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**STUDYING THE EFFECT OF QUALITY OF WORK LIFE ON REDUCTION OF
ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between employees' quality of work life and organizational silence at the University of Isfahan. It was conducted using descriptive-field method. The statistical population included eight-hundred thirty employees of the university among whom one-hundred thirty persons were selected through stratified random sampling method. Questionnaire of employees' quality of work life with thirty six questions and questionnaire of employees' organizational silence with seventeen questions were tools of data collection. Content validity and face validity of the questionnaire were confirmed by the experts and the result indicated confirmation of the questionnaire. Reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient that was equal to 0.93 and 0.82 for employees' quality of work life and organizational silence respectively. Statistical methods of correlation coefficient and regression coefficient were used for inferential analysis of data. The significant relation between the two main indexes was equal to 0.85 through Pierson correlation coefficient and testing of the results. Since this value is positive it can be stated that there is a positive and significant correlation between employees' quality of work life and organizational silence. Values of Pierson correlation coefficient were calculated to determine the significant relation between employees' quality of work life and each one of its components with organizational silence. Positive values showed that these relations are direct and there is a positive and significant correlation between employees' organizational silence and each component. It means that whatever these components are higher, organizational silence is increased in the statistical population under study. According to the obtained results, components of participation, job progress, solution of problems, communication, tendency to work, job security and wage can affect employees' organizational silence.

KEYWORDS: Employees' Quality of Work Life, Organizational Silence, Organizational Voice

INTRODUCTION

Human force is the most important factor of growth and durability and the most important competitive advantage of organizations in the modern world. Therefore, it is necessary to provide conditions for them to be able to improve the quality of their work life in the corporation with security and tranquillity and without any mental disturbance and take step towards the purposes of the organizations and explain its problems. Despite the emphasis of current literature about organization and management is on creating open channels but results of studies show many employees complain about the issue that their organizations do not support communications, information sharing and explicit and implicit knowledge. One of the important obstacles in success of the plans and purposes of the organization is lack of information, lack of trust and lack of what researchers have called organizational silence. It is avoidance to state the ideas, opinions and information about the organizational problems. Organizational silence is a common phenomenon in most organizations. However, not so many researchers have been performed about it (Zareei Matin, 2012: 77).

From one side, quality of work life has been led to attract attentions towards investment on people as the most important variable in management. It means that satisfying the needs of employees will be resulted in long-term improvement and efficiency of the organization (Shareef, 1990: 59). The major purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between employees' quality of work life and organizational silence.

In the following first organizational silence and quality of working life of employees are mentioned and their dimensions are expounded. Then the proposed model is tested in the form of a case study at the University of Isfahan by presenting the research methodology. Finally the findings are discussed and conclusions are presented.

Quality of work life

The term quality of work life was proposed at the end of the 1960's for the first time (Saraji et al., 2006). This term includes a range of theoretical concepts and its purpose is to decrease organizational problems (Martel Jean et al., 2006). Quality of work life has a dynamic and multi-dimensional structure that contains concepts such as job security, reward systems, educational and job progress opportunities and participation in decision-making. Duetsch and Schurman stated that quality of work life plans that were used in US increased employees' participation in decision-makings related to modern technology, work environment and skill training (Duetsch & Schurman, 1993). More exactly, quality of work life is a set of methods

and actions that help increase and maintain employees' satisfaction and its purpose is to improve their work conditions and increase efficiency of the corporation (Saraji et al., 2006). Reviewing the existing literature shows that there is no common and accepted definition for quality of work life and various variables such as organizational policy, leadership styles, methods and operations affect employees' attitude towards quality of work life (Lewis et al., 2007). Quality of work life can be defined as positive and satisfactory conditions of employees from the environment in which they work and their satisfaction with reward, job security, health and safety, enhancement and development of educational opportunities and supervisory support (May, Lau & Jahnsin, 1999:4). Indeed quality of work life demonstrates a kind of organizational culture or management method according to which employees have a sense of ownership, self-regulation, responsibility and self-esteem (Chan & Wyatt, 2007: 502). Cassio (1998) defined quality of work life as employees' perception of their physical and mental hygiene at the workplace and mentioned its factors as below: employees' participation, career path improvement, solving the conflicts, communications, health, job security, fair compensation and a secure and honourable environment (Mirkamali, 2005). Also Armstrong believes that quality of work life means an employee's satisfaction with satisfying his/her needs through resources, activities and consequences obtained from involvement and participation at the workplace. Also he suggested that quality of work life is usually affected by work experience and future job expectations of the individual (Armstrong et al., 2007).

Thomas summarizes quality of work life in the following four scopes:

- 1- job, physical and mental security
- 2- equality and fairness of wage
- 3- paving the way for progress and creating the opportunity for skill training and continuous learning
- 4- Freedom and participation in decision-makings (Mirsepasi, 1993).

Dastoon defines quality of work life as employees' reaction against work especially its essential consequences in satisfying job needs and mental health. Using this definition, quality of work life emphasizes personal consequences, work experience and manner of improving work in order to satisfy the individual's needs. Dastoon proposed a theoretical model to expound quality of work life that is as below:

Fair and adequate payment: equal payment for equal work as well as proportionality of payments with social standards, employees' standards and also proportionality of it with other types of work

Safe and hygienic workplace: creating safe work conditions in physical terms as well as determining reasonable work hours

Providing an opportunity for permanent growth and security: providing the ground to improve individual capabilities, opportunity for progress, opportunity to use the acquired skills and providing security in the field of employment and income

Legalism in the organization: freedom of speech without any fear of the reaction of higher authorities and attaching importance to law dominance than human dominance

Social dependence of work life: how employees understand the social responsibility in the organization

General space of life: making balance between work life and other sections of employees' life that include leisure time, education and family life.

Social integration in the organization: creating a suitable work climate that reinforces employees' sense of belonging to the organization and that the organization needs them.

Development of human capabilities: existence of opportunities such as independence and self-control at work, enjoying various skills and having access to information proportional with work (Moorhed et al, 1998)

There are methods to make work more pleasurable that improve quality of work life. These methods include:

- 1- providing the possibility of relation from bottom to top
- 2- work facilitation instead of direction
- 3- being flexible
- 4- Being one part of the organization (Betil & Newstorm, 2002).

Characteristics of quality of work life

Characteristics of quality of work life include the following cases in viewpoint of experts:

- 1- The effect of work on individuals towards effectiveness of the organization: In other words it is employees' reaction to work especially its individual consequences in job satisfaction and mental health. Characteristics based on individual consequence include fair payment, safe and healthy work conditions, suitable opportunity to disclose and develop capabilities of people, suitable opportunity for security and permanent growth in future, importance of work in the society, legitimacy of work and social proportionality of work.

- 2- Work method; manner of doing work that includes specific techniques of work like job enrichment, technical-social systems, job development, job circulation, etc.
- 3- Idea of participation in solving the problems and making decision in the organization (Salmani, 2006: 20).

Some experts have mentioned the characteristics of quality of work life as meaningfulness of work, corporate and social proportionality of work, work challenge, work productivity, growth and security, skill training and permanent learning in work (Salmani, 2006: 20)

The process of changing the expectations of organizations and employees and quality of work life

The mutual relationship of changing the social-economic conditions in shaping and changing the expectations of corporations from employees and employees' expectations from corporations is undeniable. This has been changed in industrial countries during five decades after the Second World War according to Table 2.

Table 2- Comparing change of expectations of organizations and employees after the Second World War (Mirsepasi, 2005: 160)

Employees' purpose and expectations	Purpose and expectations of the organization	Time
Finding a job to earn a living	Increasing of efficiency and profitability through mass production and reductions of costs	The two first decades after the Second World War
Receiving welfare services and higher wage level	Increasing of quality and competition by emphasizing the quality of products and services	The third and fourth decades after the world War
Increasing of quality of work life	Emphasizing customer satisfaction and his/her demand and generalizing this philosophy in inter-organizational working relationship	The recent decade

(Mirsepasi, 2005: 160)

Employees' organizational silence is mentioned below:

Definition of organizational silence

Pinder and Harlos define organizational silence as employees' avoidance to state behavioral, cognitive and effective assessments about the situations of the organization (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Morrison and Milliken consider organizational silence as a social phenomenon in which employees refuse to propose their ideas and concerns about organizational problems. Silence is affected by many organizational characteristics that

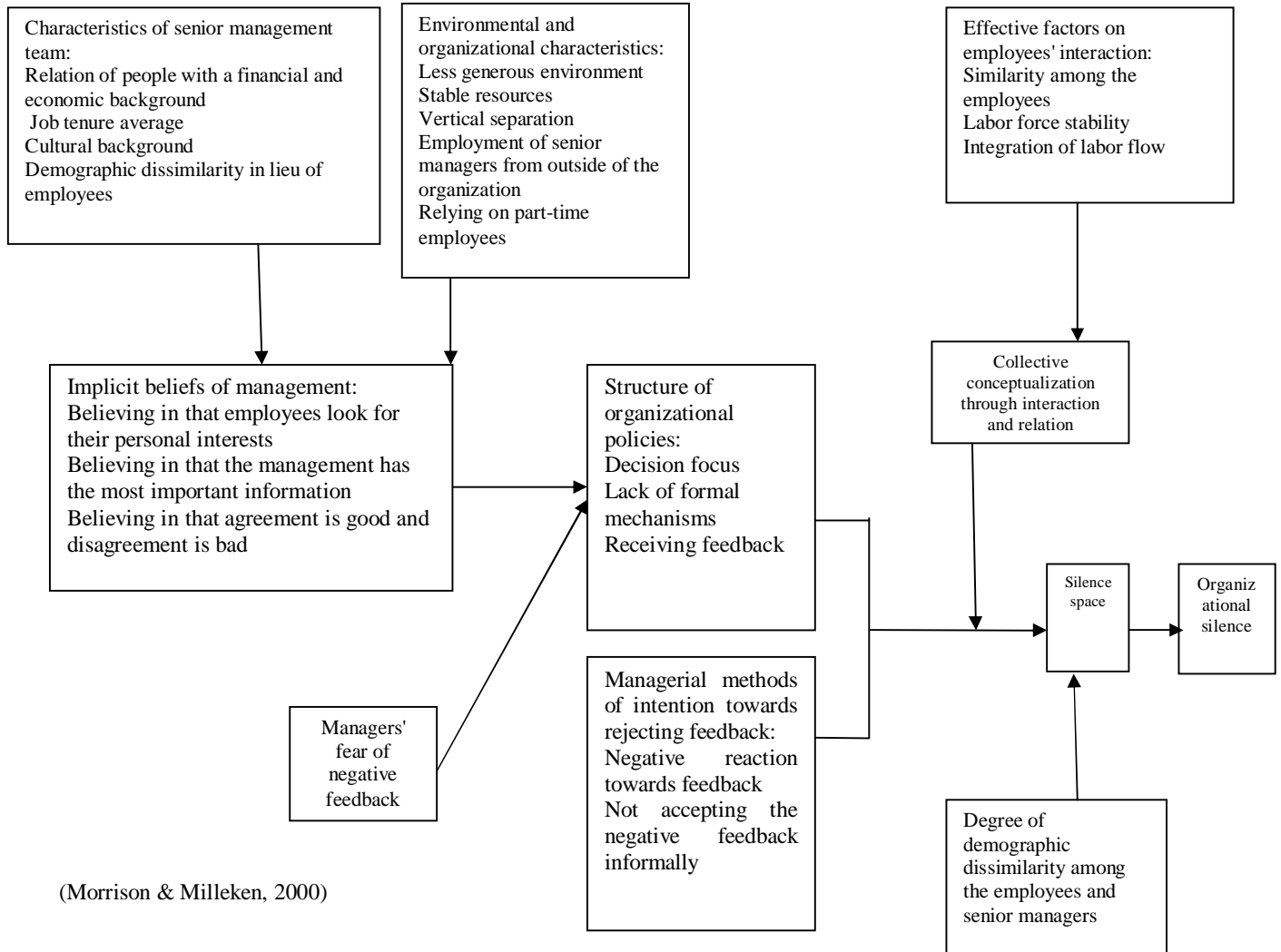
include decision-making processes, culture management processes and employees' perceptions of effective factors on silence (Dimitris & Vokala, 2007: 18).

Expression of ideas (organizational voice) or refusing to offer them (organizational silence) might be appeared as two opposite processes in behavioral terms, because silence requires not speaking. This is while sound needs to state the existing problems and difficulties in the organization. But the reality is that silence is not essentially a phenomenon in contrast with organizational sound. Indeed the difference between silence and sound is not in speaking; rather it is in peoples' motivation in avoiding to offer their information, ideas and opinions. There are three kinds of motivation in this framework regarding silence and sound: disengaged behavior based on consent and resignation, self-protective behavior based on fear and altruistic behaviors due to having interest in others and creating an opportunity to cooperate with them (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Effective factors on appearance of organizational silence; organizational and managerial variables

Environmental and organizational variables and some individual variables are the effective factors on creating organizational silence (Figure 2). According to this figure, silence is a phenomenon that is indebted to two factors of managers' fear of negative feedback and a set of their implicit beliefs. A series of organizational and environmental conditions as well as individual variables are the factors which create such beliefs. These beliefs along with the management fear of negative feedbacks are led to predictable kinds of organizational and managerial structures and policies which prevent ascending order of information.

Figure 1



(Morrison & Milleken, 2000)

Senior managers' fear of receiving negative feedback especially from subordinates is a very important factor that facilitates silence in the organization. Strong evidences reveal that individuals will have a sense of fear due to negative feedback either this information is about themselves or about what they have performed. Argyris and Schon (1978) suggest that many managers fear shamefulness, threat and susceptibility or lack of competence. Thus, they avoid from hearing the information that may question their current actions or is a threat against their power and credit (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

As it can be observed in Figure 1, these structures and methods help develop what is called "silence space". Extensive common perceptions among the employees are about the fact that talking about work problems is dangerous or fruitless. When there is such space, major reaction of employees in the organization will be silence instead of expressing the ideas and opinions. Of course the possibility of appearing such space and also the power and extension of it will depend on collective activities of employees. Therefore, this process and its factors are dealt with in the final section of explaining this model (Morrison & Milleken, 2000).

Consequences of silence on organizational decision-making and change processes

Generally, organizational silence is effective on the quality of decision-making, organizational change and reactions and behaviors of employees (Morrison & Milleken, 2000). One of the important consequences of organizational silence is its effect on organizational decision-making. Extensive studies about group decision-making show that quality of organizational decision-makings depends on the attention and investigation of various and opposite viewpoints about senior management teams that have a positive effect both on the quality of organizational decision-making and performance of the organization. All of these factors show that organizational silence decreases effectiveness of decision-making and processes of organizational change due to limiting the information that decision-makers have. Moreover, decision-making data and substitutes cannot be analyzed due to silence and in this case there is little probability that a comprehensive analysis can be conducted for the decision-making process. This is led to failure or reduced effectiveness of processes of organizational change and decision-making (Nemath, 1997).

Another method in which organizational silence has a negative effect on organizational change and development is to obstruct paths of negative feedback and thus reduce the ability of the organization to identify and modify the mistakes. Without receiving negative feedback mistakes will be continued and even they will become intensive, because modificatory actions are not performed at times of requirement. In this state silence means the organization lacks the essential capacity of what Argyris called "double-loop learning" that contains questioning and modification of the policies and purposes (Argyris, 1977).

Sometimes senior managers might not accept that they do not have the important information and consider silence as a sign of consensus and success. Even if managers ask employees directly for feedback, employees may interfere with filtration of negative feedbacks. As a result, the feedback that the management receives might reflect what employees think the

management wants to hear and not what shows the reality, status and environment (Bies & Tripp, 1999).

Consequences of organizational silence on behavioral reactions and feelings of employees

Researchers believe that organizational procedures which allow employees to express their opinions are considered positive by them, since employees are regarded as valuable members of the organization through this. According to Lind and Tyler, employees feel they have no value when they and their colleagues can not express their viewpoints freely. Researches show that such feelings decrease the commitment and confidence of members with regard to the organization. If employees feel that the organization does not value them, they will value the organization less and will have less confidence in it. Consequences which can be resulted from weakness of commitment and confidence include reduction of individual motivation and satisfaction, mental seclusion and even employees' turn-over (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Methodology

This study was conducted using descriptive-field as well as correlation method in which qualitative and quantitative data were investigated. Research variables were divided into two classes: dependent and independent. Independent variables include components of employees' quality of work life and dependent variables are factors of employees' organizational silence. The researcher used two questionnaires including employees' quality of work life questionnaire with 36 questions and employees' organizational silence with 17 questions. Also Likert scale was used to respond to the questions. Content validity and face validity of the questionnaire were confirmed by the experts and the result indicated confirmation of the questionnaire. Similarly reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient that was equal to 0.95 and 0.82 for employees' quality of work life and organizational silence respectively. Analysis methods in this study included descriptive statistics such as mean indexes and frequency and inferential statistics such as correlation and regression.

All components of the independent variable have alpha coefficient more than 70%, thus they have the essential reliability for analysis. Also confirmatory factorial analysis of items related to employees' organizational silence explains 40% of changes of the observed variables that

are significant at level 95%. The calculated Kmo for employees' organizational silence was equal to 0.862 and was more than 70% and significant for all components of the independent variable that shows suitability of these items. Thirty six items were measured in order to evaluate the dependent variable. Analysis of the items show that sum of the above factors explain totally 29% of observed changes that are significant at high level. The calculated Kmo (0.871) reveals suitability of these items.

Conceptual model of the study

The conceptual model in this study has been proposed based on theoretical principles as it is observed in Figure 2.

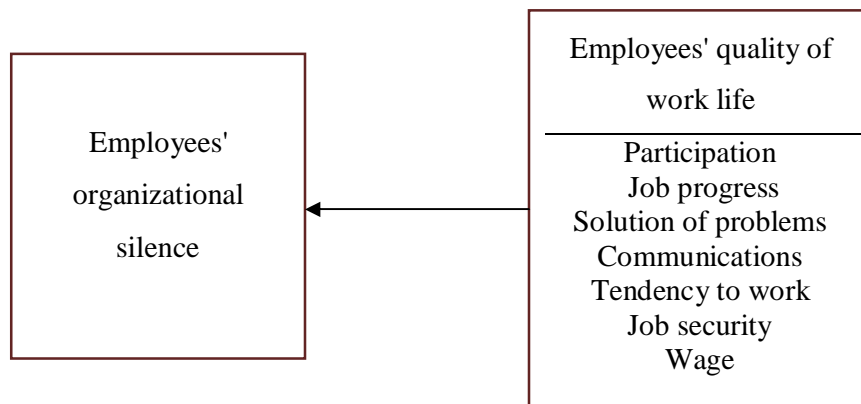


Figure 2- The proposed model (by researchers)

Research hypotheses

Primary hypothesis: There is a significant relation between employees' quality of work life and organizational silence at the University of Isfahan.

Secondary hypotheses

- 1- There is a significant relation between participation and employees' organizational silence.
- 2- There is a significant relation between job progress and employees' organizational silence.
- 3- There is a significant relation between solution of problems and employees' organizational silence.
- 4- There is a significant relation between communications and employees' organizational silence.

- 5- There is a significant relation between tendency to work and employees' organizational silence.
- 6- There is a significant relation between job security and employees' organizational silence.
- 7- There is a significant relation between employees' wage and organizational silence.

The statistical population and sample

The statistical population included eight-hundred thirty managers and employees of the University of Isfahan. Stratified random sampling method was used. Thus, the sample size was obtained equal to one-hundred thirty persons according to Morgan Table.

Table 2- Characteristics of the statistical sample

Type of variable	Elements of variable	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Gender	Female	63	64.3%	1.357
	Male	35	35.7%	
Age	Below 30 years old	16	16.3%	2.19
	31- 40 years old	48	49%	
	41-50 years old	33	33.7%	
	51-60 years old	1	1%	
Education	Below diploma	1	1%	2.95
	Diploma	20	20.4%	
	B.A	59	60.2%	
	M.A & PhD	18	18.4%	
Work experience	Below 5 years	12	12.2%	3
	5-10 years	30	30.6%	
	11-15 years	21	21.4%	
	16-20 years	16	16.3%	
	More than 20 years	19	19.4%	

Mean of gender was obtained equal to 1.357 that is closer to 1, therefore, most employees of this university are females. Age average of individuals was equal to 2.19 that shows the dominant age is between 31-40 years old. Average of education level was equal to 2.95 that indicates most individuals have B.A academic education and average of work experience in this organization was equal to 3 that indicates most individuals have work experience between 11-15 years.

Findings

Primary and secondary findings were analyzed after collecting the questionnaires. The primary findings are represented in Table 4. In order to test the hypotheses t-value test was used that if it is more than 2, the hypothesis is confirmed and if it is less than 2, the hypothesis is rejected.

As it is obvious in Table 5 there is a relatively strong and significant correlation among the research variables.

Table 3- Testing the hypotheses

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Kind of correlation	Value of correlation	t-value	Sig
Employees' quality of work life	Employees' silence	Pierson	85%	2.56	0.000
Participation	Employees' silence	Pierson	70%	2.30	0.000
Job progress	Employees' silence	Pierson	55%	2.22	0.000
Solution of problems	Employees' silence	Pierson	60%	2.15	0.000
Communications	Employees' silence	Pierson	58%	2.24	0.000
Tendency to work	Employees' silence	Pierson	45%	2.20	0.000
Job security	Employees' silence	Pierson	20%	2.35	0.000
Wage	Employees' silence	Pierson	22%	2.24	0.000

Values of Pierson correlation coefficient were calculated to determine a significant relation between employees' quality of work life and each one of its components with employees' organizational silence. The positive values show these relations are direct and there is a positive and significant correlation between employees' organizational silence and each one of the components. It means that whatever the amount of these components is more, employees' organizational silence is increased too. According to the obtained results using the regression coefficient components of participation, job progress, solution of problems, communications, tendency to work, job security and wage can affect employees' organizational silence. Thus, all hypotheses are accepted with 95% confidence.

Table 4- Results related to testing the relationship between employees' quality of work life and organizational silence

Hypothesis number	The related hypothesis	Result of the test
Secondary hypothesis 1	There is a significant relation between participation and employees' organizational silence.	Confirmed
Secondary hypothesis 2	There is a significant relation between job progress and employees' organizational silence.	Confirmed
Secondary hypothesis 3	There is a significant relation between solution of problems and employees' organizational silence.	Confirmed
Secondary hypothesis 4	There is a significant relation between communications and employees' organizational silence.	Confirmed
Secondary hypothesis 5	There is a significant relation between tendency to work and employees' organizational silence.	Confirmed
Secondary hypothesis 6	There is a significant relation between job security and employees' organizational silence.	Confirmed
Secondary hypothesis 7	There is a significant relation between employees' wage and organizational silence.	Confirmed
Primary hypothesis	There is a significant relation between employees' quality of work life and organizational silence at the University of Isfahan.	Confirmed

Finally Friedman test was applied to rank the effect of seven components of employees' quality of work life that include participation, job progress, solution of problems, communications, tendency to work, job security and wage. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7- Mean of ranks of variables constituting employees' quality of work life through the Friedman test

Seven factors constituting employees' quality of work life	Mean of ranks
Participation	2.98
Job progress	3.26
Solution of problems	3.00
Communications	5.04
Tendency to work	6.10
Job security	4.63
Wage	2.99

As it can be observed in Table 7, the highest rank is related to tendency to work with mean rank (6.10). The second rank is related to communications with mean rank (5.04), the third rank is related to job security with mean (4.63), the fourth rank is related to job progress with mean (3.26), the fifth rank is related to solution of problems with mean (3.00), the sixth rank

is related to wage with mean (2.99) and the lowest rank is related to participation with mean (2.98). The results indicate that tendency to work and thus employees' quality of work life have the highest effect on organizational silence.

Discussion and conclusion

According to findings, there is a high correlation between employees' quality of work life and decreased organizational silence. It means that whatever employees' quality of work life can be enhanced in the university, employees' organizational silence is decreased too. According to the conducted analyses it is suggested that the university always considers purposes of the organization in its perspective and managers try to harmonize personal purposes of people with those of the organization. Similarly, managers should emphasize significant values as well as their institutionalization in the organization. They can enhance the quality of adopted decisions through creating trust in the organization, solving its problems and reinforcing positive and constructive behaviors among the employees. Whatever the organization values employees more, employees will have more confidence in the organization and their trust, commitment, motivation and satisfaction with the organization will be increased and therefore employees' internal seclusion is decreased. Major purpose of this study was to explain the relationship between employees' quality of work life and reduction of organizational silence at the University of Isfahan. Questionnaire was tool of data collection and was distributed randomly among 130 employees of the university. Given to the relationship among employees' quality of work life (participation, job progress, solution of problems, communications, tendency to work, job security and wage) and general space of employees' life with their high performance and satisfaction, managers can decrease employees' seclusion by providing the ground for their freedom of speech and encourage them to express organizational problems.

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