SILENCE IN ORGANIZATIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Daniel Costa Pacheco, BSc
Ana Isabel Damião de Serpa Arruda Moniz, PhD
University of the Azores, Portugal
Suzana Nunes Caldeira, PhD
University of the Azores, Portugal - CICS.NOVA.UAçores

Abstract

In the business world, employees can contribute with information, ideas, concerns, opinions and proposals to their managers in respect of: (1) the way work could be performed, (2) what should / should not be done in the workplace, (3) how a particular decision can be implemented, and (4) how an organizational policy should be formed and executed (Rego, 2013). However, due to a diverse set of factors, employees often choose to remain silent in the workplace. One of these factors is psychological safety, which describes employees' perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in the workplace (Edmondson, 2014). The following paper is essentially a literature review and its aim is to, firstly, make a brief approach to factors reported in the literature that may affect employee voice and silence, followed up by an explanation of the types of silence that can be engaged by employees. Besides that, the authors will also make an approach to physical and psychological safety. Lastly, it will be reported some links, mentioned in the literature, between employee silence and psychological safety.

Keywords: Employee silence, organizational silence, employee voice, upward communication, psychological safety

Introduction

Organizational silence and employee silence are subsets of a diverse range of behaviors that involves employees decision to communicate (expressive communicative choices) or to not communicate (suppressive communicative choices), such as issue selling to top management, principled organizational dissent or the MUM effect (Hewlin, 2003 cited by Tangirala

& Ramanujam, 2008); (For a further understanding, see Brinsfield, Edwards & Greenberg, 2009; Brinsfield, 2009; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2013; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Morrison, 2011).

In addition, researchers have defined employee silence as a multifaceted construct (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). That is, it may include a variety of topics, be adopted and directed by and for many people, involve different types of communication and communication channels and comprehend different withholding of information (see Brinsfield, 2009). Being such a broad construct, the authors adopted the most commonly definition reported in the literature, which addresses employee silence as the omission of work-related opinions, information about problems, concerns and suggestions, derived from a conscious decision taken by the employee (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, the definition of employee silence adopted in the following paper does not describe unintended failures to communicate, which can result from having nothing to say (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, in this paper the authors not only restricted the definition of employee silence to face-to-face communication, but they also restricted their study to informal, ascending and internal silences, in particular, acquiescent, defensive, prosocial /relational, diffident and deviant silences, being the target of them the direct supervisor.

Factors that may lead to employee voice and silence

In order to do a better framework of the relation between employee voice and silence and psychological safety, the authors decided to do a brief approach to some factors identified in the literature that may influence employees decision to speak up or to remain in silence (for a better understanding, see Morrison, 2014; Ashford, Sutcliffe and Christianson, 2009; Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño & Edmondson, 2009; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Edwards, Ashkanasy & Gardner, 2009).

The first factor mentioned in the literature is the existence of a latent voice opportunity, that is, employees must be aware of the existence of problems or opportunities. Similarly, they may also have ideas, concerns, or a particular perspective that may be relevant or important to be shared (Miceli, Near & Dworkin, 2008; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; cited by Morrison, 2014). A second factor is voice efficacy, that is, employees' perceptions about the impact of their voices in the decision-making process. Another factor that may affect employees‘ decision to speak up are emotions, that is, employees can be in a situation involving a large intensity of negative emotions, leading to a "short-circuiting" of systematic processing (Kish-Gephart et al, 2009;. cited by Morrison , 2014). For example, if an employee

experience anger due to his boss, that employee can respond automatically, without any careful consideration of the pros and cons of speaking up (see Morrison, 2014; Kish-Gephart et al, 2009; Edwards *et al.*, 2009).

Moreover, speaking up can also be the result of unconscious processes, employees' desire of achieving positive and relevant results for themselves, or it can also be driven from employees' personal identity (see Morrison, 2014).

Another dimension that has been identified in the literature as relevant for speaking up and that will be portrayed in this paper, is related to the safety dimension: that is, employees' likelihood of engaging in voice may increase as their perceptions with regard to a better voice efficiency and safety increase, and vice versa. If employees perceive the lack of the safety component associated with speaking up, resulting in a possible harm to their image, they may feel afraid of engaging in voice, because if they challenge the current or past organizational practices or if they highlight a serious problem, they may: be labeled as troublemakers or as complainers, losing the respect and support of others; subject themselves to get a bad performance evaluation, not receiving a possible promotion; or put themselves at risk of being fired (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Grant, 2013; Milliken & Morrison, 2003; cited by Morrison, 2014; Ashford *et al.*, 2009; Adler-Milstein, Singer & Toffel, 2011). Furthermore, if employees decide to speak up they can also put their colleagues in trouble (Morrison, 2014). Thus, to avoid any social discomfort due to the transmission of bad news and to provide a harmonious environment, employees often withhold information, giving rise to the MUM effect (Morrison, 2014).

Besides the role of the existence of a latent voice opportunity, voice efficacy, unconscious processes, employees' desire of achieving positive and relevant results for themselves, or employees' personal identity, on employee voice and silence, the literature also mentions possible motivators and inhibitors that can be taken into account by the employee in his decision of speaking up or remaining at silence (see Table 1).

	Motivators	**Inhibitors**
Individual dispositions	Extraversion Proactive personality Assertiveness Conscientiousness Duty orientation Customer orientation	Achievement orientation
Job and organizational attitudes and perceptions	Organizational identification Work-group identification Felt obligation for change Job satisfaction Role breadth Control or influence Organizational support	Detachment Powerlessness
Emotions, beliefs, and schemas	Anger Psychological safety	Fear Futility

		Image or career risks
Supervisor and leader behavior	Openness Consultation Leader–member exchange Transformational leadership Ethical leadership Leader influence	Abusive leadership
Other contextual factors	Group voice climate Caring climate Formal voice mechanisms	Job and social stressors Climate of fear or silence Instrumental climate Hierarchical structure Change-resistant culture

Table 1: motivators and inhibitors of employee voice and silence
Source: Morrison (2014)

Types of silence that can be engaged by employees

There are different types of silence, as summarized in table 2, which differ among themselves based on employees' motive. However, as stated previously, our study will be restricted to acquiescent, defensive, relational, diffident and deviant silences, not including, for example, the instrumental silence (employee remains in silence with the aim of generating a good impression of him on the boss and to get rewards) or the ignorant silence (employee remains in silence due to no knowledge of the matter).

Employee silence - Intentional withholding of ideas, information or opinions related to the workplace	**Type of behavior** **Employee's motive**
Acquiescent silence **(**Pinder & Harlos, 2001) - Intentional withholding of ideas / opinions / suggestions due to resignation and to low decision-making capacity.	Resignation Resulted from resignation; Feeling of inability to make a difference
Defensive Silence **(**Pinder & Harlos, 2001) - Withholding of information and problems based on fear - Withholding of facts for self-protection, with the aim of not being penalized or reprimanded by the boss.	Self-protection Resulted from the fear of consequences
Prosocial/relational silence - Withholding of confidential information, based on cooperation. - Protecting proprietary knowledge to benefit the organization.	Cooperation and assistance Willingness to cooperate and help
Deviant silence - Employee remains in silence in order to make their superior or colleague to decide wrong.	Evil intentions
Diffident silence Brinsfield (2013) Composed by insecurities, self-doubt and uncertainty in respect of a situation and to what to say. This kind of silence may result from the fear of suffering embarrassment or losing the job.	Timidity

Table 2- Types of employee silence
Built from: Van Dyne *et al.* (2003); Rego (2013); Brinsfield (2013)

Next, it will be made a brief explanation of the different types of silence found by the authors in the literature.

Acquiescent silence

Having regard to Pinder and Harlos' study (2001, cited by Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003), Van Dyne *et al.* (2003, p. 1366) defined acquiescent silence as "withholding relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation". Being acquiescent silence a form of inaction (Kahn 1990, cited by Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003) it is more passive than active.

Employees who choose this kind of silence are conformed to the context where they live in and are not willing to make any effort to speak up, get involved in, or to try to change their current situation (strongly rooted resignation). For example, an employee may withhold his ideas, because of the belief that speaking up is pointless and would not make a difference. On the other hand, the employee may keep his opinions and information to himself, believing that he holds little influence to change his current situation (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

Defensive silence

Suggested by Pinder and Harlos (2001, cited by Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003) defensive silence describes the withholding of ideas, information and opinions as a form of self-protection, based on fear. Defensive silence is an intentional and proactive behavior, intended to protect the employee from external threats (Schlenker & Wigold, 1989; cited by Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, defensive silence has a more proactive nature, it is conscious and involves the reflection of alternatives before being adopted. In this type of silence, there's a conscious decision of withholding ideas, information and opinions, as the best strategy for the moment.

More recently, Gephart-Kish *et al.* (2009) suggested that defensive silence should be categorized with regard to the level of fear experienced by the employee (low-high) and to the amount of time employee has to take action (short-long). The aim of table 3 is to make a brief summary of the existing types of defensive silence.

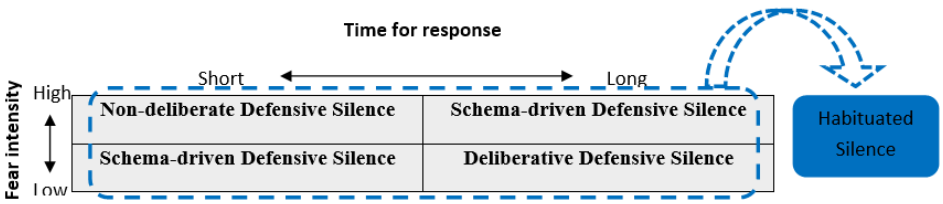

Table 3- Types of defensive silence
Adapted from: Kish-Gephart *et al.* (2009)

Non-deliberate defensive silence

Gephart-Kish *et al.* (2009, p. 171) define this subcategory of defensive silence (upper left corner of the table) as "an automatic, nonconscious psychological retreat from a high threat severity voice situation that allows little time for a response". For example, an employee might begin to speak up to a manager and, unexpectedly, finds out the manager is angry. Consequently, the employee can experience a high intensity of fear, not communicating what he meant to say, leading to non-deliberative defensive silence (Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2009).

Schema-driven defensive silence

Kish-Gephart *et al.* (2009) suggest in this kind of defensive silence employees are aware of their intention to remain in silence, but have not yet decided exactly what to do. This can happen in two occasions. The first one occurs when employees experience a high level of fear in situations where they still have time to decide (upper right corner of the table). For example, after finding a flaw in a new project led by his leader, if the employee perceive communication as highly threatening (due to the fact he had a bad experience with his leader's temperament in the past), he is more likely to remain in silence. The second situation (lower left corner of the cell) occurs when the employee experiences a low level of fear and a need to give an immediate response. For example, an employee may experience a low level of fear when he finds out, on a meeting, he has a suggestion to propose, however, due to lack of time to deliberate, that employee is likely to remain in silence, believing that it is better to be safe than sorry (Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2009).

Deliberate defensive silence

Deliberate defensive silence (lower right corner of the table) is driven from an employee's deliberate and conscious choice in order to protect himself in a potentially dangerous situation. This kind of silence occurs in situations that meet a low intensity of fear and enough time for the employee to make a decision. For example, an employee may experience a low level of fear when he reflects on going to talk to the boss about suggestions for improvement. In this situation, the employee has time enough to deliberately and consciously determine the costs and benefits of speaking up (in case he wants to), to consult others and to evaluate different strategies instead of speaking up (Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2009).

Habituated silence

In the long run, the three types of silence previously discussed may lead to habituated silence. According to Kish-Gephart *et al.* (2009, p. 172),

habituated silence "results from humans' natural tendency to develop safety-oriented avoidance behaviors to reduce fear by minimizing exposure to threatening situations that might trigger fear". For example, for an individual who developed fear of talking openly to his leader due to a past negative experience, he is unlikely to check again if there are still threats by speaking up (contributing, that way, for the climate of silence) (Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2009).

Prosocial / relational silence

Derived from the organizational citizenship behavior literature (OCB), Van Dyne *et al.*, (2003) defined prosocial silence as the withholding of ideas, information and opinions related to the workplace, in order to benefit the organization and its members. Thus, this type of silence is based on altruism and cooperative motives, not being controlled by leadership. Moreover, in contrast of defensive silence, the use of prosocial silence is motivated by the intention of protecting others, rather than by fear of receiving negative outcomes for the "self" (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). For example, an employee can show other-oriented behavior and cooperation by preserving proprietary knowledge for the benefit of the organization. That is, an employee can have an opinion regarding to an important decision and not be in a position of discussing it with other individuals (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

However, Brinsfield (2009, 2013) after trying to find explanatory reasons for employee's choice of remaining in silence at the workplace, found out that only 3 of 574 reasons given by the respondents pointed to prosocial silence. Given the fact most of the reasons given by them had a more relational nature, Briensfield (2009) suggested that prosocial silence is the result of a misunderstanding, renaming that type of silence as relational silence.

Deviant silence

Deviant silence is a kind of destructive deviant behavior in the workplace. According to Rego (2013) in deviant silence employees remain silent in order to lead their superiors or colleagues to decide wrong.

Employees' adoption of deviant behaviors is a common problem in organizations and can be categorized into two categories: constructive deviant behaviors or destructive deviant behaviors. Besides deviant silence, theft, workplace aggression and sabotage are included in destructive deviant behaviors and the aim of them is to hurt the organization and its members (Ahmad & Omar, 2014).

According to Ahmad and Omar (2014), the interest around the deviant behaviors in the workplace is due to the negative impact of this kind

of behaviors on organizations and individuals. That is, deviant behavior in the workplace can cause to employees stress, lower productivity and lower commitment, increasing the levels of turnover and absenteeism (Hoel & Salin, 2003; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; cited by Ahmad & Omar, 2014). Consequently, all of that will result in financial costs to organizations.

Diffident silence

Diffident silence was mentioned in Brinsfield's studies (2009, 2013) and it involves employees' insecurities, self-doubt and uncertainty in respect of a situation and to what to say. In addition, Brinsfield (2013) also refers that there may be an overlap between diffident silence and defensive silence, since in both types of silence the employee tries to avoid negative outcomes for himself. Diffident silence may be a form of passive behavior, which is characterized by a shy and withdrawn body posture (Rego, 2013). The person finds difficulty in defending her own interests, to communicate her thoughts or to show disagreement. This situation may encourage others to take advantage and to disregard her. Consequently, that person may feel misunderstood, believing that "others should know where they can get".

Lastly, passive behavior may result in the loss of individual's self-esteem. Furthermore, the person that engages in that kind of behavior may not be respected and may feel guilty of acting that way. In addition, individuals may experience anxiety, depression, feeling of lack of control and loneliness (Loureiro, 2011).

Literature review on Psychological Safety

In order to make a better framework of psychological safety and taking into account the high similarities between physical and psychological safety constructs, firstly, the authors will make a brief approach to the physical safety literature, followed up by an analysis of the psychological safety literature, giving greater focus to psychological safety at the individual-level research.

The Physical Safety construct

Most of the interest around the physical safety construct in organizations is due to the aim of reducing the number of accidents at the workplace and its consequences (Zavareze & Cross, 2010). The literature on physical safety suggests that organizations that have implemented a good proactive functional safety management, will be less likely to experience work-related accidents (Wright & Marsden, 2010; cited by Ek, Runefors, Burell, 2014). In other words, the physical safety management is a management system in which formal safety practices are established and responsibilities are documented (Ek et al., 2014), with the aim of reducing

possible accidents and to keep them under control (Rosness, Blakstad, Forseth, Dahle & Wiig, 2012).

Besides that, physical safety has links to Maslow's work (1943, cited by Schepers, Jong, Wetzels & Ruyter, 2008), particularly to his hierarchy of needs theory. According to the author, the sorting of different motivational needs, conceptualized in a pyramid model, implies that the satisfaction of higher needs is only possible when the lower needs have been already satisfied. In other words, a particular need is only replaced by the following one, in the ascending hierarchy, when satisfied. Safety needs appear at the second position from the bottom of the hierarchy, being preceded by physiological needs (e.g. hunger and thirst), which are more primitives. As reported by Maslow, people need a safe environment to work effectively (Feldman, 2001).

After having satisfied their physiological needs, individuals strive to protect themselves from physical or mental threats. Only after satisfying those basic needs, individuals will be able to pursue higher needs, such as love/belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. Thus, taking into account Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory in the organizational context, employees need a safe working environment to be able to motivate themselves to reach higher needs (Schepers *et al.*, 2008).

Physical safety has been receiving some attention in the organizational behavior literature. For example, Zohar (2000, cited by Schepers *et al.*, 2008) demonstrated empirically that the greater the safety perceived by an individual, the smaller the amount of damage inside the working unit. However, mental safety dimension (psychological safety) has only received some attention only very recently (May *et al.*, 2004; cited by Schepers *et al.*, 2008). That is, most of the studies about safety science that the authors have accessed are about physical safety. Only more recently researchers have been giving more attention to the psychological safety issues, which may be related, for example, to risk management in decision-making, uncertainty, organizational change and organizational stress.

The Psychological Safety construct

Nowadays, much work in organizations is done collaboratively, involving sharing of information and ideas, coordinating tasks and integrating perspectives (Edmondson, 2003), that is, the need for work specialization, require people to work together to achieve organizational goals. However, the interdependence between team members is not always easy, since some individuals work well together while others have difficulties in doing so (Hackman, 1990; cited by Edmondson, 2003).

Psychological safety is taken here as corresponding to employees' perceptions about the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in the

workplace, affecting their willingness to "express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances", instead of defending "their personal selves" (Kahn, 1990, p. 694; cited by Edmondson & Lei, 2014;. Edmondson, 1999). In other words, psychological safety refers to the employee's belief that his team (supervisor and colleagues) won't embarrass, reject or punish him in case he decides to engage in voice (Edmondson, 1999), that is, in case he decides to ask something, ask for feedback, to report a bug or to propose a new idea (Edmondson, 2003; Detert & Burris, 2007; cited by Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012). Thus, when employees feel free of fear about expressing their points of view, their concerns about possible negative outcomes resulting from speaking up will be minimized, making them more likely to engage in voice and vice versa (Zhao & Oliveira, 2006; Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit & Dutton, 1998; Edmondson, 1999; Kahn 1990; cited by Liang *et al.*, 2012; Passos, Silva & Santos, 2011).

On the other hand, Brown and Leigh (1996, cited by Baer & Frese, 2003) added to Kahn's psychological safety approach (1990, cited by Baer & Frese, 2003 and by Schepers *et al.*, 2008) employee's feeling that it is safe for him to be himself without suffering negative outcomes for his self-image, status and career.

In addition, psychological safety does not imply a cozy environment where individuals are close friends or the absence of problems and stress. Rather it describes a climate focused on productive discussion to stimulate problem prevention and to achieve goals (Edmondson, 2003).

Psychological safety at three levels of analysis

Psychological safety has been categorized in three levels of research: the individual, group and organizational levels. For the following paper, the individual-level research is the one that best suits.

In general, there are many similarities between the outcomes of the three different levels. First, in all three levels, psychological safety is crucial for the learning and changing behaviors in organizations, which is the main reason given in the literature for the growing interest around the psychological safety construct (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Another consistency among the three levels of research is the attention given to performance as a dependent variable, that is, the three levels of psychological safety research suggest the existence of a significant relation between psychological safety and performance (Edmondson and Lei, 2014).

However, there are also differences among them, that is, in contrast to the other two levels, individual-level research has also focused on other constructs, such as work and organizational commitment. In addition, individual-level research has also established links between psychological safety and in-role and extra-role behaviors (Edmondson & Lei, 2014).

Psychological safety at the individual-level research

With regard to psychological safety at the individual-level research, the literature addresses it from two points of view: psychological safety influence on in-role and extra-role behaviors. On other words, behaviors that are expected from the employee but not always played *vs.* behaviors that are performed voluntarily by the employee, for the good of the collective.

In role-behavior

The literature on in-role behavior also examines the relationship between individual's perceived psychological safety and work engagement (commitment and knowledge sharing).

Regarding the possible influence of psychological safety on commitment, Kark and Carmeli's study results (2009) suggest that a good employee's perceived psychological safety induces feelings of vitality (which encompasses the belief of being alive and fully functional, vigor and zest) which, in turn, enhances creativity (development of new and useful ideas or solutions to address existing problems).

Relatively to the psychological safety influence on knowledge sharing, Gong, Cheung, Wang and Huang (2012), suggested that proactive employees seeking for change, more often, share information with their colleagues and the relationship between information exchange and creativity is affected by trust (similar construct to psychological safety).

On the other hand, Siemsen, Roth, Balasubramanian and Anand (2009) argued that psychological safety is an important antecedent of knowledge sharing between co-workers, and suggested that the relationship between psychological safety and knowledge sharing is moderated by the level of confidence that employees have on the knowledge to be shared. Thus, the greater the confidence, the smaller the role of psychological safety as a stimulus for knowledge sharing.

Extra-role behavior

Next, the authors will approach the impact of psychological safety in extra-role behaviors, in particular on employee voice.

As discussed earlier, the literature has shown that employees' perceptions about psychological safety have a significant impact on speaking up (Detert & Burris, 2007; Wembhard & Edmondson, 2006; cited by Cheng, Chang, Kuo & Lu 2014). That is, if employees realize that negative outcomes may result from their decision of speaking up, they will be reluctant to communicate their constructive points of view (Detert & Burris, 2007; cited by Cheng *et al.*, 2014).

Similarly, Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009, cited by Edmondson & Lei, 2014) suggested that ethical leadership influences employee voice,

being that relationship partly mediated by employee's perceived psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Liang *et al.*, 2012).

Moreover, Liang *et al.* (2012), approached employee voice in a different perspective of the current literature, by categorizing it into two groups: promotional voice and prohibitive voice. They also tried to establish links between these two categories of voice and three psychological antecedents (psychological safety, felt obligation for constructive change and organizational-based self-esteem). Similarly, Liang *et al.*, (2012, pp. 74-75) defined promotional voice as "employees' expression of new ideas or suggestions for improving the overall functioning of their work unit or organization". On the other hand, prohibitive voice was defined as describing "employees' expressions of concern about work practices, incidents, or employee behavior that are harmful to their organization". The results of the study suggest that psychological safety is strongly related to prohibitive voice by reducing employees' perceived risks of speaking up.

Furthermore, with the aim of understanding why employees, sometimes, remain silent at work, through a series of studies, Detert and Edmondson (2011) investigated implicit voice theories (also known as IVTs), and they identified five IVTs: fear that a suggestion will be taken as criticism, concern with speaking up to bosses in the presence of others or not wanting to embarrass bosses, a need to have solid data or polished ideas and a fear of negative career consequences for speaking up. In their study, Detert and Edmondson (2011) found that psychological safety may be negatively correlated with the strength of IVTs.

Finally, according to Brinsfield's study (2013), psychological safety may be negatively related to the defensive, relational and diffident silences, not being related to acquiescent and deviant silences because, as stated below, if employees feel free to express their ideas without running the risk of being penalized, they will be more likely to speak up rather than adopting the previous types of silence.

Summary of psychological safety at the individual-level research

Next, the authors will make a brief summary of the relations between psychological safety at the individual-level research and other constructs (see figure 1). Thus, as it can be observed, in-role behaviors (engagement and knowledge sharing) and extra-role behaviors (speaking up) can be affected by some variables: for example, leaders' behavior (such as the adoption of ethical leadership) can influence employees' decision of adopting the previous behaviors, being that relation influenced by psychological safety. In addition, the authors underline the possibility of employee voice be affected by implicit voice theories (IVTs), being a good psychological safety mitigating those effects. However, it is also important to highlight that

employee's in-role and extra-role behaviors adoption may be moderated by the level of confidence in knowledge, that is, the higher the level of confidence, the smaller may be the role of psychological safety. On the other hand, the authors recall that proactive employees may adopt in-role and extra-role behaviors more often, being that relation affected by trust.

Subsequently, a good level of voice, engagement and knowledge sharing may result in the improvement of individual's levels of creativity.

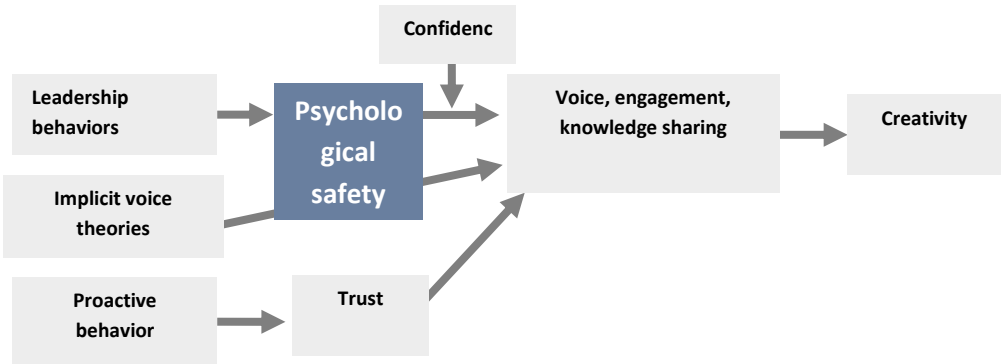

Figure 1 – Relationships between psychological safety at the individual-level research and other constructs.
Source: Edmondson and Lei (2014).

Conclusion

As stated below, literature has shown that employees' perceptions regarding the psychological safety have a significant impact on speaking up. That is, if employees realize that potential costs may result from their decision of speaking up, they will be reluctant to show their constructive point of view, due to fear of suffering personal and interpersonal negative outcomes (Detert & Burris, 2007; cited by Cheng *et al*., 2014; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Liang *et al.*, 2012; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Morrison, 2014; Brinsfield, 2009, 2013).

Furthermore, it is pertinent to recall that according to Brinsfield's study (2013), psychological safety may be negatively related to the defensive, relational and diffident silences, because in a good psychological safety environment employees can be themselves, without fearing to receive negative outcomes in case they decide to express their suggestions, concerns, work-related opinions or information about problems to someone in a higher organizational position. As for the acquiescent and deviant silences, the authors believe that psychological safety does not exercise a prominent role on them, given that in the first one is related to voice instrumentality, while in the second one deviant silence adoption is due to deviant reasons related to the organizational world.

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