oriented, the observer (a supervisor, peer, or subordinate in typical work contexts) also infers other-oriented motives. Moving down the diagonal to the middle cell in the matrix [2,2], we again have accurate observer attributions of motive. The difference between the first cell and this cell is the nature of the motive (self-protective in [2,2] and disengaged in [1,1]). The final cell on the diagonal [3,3] also depicts accurate attributions (other-oriented behaviour is viewed as other-oriented).

Misattributions (where x is not equal to y)

The remaining six cells in Table II represent examples of misattributions. In these cases, observer views of employee motives are different from employee actual motives. In two cases, (cells [3,1] and [3,2]), observers interpret employee motive more negatively than employee intent. For example, cell [3,1] indicates an other-oriented employee motive that observers perceived as disengaged. In [3,2], an employee could withhold information because it is confidential (ProSocial Silence), and yet an observer might infer that the employee is withholding information out of fear (Defensive Silence). Similarly, an employee might express concerns about a production issue with the goal of alerting management to a potential problem (ProSocial Voice), but observers might infer that the employee is simply trying to focus on other people's problems (Defensive Voice).

In two other cases of misattribution (cells [1,3] and [2,3]), observers interpret employee motive more positively than employee intent. For example, cell [1,3] shows an employee motive of disengaged behaviour that is perceived by observers as other-oriented. Cell [2,3] shows observers imputing silence or voice as based on other-orientation motives, when in reality the behaviour is based on fear. For example, an employee might withhold information about an error based on fear of being criticized (Defensive Silence that is self-protective) or an employee might communicate information about a product problem that shifts attention to another employee's area of responsibility to avoid being held responsible (Defensive Voice). In each of these instances, employee motive is misunderstood by observers. The remaining two cases (cells [2,1] and [1,2]) also represent examples of misattribution. In these cells, self-protective and disengaged motives are misinterpreted by observers.

In sum, we have described three types of accurate attributions and six types of misattributions based on the match or mismatch between employee motives and observer judgments about the motive behind the behaviour (disengaged, self-protective, or other-oriented). In the next section, we discuss the consequences of accurate attributions versus misattributions.

Nature of Employee Consequences

We now focus on the link between observer attributions and consequences to employees for engaging in silence and voice. For the three cells on the diagonal ([1,1], [2,2], and [3,3]) that represent accurate attributions, we predict that consequences will be generally congruent with the employee motives. When attributions are accurate, we expect consequences that observers can influence (feedback, performance ratings, recognition, promotions, demotions, etc.) will be consistent with the employee motive. For example, if an employee is silent based on other-orientation in order to protect confidential information and the supervi-

sor accurately assesses this motive, consequences to this employee (i.e., positive feedback or a favourable impression) will correspond to the employee's underlying motive. At the same time, we do not mean to imply that accurate attributions will lead to positive consequences. For example, cell [1,1] denotes accurate attributions where an employee is disengaged and perceived as disengaged. To the extent that disengaged behaviour seems inappropriate to observers, consequences to the employee will be more negative than positive. Our point is that accurate attributions are less likely to generate incongruent and unexpected consequences to the employee.

In contrast, we argue that when observers misattribute employee motives (the cells that are not on the diagonal), employee behaviours are more likely to be misunderstood, such that there is a mismatch between motive and outcomes received. This difference could be positive or negative based on the type of mismatch. For example, when an employee is disengaged but viewed as other-oriented, misattributions could lead to too positive feedback and expectations for future other-oriented behaviour. Similarly, if an employee is other-oriented and the supervisor makes a misattribution and assesses the employee motive as disengaged, feedback and other consequences will be overly negative and incongruent with the employee's underlying motive and behaviour.

When feedback or rewards are incongruent with employee motives, this has implications for employee motivation. For example, if a supervisor misunderstands ProSocial Voice and instead thinks the employee is simply complaining, the supervisor might question whether the employee is a team player, give negative feedback, or not consider the employee for promotion and additional responsibilities. Over time, mismatches between employee motives and observer evaluations will lead to unpredictable feedback, poor quality relationships, and low trust. In sum, we suggest that when observer attributions are accurate, outcomes are generally consistent with employee motives. In contrast, when observers misattribute employee motives, we expect a mismatch that is confusing to employees and to supervisors.

Returning to Table II, we now integrate these ideas about accurate attributions and misattributions with our primary interest in employee silence and employee voice. In Proposition 4, we posit that employees will experience more incongruent consequences for silence (see cells [1,2], [1,3], [2,3], [2,1], [3,1], [3,2] in Table II) than voice (see cells [1,1], [2,2], and [3,3]). Recall that in Proposition 3, we predicted observers would be more likely to misattribute employee motives for silence than for voice. Applied to Table II, we expect that employee outcomes associated with silence are thus likely to fall on the off-diagonal (incongruent cells) rather than on the diagonal (congruent cells), since there is a greater likelihood of misattribution of employee motive (greater incongruence) for silence than for voice. Conversely, we expect that employee outcomes for voice are more likely to fall on the diagonal rather than on the off-diagonal, since accurate attributions of motive are

more likely for voice than for silence. Thus, since we predicted in Proposition 3 that silence will engender more misattribution than accurate attribution, we also predict that employees will experience greater incongruence in consequences (mismatch between motives and outcomes) for silence than for voice. Accordingly:

Proposition 4: Silence engenders more incongruent consequences than voice.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have argued that employee silence is not the opposite of employee voice because some forms of silence represent intentional withholding of ideas, information, and opinions. Instead, we have developed a framework that suggests silence and voice are best conceptualized as separate, multidimensional constructs. Drawing from and extending prior literature, the conceptual framework emphasizes three specific employee motives (disengaged behaviour based on resignation, self-protective behaviour based on fear, and other-oriented behaviour based on cooperation), three types of employee silence (Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and ProSocial Silence) and three parallel types of voice (Acquiescent Voice, Defensive Voice, and ProSocial Voice). Building on the conceptual framework and fundamental differences in the overt behavioural cues provided by silence and voice, we also presented a model and developed a corresponding series of propositions for observer attributions and the consequences to employees for engaging in silence versus voice. As we discuss below, the conceptual framework of employee silence and voice and the proposed model of observer attributions and employee consequences suggest interesting and important implications for theory, research, and practice.

Assumptions and Limitations of Paper

As with all research, we made a number of assumptions and therefore limited the scope and comprehensiveness of our framework and model. First, we focused on three specific motives, based on prior management literature on silence and voice. We recognize that other motives can also lead to silence and voice. Accordingly, we recommend that future research expand upon this initial framework by addressing other types of silence and voice based on other motives (such as ignorance, confusion, cynicism, anxiety, self-enhancement, anger, jealousy, retribution, and revenge). We also acknowledge that, in reality, silence and voice are complex behaviours that are typically based on mixed motives. In this initial framework, we focused on extreme cases where motives represent ideal types. Future research can relax these assumptions and consider more complex models that incorporate mixed motives.

Second, our model in Figure 2 is unavoidably incomplete. We did not include all factors that influence silence, voice, attributions, and consequences to em-

ployees. For example, we did not include individual differences such as self-esteem, need for achievement, need for power, introversion, or communication apprehension which most likely have direct effects on the occurrence of silence and voice. We also did not include the nature, content or valence of information to be conveyed. For example, we expect that decisions to express or withhold relevant information are influenced by whether the news is positive or negative. Another key factor is the type or form of communication between the actor and observers. In this paper, we focused on employee silence and voice in face-to-face interactions in work organizations. In these settings, supervisors, peers and subordinates are observers who make attributions regarding employee motives in enacting behaviours of silence and voice. Other forms of communication such as telephone, e-mail, fax, and written documents may have other implications for silence and voice. Given that media vary in their capacity to convey information and can be arrayed along a 'media richness' continuum (Daft and Lengel, 1984, 1986; Trevino et al., 1990), we would expect media type or communication form to influence silence, voice, attributions, and consequences to employees.

We also acknowledge that moderated relationships could be added to the model such as characteristics of the employee (e.g., individual differences in knowledge, skills, abilities, personality, as well as prior interactions with observer) and the observer (e.g., individual differences in knowledge, skills, abilities, personality, and prior interactions with the employee). Other important potential influences are contextual norms and organizational culture which could moderate the relationships theorized in this paper. An example of a contextual norm is the presence of voice mechanisms such as union participation, problem-solving groups, and self-directed teams in the workplace that can directly influence involvement, participation, and withdrawal as well as silence and voice (e.g., see Batt et al., 2002).

Finally, we did not explicitly include feedback loops or reciprocal effects and did not consider the more long-term consequences of silence and voice. A comprehensive discussion of these factors is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, we hold them constant to enhance focus on the core concepts of our arguments. In sum, our approach is not comprehensive but instead aims to provide an initial framework that can guide future research on silence and voice in work contexts.

Implications for Theory and Research

Given the increasing interest in silence and voice in organizational contexts, it is important for researchers to enrich our understanding of the similarities and differences in these concepts. Accordingly, the conceptual framework in this paper has a number of important research implications.

First, the framework, with its emphasis on employee motives, should help researchers avoid unintentionally assuming that silence and voice are polar opposites. It should also reduce unintentional confounding of constructs, allow more

precise specification and testing of the nomological networks for specific types of silence and voice, and facilitate comparisons of different types of silence and different types of voice. For example, Pinder and Harlos (2001) contrasted acquiescence and quiescence silence, and Morrison and Milliken (2000) compared silence and voice at the organizational level. We suggest that this past research can be viewed in terms of the framework in this paper. In addition, future research on silence could build on Pinder and Harlos' focus on acquiescent and quiescent silence by also including ProSocial Silence. Similarly, research could extend the implicit comparison in the Morrison and Milliken paper between Defensive Silence (withholding based primarily on fear) and ProSocial Voice (expression based primarily on altruism and cooperation). Relating this prior work to the other types of silence and voice included in our framework suggests the benefit of future research that considers other comparisons between silence and voice. This could include parallel comparisons such as Defensive Silence and Defensive Voice or ProSocial Silence and ProSocial Voice or non-parallel comparisons such as ProSocial Silence and Defensive Voice or Defensive Silence and ProSocial Voice. It also should enhance comparisons of different types of silence (or voice). In sum, the framework should allow researchers to study specific forms of silence and voice in a manner that acknowledges their multidimensional nature and does not imply that high silence represents low voice.

Second, the framework highlights areas where additional research on specific types of silence and voice would increase our understanding of these concepts. The framework integrates existing as well as new types of silence and voice. By identifying specific types of behaviour that have not been a primary focus of prior research, we hope to stimulate future research on these under-researched forms of silence and voice. Specifically, we introduced the idea of *ProSocial Silence* in addition to the existing conceptualizations of Acquiescent and Quiescent Silence and emphasized ProSocial Silence as a proactive and cooperative form of silence that has not yet been considered by researchers. We argue that although the three types of silence are similar in that they involve the intentional withholding of relevant ideas, information, and opinions, only Acquiescent Silence has strongly passive elements. Instead, the other two forms of silence represent more proactive behaviour (Defensive Silence and ProSocial Silence). We also introduced the concepts of *Acquiescent Voice* and *Defensive Voice* to complement the concept of ProSocial Voice that exists in the Organizational Citizenship literature. We suggest that some forms of voice are more proactive than others, proposing that Acquiescent Voice is fundamentally a conforming form of voice, where verbal communication is based on disengaged resignation. Overall we suggest that the paradoxical nature of proactive silence (the assertive and intentional withholding of relevant ideas, information, and opinions) and passive voice (the disengaged and resigned expression of relevant ideas, information, and opinions) provides an intriguing basis for future research on silence and voice.

Third, we suggest that research on ProSocial Voice and ProSocial Silence should have relevance to the Organizational Citizenship Behaviour literature. Thus, we suggest the benefits of comparing these streams of research so that they can inform each other. In addition, this conceptual framework provides a foundation that should be useful in responding to Crant's (2000) recommendation for research that compares different types of proactive employee behaviour. For example, it provides a structure and basis for contrasting the four more proactive behaviours with each other (Defensive Silence, ProSocial Silence, Defensive Voice, and ProSocial Voice) and for comparing these proactive behaviours with the more passive behaviours (Acquiescent Silence and Acquiescent Voice).

The model of observer attributions of employee motives and ultimate consequences to employees also suggests a number of research implications. First and most obvious is to conduct empirical tests of the proposed model. One approach to starting empirical work would be to develop measures of silence and voice based on employee motives and to assess the construct validity of these measures. Given our emphasis on silence and voice as multidimensional constructs (passive versus proactive; and then within proactive: self-protective versus other-oriented), it would be important to determine whether empirical data shows these as six separate constructs or if a second-order hierarchical model is a better representation. As an initial step toward construct operationalizations, Table III includes five preliminary items for an initial operationalization of each of the six constructs in the paper.

We note that we conceptualized silence and voice as multidimensional aggregate constructs where the subdimensions (i.e., Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, and ProSocial Silence) are not necessarily correlated, but instead represent facets of overall silence (Law et al., 1998; LePine et al., 2002). It would be interesting to see if our conceptualization is consistent with the cognitive representations of these behaviours held by managers and employees. For example, it is possible, that employees clearly differentiate self-protective and other-oriented motives but due to actor-observer biases (Nisbett et al., 1973), supervisors and peers do not differentiate these motives as clearly as the employees do themselves. In addition, it would be useful to assess the extent that observers focus more on their own judgments of the organizational outcomes of the employee silence and voice while employees focus more on their own motives.

Beyond construct validation, it will be important to test the propositions in the model to see if the predictions about differences in silence and voice (both attributions and consequences) are supported by empirical data and statistical analyses. In addition, it would be interesting to assess the relative contribution of different types of overt cues (speech acts, subtle speech cues, back-channel communication, and general non-verbal body language) on the accuracy of observer attributions of employee motives. Future research is needed to theorize and examine the moderating influences of individual differences of observers and

Table III. Preliminary items to measure forms of silence and forms of voice

Instructions: Please describe this employee's characteristic behaviour (across time and across situations) by responding to the following items (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree).

Acquiescent Silence

- This employee is unwilling to speak up with suggestions for change because he/she is disengaged.
- This employee passively withholds ideas, based on resignation.
- This employee passively keeps ideas about solutions to problems to him/her self.
- This employee keeps any ideas for improvement to him/her self because he/she has low self-efficacy to make a difference.
- This employee withholds ideas about how to improve the work around here, based on being disengaged.

Acquiescent Voice

- This employee passively supports the ideas of others because he/she is disengaged.
- This employee passively expresses agreement and rarely offers a new idea.
- This employee agrees and goes along with the group, based on resignation.
- This employee only expresses agreement with the group based on low self-efficacy to make suggestions.
- This employee passively agrees with others about solutions to problems.

Defensive Silence

- This employee does not speak up and suggest ideas for change, based on fear.
- This employee withholds relevant information due to fear.
- This employee omits pertinent facts in order to protect him/her self.
- This employee avoids expressing ideas for improvements, due to self-protection.
- This employee withholds his/her solutions to problems because he/she is motivated by fear.

Defensive Voice

- This employee doesn't express much except agreement with the group, based on fear.
- This employee expresses ideas that shift attention to others, because he/she is afraid.
- This employee provides explanations that focus the discussion on others in order to protect him/her self.
- This employee goes along and communicates support for the group, based on self-protection.
- This employee usually expresses agreement with the group, because he/she is motivated by fear.

ProSocial Silence

- This employee withholds confidential information, based on cooperation.
- This employee protects proprietary information in order to benefit the organization.
- This employee withstands pressure from others to tell organizational secrets.
- This employee refuses to divulge information that might harm the organization.
- This employee protects confidential organizational information appropriately, based on concern for the organization.

ProSocial Voice

- This employee expresses solutions to problems with the cooperative motive of benefiting the organization.
 - This employee develops and makes recommendations concerning issues that affect the organization.
 - This employee communicates his/her opinions about work issues even if others disagree.
 - This employee speaks up with ideas for new projects that might benefit the organization.
 - This employee suggests ideas for change, based on constructive concern for the organization.
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employees and the effect of situational factors on the observer attribution process. Specifically, future research should investigate which individual characteristics and situational contingencies promote or dampen the accuracy of observer attributions for employee silence versus voice. Ultimately, both field and experimental research should be useful for testing the relationships and assessing the causal directions implied in the model.

Implications for Practice

The ideas introduced in this paper also have important implications for practice. For example, the framework should help observers (particularly supervisors) better conceptualize and differentiate types of employee silence and voice. Although silence can be viewed as the absence of speech acts (and thus the opposite of voice), these constructs are more than opposites. Thus, the examples in the conceptual framework should increase manager awareness of various employee motives that can engender silence and voice.

Our propositions in the second half of the paper suggest reasons why employee silence can be misunderstood by observers such as supervisors, peers, and subordinates. Since silence is based on withholding, it is more covert than voice and provides fewer behavioural cues about employee motives. For example, a supervisor might infer that a silent employee is disengaged and uninvolved. This might be accurate or the employee might be silent due to cooperatively-based efforts to protect confidential or private information, such as trade secrets or information that is not yet ready for wide dissemination.

From a practical perspective, our conceptualization should also highlight the risks that observers face if they focus only or primarily on visible behaviour when assessing employee motives. Instead, it is important to consider other cues – both overt and covert – when making these judgments. We recommend that managers and coworkers pay particular attention to nonverbal cues in forming their judgments of employee motives for silence. This could include facial expressions, gestures, posture, gazing, physical spacing, and eye contact (DePaulo and Friedman, 1998). In addition, observers would gain a better understanding of employee motives by discussing the situation and interacting with the employee.

Emphasis on multiple cues also has relevance for observer interpretations of voice. Even though voice behaviour provides overt verbal cues, voice can be used for multiple reasons (disengaged voice where the employee is resigned, self-protective voice where the employee tries to defend the self, and other-oriented voice where the employee genuinely intends to make a positive contribution to the organization through expression of ideas, information, or opinions). Given these various motives for voice, our framework suggests that observers such as supervisors, peers, and subordinates should consider the nonverbal cues provided in conjunction with the verbal cues in making judgments about employee behaviour

(DePaulo and Friedman, 1998). For example, watching body language, listening carefully to pragmatics of speech cues (such as tone, inflection, and changes in pace) should provide additional information that might be useful in interpreting employee motives (Krauss and Chiu, 1998).

In sum, by sensitizing observers to different motives underlying silence and voice, and making the cognitive processes inherent in observer attributions explicit, we hope that supervisors would be more conscious of the attributions they make for employee silence and voice. Over time this should lead to more accurate interpretations and fewer instances of incongruent consequences (either positive or negative) to employees. This raises an interesting point. Misattributions can be too positive or too negative. Although employees should respond favourably when attributions of their motives are more positive than their actual motives, misunderstandings such as these will detract from the quality of communication and interaction between observers and employees. For example, if a supervisor misattributes self-protective silence as other-oriented silence, the supervisor may expect future cooperation from the employee that is not realistic. Similarly, if a supervisor assumes that other-oriented voice is based on fear (Defensive Voice), the supervisor may not give adequate attention to employee ideas and suggestions.

A final practical implication of the ideas in this paper involves strategic self-presentation, from the perspective of the employee. Recent developments in the nonverbal behaviour literature stress the use of non-verbal cues as a form of intentional self-presentation. Thus, it is possible to draw on this literature to make suggestions for how employees can use their non-verbal behaviour to communicate their other-oriented motives when engaging in ProSocial Silence and ProSocial Voice. When employees take the time and make the effort to engage in constructively motivated behaviours, they can reduce ambiguity and the possibility of misattribution of their motives by observers (such as peers, subordinates, and supervisors) by paying particular attention to their non-verbal behaviour as a means of effective self-representation (Bavelas et al., 1990; DePaulo, 1992; DePaulo and Friedman, 1998; Eisenberg, 1984; Jones and Pittman, 1982). We suggest that strategic self-presentation is especially important for ProSocial Silence due to the absence of speech acts in silence and the generally more ambiguous nature of silence.

CONCLUSION

We conclude by stressing that silence and voice are not simply polar opposites of each other. Instead, emphasizing the importance of employee motives, we suggest that both silence and voice are complex and multidimensional constructs. We propose that silence presents greater ambiguity to observers (emphasis on non-verbal cues) compared to voice (verbal and non-verbal cues). We also propose that observers will be more likely to misunderstand and misattribute employee motives

for silence (than for voice). This, in turn, will lead to more incongruent consequences to employees for engaging in silence compared to voice. In sum, we recommend future research on Acquiescent Silence, Defensive Silence, ProSocial Silence, Acquiescent Voice, Defensive Voice, and ProSocial Voice, with special attention to differentiating their antecedents and consequences in work organizations.

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