

**Breaking the Silence with Emotions:
Emotional Resources as a Buffer Against Silence in the Workplace**

Summary

This dissertation conceptualizes silence in the workplace as an emotionally embedded and resource-sensitive phenomenon. Across three studies, it examines whether emotional resources contribute to explaining why employees withhold work-relevant concerns and whether such resources can be strengthened through targeted intervention.

Conceptually, the dissertation is anchored in job demands–resources (JD–R) theory and research on emotions in organizations (Bakker et al., 2023; Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Building on these theoretical foundations, it develops a multilevel account of silence in the workplace centered on emotional resources and examines whether silence can be addressed through intervention. Drawing on evidence from three preregistered studies—a meta-analysis, a field evaluation of a web-based training fostering authenticity, and an experimental evaluation of this training in a scenario-based randomized team experiment—the dissertation addresses important empirical and conceptual gaps in the literature on emotional resources, authenticity, silence in the workplace, and intervention-oriented occupational health psychology.

A key assumption underlying the dissertation is that silence in the workplace emerges within emotionally consequential work episodes (Dilba & Meyer, 2023). Such episodes can be understood as emotional job demands that elicit appraisals, discrete emotions, and self-protective or resignation-based impulses. Whether these episodes culminate in resignation-based (acquiescent) silence, fear-based (quiescent) silence, or more constructive responding depends on emotional resources available at the individual level, at the dyadic level of supervisor–employee interactions (leader level), at the level of teams, and at the organizational level.

Within this broader class of resources, authenticity-related functioning is considered especially

promising because it combines more accurate access to internal emotional cues, more flexible regulation, and more congruent yet context-sensitive expression (Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

Study 1 provided the broad empirical foundation in a meta-analysis synthesizing correlational evidence on emotional resources and silence in the workplace. Across $k = 84$ independent effects ($N = 43,495$), higher emotional resources were associated with reduced silence in the workplace, $r = -.26$. This negative association emerged across all levels at which emotional resources were assessed (employee, team, leader, and organizational level). Importantly, effect magnitudes differed by motives for being silent. The strongest negative association emerged for acquiescent silence ($r = -.38$), whereas quiescent silence also showed a clearly negative, but smaller, association ($r = -.28$). By contrast, prosocial and opportunistic silence were not reliably related to emotional resources. These findings suggest that emotional resources are especially relevant for those forms of silence that are rooted in resignation and threat.

Study 2 transitioned from a correlational design to an intervention approach by conducting a field-based evaluation of the web-based training *Working Authentically* in nursing during the COVID-19 period. Employees and leaders ($N = 42$) completed a five-week digital curriculum comprising five one-hour learning units delivered in employee and leader versions. Evaluated in line with the framework of Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2007), the training showed favorable reactions through high satisfaction, learning through increased authenticity-related knowledge, behavior change through increased authentic work behavior, and results-level change through reductions in acquiescent silence and emotional exhaustion. Quiescent silence, however, did not exhibit statistically reliable change. In this chronically high-demand context, the findings support the feasibility of scalable online resource building while suggesting that authenticity-centered intervention may be particularly effective for decreasing acquiescent silence.

Study 3 strengthened causal and multilevel inference in a scenario-based cluster-randomized team experiment. University students assigned to employee and leader roles ($N = 85$, $k = 19$ teams) completed a pretest assessment including a standardized simulated team meeting, then received either the training *Working Authentically* or a recovery-focused active control training, and subsequently completed a parallel posttest assessment including a second simulated meeting. Emotionally demanding situations were implemented through a confederate taking part in the meeting and creating provocations across teams. Under these stringent experimental conditions, the expected condition \times time interactions did not attain statistical significance. Nevertheless, the findings yielded several promising indications consistent with the intervention logic, particularly for emotion regulation flexibility, authentically expressed emotions, psychological safety during the meeting, and lower meeting-related acquiescent silence. Study 3 thus provided an important proof of concept that authenticity-based resource building may alter proximal emotional and interactional processes in emotionally demanding episodes, while indicating that increased methodological control may yield a more conservative and less consistent pattern of evidence that requires larger, adequately powered replication.

Taken together, the studies of the present dissertation extend theoretical and empirical understanding of silence in the workplace in several ways. First, they demonstrate that emotional resources are meaningfully linked to reduced silence in the workplace across multiple levels of analysis, thereby extending the health-impairment logic of the JD–R model to acquiescent silence and quiescent silence as affectively embedded organizational responses. Second, they indicate that an authenticity-focused online training represents a promising intervention strategy, with the clearest effects emerging for proximal emotion-related processes and acquiescent silence. Third, the nonresponse of quiescent silence to the intervention suggests that it may be embedded within a more deeply ingrained fear network and thus represent a more entrenched, less malleable form of silence, potentially requiring more intensive intervention formats be-

fore reliable modification can be expected (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009).

Overall, the dissertation supports the conclusion that silence in the workplace under emotionally demanding conditions is shaped by emotional resources available across several levels of analysis and can be addressed through deliberate resource building. Authenticity-related functioning emerges as a particularly relevant subset of these resources because it appears to support more accurate emotional access, more flexible regulation, and more congruent expression. In this way, the dissertation contributes to work and organizational psychology by identifying multilevel resource building as a theoretically grounded and practically relevant avenue for reducing silence in the workplace under emotionally demanding conditions.

Keywords: silence in the workplace, emotional resources, authenticity, emotion regulation, acquiescent silence, quiescent silence, job demands–resources theory

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