

# VOICE AND SILENCE IN ROMANIAN SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS

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## Abstract

Communication is, along with motivation and competence, the key concept for an efficient organization. Even if school organizations should be open for communication, the participant observation leads us to say that, nowadays, the communication deficiencies and especially the organizational silence observed among all actors involved in the educational process encouraged the poor performance of high school education in Romania.

This article examines the concepts of voice and silence as factors that can cause poor performance in school institutions.

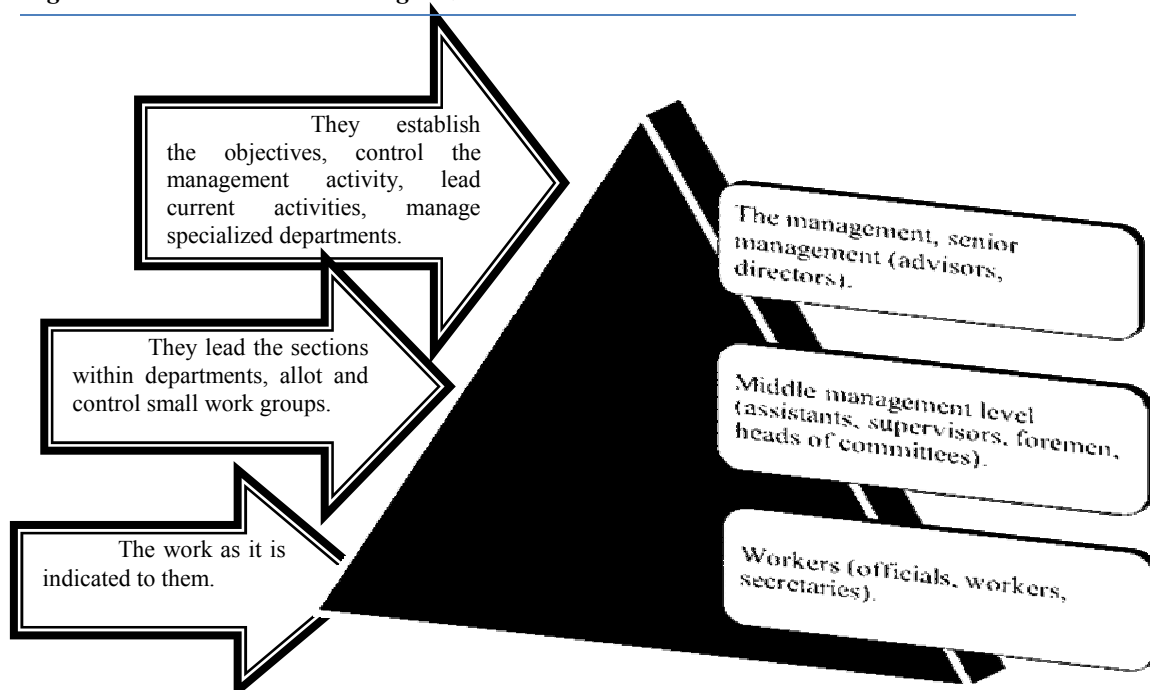
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**JEL classification:** I20

Organizations are associations of people organizing and coordinating their activity in order to realize specific objectives (Giddens A., 2000). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, organizations play a much more important role than during any previous period. Now there is no specifically human activity that does not involve organizations, be they schools, hospitals, agencies or companies.

In each company, formal and informal relations are established. If formal relations are established by the organization's rules, as one can note in Figure 1.1., informal relations are established spontaneously among the employees, depending on: passions, age, ethnic group, etc., in order to meet specific needs.

Figure 1.1. Formal relations in organizations



Source: S. Gregson, F. Livesey, *Organizations and Management Behavior* (1993).

Communication is a binder in this formal structure and, at the same time, is the source of formation of informal relations.

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The principal functions of organizational communication are:

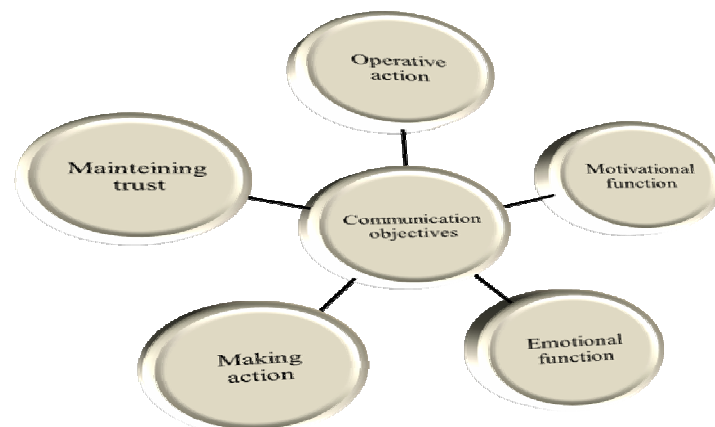
- control;
- information;
- coordination;
- motivation;
- the emotional function.

Organizational communication has the role of clarifying the employees' duties and establishing the organizational authority. At the same time, it provides the ground for the decisions made in the organization, permits synchronizing the activities, establishing a favorable environment for the exteriorization of the members' inner experiences, cooperation and involvement of the members in activities leading to reaching the objectives.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The process of organizational communication

Optimizing organizational communication can improve the companies' activity. The main objectives of organizational communication are presented in 1.2. Figure.

*Figure 1.2. Organizational communication objectives.*



Source: Our own realization.

Operative action aims to increase the company's capacity to act coherently, efficiently and rapidly, so as to win in front of its competitors, namely in front of other organizations. Maintaining trust and the relations among the organization members does not aim to make them uniform but to promote tolerance, to accept individual differences. The capacity to make actions and decisions efficient, viewed as a result of the relation between effect and effort, is calculated on the level of the organization as relation between the objectives realized and the means used.

Beside these objectives, we can also enumerate several objectives concerning interpersonal communication, in general, and especially organizational communication:

- persuading the employees,
- synchronizing activities;

<sup>1</sup> Peiró J. M., & Bresó I., *La comunicación en las organizaciones: Una aproximación desde el modelo de análisis multifacético para la gestión y la intervención organizacional (modelo Amigo)*, Universidad de Valencia Recibido, 2012, p. 41-44;

- inter-knowledge/self-knowledge,
- identifying the employees' needs,
- establishing and maintaining relations among the organization members,
- information exchange.

The process of organizational communication supposes five stages:

1. codifying the sense using words, images, position, mimics, sounds, tonality;
2. transmitting the message – choosing an efficient communication channel;
3. decoding and interpreting the message – by deciphering the message and explaining its meaning;
4. filtering – consists in the selection of the information important for the receiver or concerning him explicitly;
5. feed-back – permits the receiver to evaluate the message transmitted interpreted by the receiver.

The specialized literature identifies two forms of the organizational communication process: one bilateral and other unilateral. Bilateral communication supposes a two-way communication activity: from emitter to receiver and from receiver to emitter (Peiró J. M., & Bresó I., 2012)

. This type of communication allows the receiver's intervention and checking the meaning given by the receiver to the message; out of the limits of bilateral communication, we shall enumerate: it is time-consuming and more disorganized than unilateral communication.

Unilateral communication takes place in only one sense: from emitter to receiver; although it has some advantages, such as: rapidity and organization, it has the disadvantage of lack of agreement between the message transmitted by the emitter and the one interpreted by the receiver.

Communication specialists consider that, in an organization, optimal is the use of bilateral communication (Niculae T., Gherghiță I., Gherghiță D., 2006). It allows developing collegial relations and leads to the formation of the organizational culture.

## 2. *Voice And Silence in Romanian Educational Organizations*

Two of the factors determining the decrease in performances for educational organizations are: the organization's silence and voice. These appear on the background of dysfunctions of the communication systems inside the institutions.

### 2.1. *Organizational Voice*

The organizational voice is defined in organizational-managerial psychology as attempt of radical change of certain insatisfactory aspects, by individual or group requests, addressed directly to the managers or by turning to an authority that could impose a change. The organizational voice can be expressed by protests or by mobilizing the public opinion (Hirschman A.O., 1990).

Following a study realized by them, the psychologists J.R. Detert and A. Edmondson (Detert J.R. and Edmondson A., 2008) have noticed that communication dysfunctions on the level of the organizations (called by the two authors: *risky communication opportunities*) have two causes: injustices perceived by members (26%) and improvements of the processes that could lead to the increase of the organizational performances (74%). (Avram E. and Cooper C.L., 2008)

There are several forms of the organizational voice, which can be grouped according to four criteria, as one can observe in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1.: Taxonomy of the organizational voice**

Organizational Voice	Depending on the character of the presentation in front of the authorities	<i>direct</i> voice – supposes expressing oneself in front of the authorities;
		<i>hidden</i> voice – supposes expressing oneself in small groups, hoping that the information will be transmitted to the authorities by other members;
	Depending on the content of the presentation	<i>subjective</i> voice – refers to discontents that lead to a fall in employees' morale;
		<i>objective</i> voice – contains messages regarding discontents concerning work tasks and institutional procedures;
	Depending on the permissiveness of the presentation	<i>healthy</i> voice – transmits both the personal discontents and solutions to remove these discontents;
		<i>voice of pain</i> – transmits only individual or group discontents; messages are emotional;
		<i>voice requesting treatment</i> – it is formed when solutions are presented for the problems identified;
	Depending on the character of the presentation	<i>employee's</i> voice – the transmission of messages is made by the employees in an isolated manner;
		<i>collective</i> voice – the presentation of the discontents is made collectively, in the context of syndical actions.

Source: E. Avram and C.L. Cooper, *Organizational-Managerial Psychology: Current trends* (2008)

There are psychologists who consider that organizational voice is an open expression of opinions and views of employees, about their job.

In school organizations, the most heard is the voice of syndicate unions. Other voices appear sequentially in school life and are caused mainly by complaints about differences made by principals among employees, workload and the unpaid responsibilities of teachers.

Among the negative effects of organizational voice, recorded by the romanian educational establishments, we can mention:

- decrease of the coordination of the activities in the organization;
- decrease of the employees' motivation;
- excessive filtering of the messages transmitted in the organization;
- decreased efficiency and efficacy in communication;
- creation of a preponderantly conflictual climate;
- increase of the number of conflicts among employees;
- increased tendency of manipulation of some employees;
- preponderance of non-formal communication;
- numerous complaints of the employees;
- exchanges of violent retorts among employees;
- non-completion of the work tasks;
- poor quality results;
- increase of the risk of emergence of physical conflicts;
- non-assuming the organizational rules.

To overcome these negative effects, the director must reconcile the employees and solve their problems. Participant observation leads us to say that most executives solve these problems by transforming organizational voice in organizational silence.

## 2.2. Organizational Silence

An antonymous notion to the concept of organizational voice is that of organizational silence. It appears on the collective level, due to organizational conditions determining the members who could modify the situation not to express their opinions regarding the organizational problems.

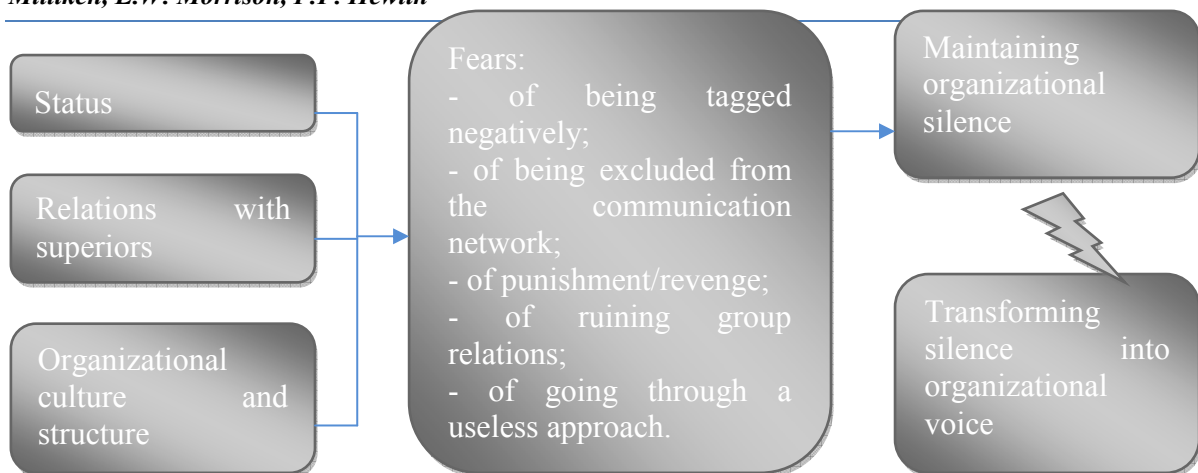
F.J. Milliken, E.W. Morrison and P.F. Hewlin (1996) identify two stages of the organizational silence: first stage - not assuming the risks supposed by the use of the organizational culture, the second stage - evaluation of the risks supposed by expressing the organizational voice.

The first stage of the organizational silence is an affective one and is grounded in the following fears: of being tagged negatively, of being excluded from the communication network or of being sent to the periphery of the network, of punish and revenge, of affecting other members of the organization, of ruining group relations, but especially of going through a useless approach. (Avram E. and Cooper C.L., 2008)

The second stage, i.e. organizational silence, supposes a cognitive approach. During this stage, the organization member(s) will quantify the risks they need to take if they were to transform organizational silence into organizational voice. The factors influencing the transformation are: status, relation with superiors, organizational culture and structure (Milliken F.J., Morrison E.W., Hewlin P.F., 1996).

The decision to maintain the organizational silence is influenced significantly by the other group members, by previous experiences in the organization.

**Figure 2.2. Model of organizational silence and voice, adaptation of the model elaborated by F.J. Milliken, E.W. Morrison, P.F. Hewlin**



Source: Our own realization starting from the Milliken and Morrison Model.

***Organizational silence is a barrier of organizational change and development. It generates employee frustrations, frustrations that lead to loss of performance.***

Among the negative effects of organizational silence, recorded by the romanian educational establishments, we can mention: diminished efficiency and efficacy in communication on the background of the incapacity of expressing discontent, increased teachers' discontent concerning the quality of the educational services offered by the

school institution, preponderance of formal communication, difficulties of adaptation for teachers and decrease of the feeling of belonging to the organization, diminution of the accuracy of the information transmitted, decrease of the contribution of the teaching staff to the development of the organization, feeble anchoring of the school personnel in the activity of promotion of the school image, apparently calm climate, propitious to the school's activities, declining responsibility of the employees, increased passiveness of the employees and poor quality results.

### *Conclusions*

In our opinion, organizational silence is much more damaging for the educational organization than the organizational voice. The main negative effects of silence on organizational communication are: exaggerate filtering of the messages, parallelism between the message thought and the message expressed, duality of feed-back: the feed-back expressed is positive, while the unexpressed feed-back is negative, inhibiting the desire to transmit critical messages or personal ideas and poor performances. These effects lead to the degradation of organizational communication and the instoration of a climate inadequate for organizational development.

Organizational silence offers to the organization's members two alternatives: to look for another organizational environment or to transform the silence into voice. The longer the period of silence, the stronger the voice, especially if the number of those keeping silent is significant for the organization. In this situation, the voice will be mainly of pain and the only form of rehabilitation proposed will aim to collectively remove and stigmatize the members who caused discontent.

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