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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Model for Identifying Silent Protests in Government Organizations, Case Study: Ilam University of Medical Sciences

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EXTENDED A B S T R A C T

Introduction

This study aimed to design a comprehensive hierarchical model for identifying silent protests within governmental organizations, using Ilam University of Medical Sciences as a case study. Silent protests, characterized by non-explicit, indirect employee actions such as reduced effort, fake participation, and organizational withdrawal, pose a significant threat to organizational health and performance, particularly in the public sector. Early identification is crucial for proactive management.

Methodology

This applied research employed a mixed-methods approach (qualitative-quantitative). The qualitative phase utilized the meta-synthesis method based on the seven-step model by Sandelowski and Barroso. A systematic review of 41 relevant articles from valid databases, published from 2013 onwards, was conducted. Through content analysis and coding, 19 key indicators for identifying silent protests were extracted. The reliability of the meta-synthesis process was confirmed by a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.89, achieved through expert review.

In the quantitative phase, the combined ISM-DEMATEL method was employed. Data were collected from 16 purposefully selected experts from Ilam University of Medical Sciences, who met specific criteria including a PhD in relevant fields, associate professor rank or higher, and over 10 years of relevant experience. First, the 19 extracted indicators were validated using the Fuzzy Delphi method, with all indicators confirmed against a threshold of 0.7. Subsequently, experts completed a paired comparison questionnaire based on a 0-4 scale to determine the inter-influential relationships among the indicators. The data were analyzed using MATLAB software to form the initial direct relation matrix, calculate the total relation matrix, determine a threshold (0.06), and finally construct the reachability matrix for level partitioning and model development.

Findings

The meta-synthesis resulted in the identification of 19 primary indicators (C1-C19): Organizational Commitment (C1), Organizational Maturity (C2), Managers' Ethics (C3), Changes in Organizational Behavior of Employees (C4), Employee Adherence (C5), Employee Satisfaction (C6), Level of Healthy Work Interactions (C7), Fake Participation (C8), Level of Use of Directive Management (C9), Development of Human Relations (C10), Managers' Decision-Making Style (C11), Organizational Developments (C12), Organizational Culture (C13), Listening to Employee Voice (C14), Managers' Charismatic Level (C15), Manager's Attitude towards Employees (C16), Organizational Loneliness (C17), Organizational Learning (C18), and Manager's Communication Skills (C19).

The DEMATEL-ISM analysis structured these 19 indicators into a definitive four-level hierarchical model, clarifying the causal relationships and hierarchy among them. The findings revealed that "Listening to Employee Voice" (C14) is the most influential and foundational indicator, positioned at the base (Level 4) of the model. This indicator acts as the cornerstone, directly influencing all upper levels.

- Level 1 (Manifestation Level): This top level comprises the most immediate and observable symptoms of silent protests. Indicators at this level include Organizational Commitment (C1), Organizational Maturity (C2), Changes in Organizational Behavior (C4), Employee Adherence (C5), Employee Satisfaction (C6), Fake Participation (C8), Organizational Developments (C12), Organizational Loneliness (C17), and Organizational Learning (C18). A decline in these areas serves as a primary warning signal.
- Level 2 (Mediating Organizational Factors): This level contains factors that are directly influenced by managerial practices and, in turn, drive the manifestations at Level 1. Key indicators here are Managers' Ethics (C3), Level of Use of Directive Management (C9), Managers' Decision-Making Style (C11), Organizational Culture (C13), Manager's Attitude towards Employees (C16), and Manager's Communication Skills (C19).
- Level 3 (Relational & Leadership Channels): This level represents the primary channels through which "listening" translates into organizational climate. It includes the Level of Healthy Work Interactions (C7), Development of Human Relations (C10), and Managers' Charismatic Level (C15). These factors are directly affected by the core practice of listening.
- Level 4 (Foundational Cause): At the base of the model lies "Listening to Employee Voice" (C14), identified as the most influential lever for preventing and identifying silent protests.

The final Interpretive Structural Model (ISM) diagram visually represents these four levels and the directional relationships between the indicators, providing a clear map of the pathways through which silent protests develop and can be identified.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study presents a novel, hierarchical causal model that elucidates the complex interrelationships among factors leading to silent protests in a government organization. It identifies "Listening to Employee Voice" not merely as a communicative tool but as the foundational managerial practice for the early detection and effective management of such protests. The model underscores that observable issues like low commitment and satisfaction (Level 1) are ultimately rooted in deeper managerial and relational factors, with listening being the most critical starting point for intervention.

The findings align with existing literature emphasizing the roles of psychological safety, managerial support, awareness, and organizational justice in reducing silence and "quiet quitting." The model provides a practical and diagnostic framework for managers in governmental and healthcare organizations. It advises a dual approach: 1) a top-down strategy focusing on institutionalizing genuine listening mechanisms, fostering justice, redesigning decision-making styles, and reducing reliance on directive management; and 2) a bottom-up strategy involving the implementation of dashboards to continuously monitor the nine Level 1 indicators for early warning signs, enabling targeted interventions.

For future research, testing this multi-level model in diverse public sector contexts, employing longitudinal designs, and incorporating additional public administration-specific constructs like red tape and goal ambiguity are recommended to enhance the model's generalizability, causal strength, and explanatory power.

KEYWORDS

Silent Protests, Organizational Silence, Employee Voice Listening, DEMATEL Method, Ilam University of Medical Sciences.



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