Illuminating employees' organizational silence

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C H R O N I C L E	A B S T R A C T
	Undoubtedly, human capital is the main source of knowledge generation, which leads to a competitive advantage and sustainability of organizations. When managers pay more attention to such capital, they will be able to lead their organization, more effectively. In such route, the managers should look for their employees' opinions on policies/plans of the organization and learn how to run the organization and organizational challenges. They should use their employees' knowledge to improve the quality of decisions, they should encourage them to share their ideas and protect them from organizational silence. Thus, human capitals will be obviously considered as strategic capitals of an organization. Concerning the importance of organizational sound, the status of organizational silence is studied in 13 selected organizations in Qom Province – as one the biggest Iranian provinces. The findings indicate that organizational silence in Qom selected organizations is not in an ideal status and the current level should be mitigated. Likewise, findings show that there is no significant difference between organizational silence in Qom selected organizations in terms of demographic variables.

1. Introduction

Today, organizations encourage their employees to present their creativity and innovation and ask them to study and criticize various issues, to challenge organizational policies/plans and to feel commitment and responsible to all organizational events such that they could succeed in their competition with other organizations. Although organizations welcome their employees' opinions apparently and encourage them to criticize the firm, but practically, organizations are less welcoming organizational sound and employees' statements and they mitigate their employees' propensity to state about all organizational scopes and fields. When a system enforces silence climate, different attitudes, ideas, aims and preferences will not encourage employees' statements. Hence, a system is entering the process, which would not be able to achieve its aims properly and it would not look for

learning from experiences. In fact, such system involves with negative impacts of silence on organizational decision making and change processes are enforced (Danayifard & Panahi, 2010). Organizational silence may lead to lack of positive feedback, lack of information and organization may suffer from ineffective organizational process (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Concerning the importance of organizational sound in decision makings, developing organizational operations, making decisions effective and so on, we are looking for illuminating the status of organizational silence among the employees of Qom selected organizations in present study.

2. Problem description

Many researchers state that organizations are not usually accepting the opposite opinions of employees/managers. They try to prevent their staff to state the problems and inspire them not to challenge or criticize organizational policies, plans and strategies. Therefore, in expounding their problems to their top people in organizational hierarch, employees are confronting with some problems (Argyrys & Shon, 1978).

In today's changing world, the organizations need employees who express their ideas. Likewise, human capitals at labor market select organizations that can express their ideas and opinions since both managers and employees show higher motivation, satisfaction, commitment and performance in a silence-less ambience. Organizational silence may have damaging impacts on decision making and change process in organization (Huang et al., 2005).

Other evidences emphasize that organizational silence can lead into stress, pessimism, dissatisfaction and withdrawal of employees (Beer & Noria, 2000). Furthermore, Van Dyne et al. (2003) studied the reasons of employees' silence negative consequences and concluded that the meaning and concept of silence is more important than employees' contribution and connoisseurs believe that employees' motivations more depend on contribution than silence and silence leads into more incompatibility than contribution. Brinsfield et al. (2009) showed that organizational silence was universal, multidimensional, and exactly measurable and could be associated with important phenomena of organizational behavior. In present paper, we plan to study the extent of organizational silence in Qom selected organizations. Also, we will answer this question: how is the level of organizational silence among 13 selected organizations in Qom province?

3. Reviewing the literature

3.1.The concept of organizational silence

Organizational silence refers to collective phenomenon of trivial statements or reactions of employees in answering important issues the organizations confront (Henriksen & Dayton, 2006: 1539). Morrison and Milliken defined organizational silence as a collective phenomenon in which employees refuse providing their information, opinions and concerns on potential working problems (Brinsfield, 2009: 50). According to them, many organizations have involved in resolving a clear puzzle, that is, most employees know the facts on certain organizational problems while they have no dare to transfer them to their supervisors (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003: 1394).

Pinder and Harlos (2001) believed that although silence is widespread in organizations it is often neglected by researchers. Even when silence in organizations is admired by organizational employees and researchers, other researchers neglect it. They believed that employees' silence is to refuse real statements on behavioral, cognitive and/or emotional evaluations on organizational conditions by those people who seem have the ability and talent to challenge and criticize such situation.

According to Peter Senge (1999), silence means "silence climate". He describes silence in comparison with change in which people in organizations tend to solve their problems in their own

fields by neglecting difficult interactions. As a result, they only tend to discuss on methods that have enforced a dissatisfactory climate. Senge (1999) believed that some managers have lived for a long time in environments where fear, threat and silence are, *inter alia*, habits and no one can imagine an alternative. Such limited capacity for results would cause that people remain in silence. Organizational silence means deliberated withhold to state ideas, information and opinions on job. Organizational silence may lead into lack of feedback, information and idea analysis. Therefore, the organization endures damages of lower effective organizational processes (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Silence does not mean only not to talk. Rather, it can mean not to write, not to attend, not to hear and to neglect. Silence can be an invalid word or text. Silence can refer to keep still, censorship, suppression, marginalization, trivialization and exclusion (Hazen, 2006: 238).

3.2. The process of silence creation in an organization

Although in organizational behavior arena, the concept of organizational silence is not analyzed in a proper level and its revealed and hidden aspects are not studied well, tactics which attempt to confront organizational silence and preventing employees' words and organizational sound are well recognized in the literature. Izraeili and Jick (1986) expressed some common tactics to create silence. These tactics include: employees are told that their cognition is not enough, they lack necessary authorities to perform, they are not players of a team, they lack necessary skills for team working and their reactions can only cause problems and bad feelings among them. Interestingly, many managers believe that they encourage their employees to speak and prevent them of organizational silence while they use informal tactics to create silence. This contradictorily behavior by managers is recognized as "leadership with two links" defined by Hennestad (1990). It causes that they see no common point with organizational managers/officials in expressing their ideas. In such case, employees refuse expressing their opinions since no one wants to be recognized as a troublemaker and suffers from possible negative consequences which impact on his/her professional life (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005: 446). According to Morrison and Milliken, employees' silence behavior is eclipsed by three main factors. Senior managers' attitude toward silence and operational managers' attitude toward silence impacts positively on employees' silence behaviors while the opportunities to establish communications have negative relationship with employees' silence behaviors (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005, P. 445).

3.3. The reasons of organizational silence and sound

Table 1 renders some reasons for organizational silence and sound (Maria, 2006: 226).

Table 1
The reasons of organizational silence

Organizational sound	Organizational silence
1. There are managers with different backgrounds in the organization.	1. There are managers with financial or economic background in the organization.
2. Management values liberal and democratic decision making.	2. Managers value homogeneity and hierarchy.
3. There is low acceptance of control by employees and low emphasis on efficiency.	3. There are huge differences between management and employees in terms of age and gender.
4. Management designates decision making.	4. Management's emphasis is on control and efficiency.
5. Organization performs its jobs through its staff.	5. Organizational structure centralizes decision making.
6. Management encourages receiving feedback from subordinates.	6. Management responses feedback negatively.
7. In terms of resources, the organization is rich.	7. Organization is highly relied upon contracted manpower.

Researchers have considered different factors and reasons for silence. In a research, authors indicated that personal factors (keeping the status quo, distrust and pessimism toward manager), organizational factors (burnout, lack of feedback system, organizational structure), managerial factors (bad managerial actions, senior manager sickness, creating a distrusted climate by manager in the organization, prejudiced behaviors and negative feedback) and collective factors (group thinking,

social refusing) have all caused a silence climate and they finally create organizational silence (Khanifar et al., 2010). However, Morrison and Milliken believe that the reasons of organizational silence are centralized decision making, relying upon contracted manpower, negative reaction to feedback, etc. They believe that the main reasons for organizational sound include designating the authorities, encouraging employees toward feedback, emphasize on efficiency and so on.

3.4.Affecting factors on organizational silence

There are some believes in organizations that lead into an environment where employees do not feel convenience to state about certain problems. It is not a new issue that managers impact on believes and assumptions of employees. Managerial ideas can impact strongly on employees' behaviors. For example, when managers assume that employees hate their job, they cannot trust them to do their jobs well. As a result, managers create control mechanisms to prevent refusing. As a consequence, employees find that management does not trust them. So they will be discouraged and will look a way to leave the system. When the common ideology in an organization is NOT to state, employees are headstrong and obstinate, management knows the best and disagreement is undesired. Then, management will create structures and policies which facilitate previous flow and it will enforce managers to prevent any threat and/or feedback. Two common structural traits in organizations created by such beliefs, centrality in decision making and lack of official feedback mechanisms are upward (Danaeefard & Panahi, 2010: 5). If the common belief in organization is that employees should be opportunistic and they have no valid knowledge about the interests of organization, so it is favorable for managers not to participate them in decision making process. Keeping employees from decision making is a way to prevent their opposite votes and negative feedback. The result is not to express disagreement and fear of feedback. Although a contributive decision making be apparently valued, the main decision making is done higher levels of the organization (Forgen, 1999).

4. Methodology

4.1.Research aims

1. Describing and clarifying the condition of organizational silence in Qom selected organizations.
2. Clarifying the condition of organizational silence based on demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, years of services and educational level)
3. Providing theoretic and practical guidelines to improve organizational silence mitigation in Qom selected organizations

4.2.Hypotheses

Major hypothesis

Employees' organizational silence at Qom selected organizations is higher than average level.

Minor hypotheses

1. Employees' organizational silence at Governor General Office is higher than average level.
2. Employees' organizational silence at Martyrs Foundation is higher than average level.
3. Employees' organizational silence at Social Security Directorate is higher than average level
4. Employees' organizational silence at Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare Directorate is higher than average level.
5. Employees' organizational silence at Registry Office is higher than average level.
6. Employees' organizational silence at Agricultural Jihad Directorate is higher than average level.
7. Employees' organizational silence at Economy and Finance Directorate is higher than average level.
8. Employees' organizational silence at Veterinary Directorate is higher than average level.
9. Employees' organizational silence at Medical Science University is higher than average level

10. Employees' organizational silence at Prisons Directorate is higher than average level.
11. Employees' organizational silence at Power Regional Company is higher than average level.
12. Employees' organizational silence at Industry, Mines and Commerce Directorate is higher than average level.
13. Employees' organizational silence at Sport and Youth Directorate is higher than average level

4.3. Population, statistical sample and sampling method

Population consists of 13 Qom selected organizations. After initial computations based on Eq. (1), 110 subjects were achieved. Owing to authors' experiences in previous works, 130 questionnaires were distributed of which 115 ones that were precisely completed were finally gathered and analyzed. Table 1 shows the number or respondents in terms of each organization.

$$n = \frac{N z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 \, pq}{\varepsilon^2 (N-1) + z_{\frac{\alpha}{2}}^2 \, pq} \tag{1}$$

Table 2
The number of respondents in terms of each organization

Row	Organization	QTY	%
1	Governor General Office	5	4.34
2	Martyrs Foundation	22	19.13
3	Social Security Directorate	6	5.21
4	Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare Directorate	5	4.34
6	Agricultural Jihad Directorate	10	8.69
7	Finance and Economy Directorate	5	4.34
8	Veterinary Directorate	4	3.47
9	Medical Science University	10	8.69
10	Prisons Directorate	10	8.69
11	Power Regional Company	10	8.69
12	Industry, Mines and Commerce Directorate	9	7.82
13	Sport and Youth Directorate	13	11.30
	Total	115	100

4.4. Data collection tool

To measure the extent of organizational silence, organizational silence questionnaire of Vakola and Bouradas (2005) extracted. Answering the questions was based on Likert scales including fully disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree and fully agree with scores 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. Noteworthy, score 3 means that organizational silence is dominated in the population. Less value of its extent shows organizational sound.

Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

Questionnaires were distributed among a group of elites in organizational behavior field, researchers and experts of mentioned organizations. After receiving their viewpoints, their suggestions on amending some questions were executed. Afterwards, a 30 – subject sample of amended organizational silence questionnaires was distributed in the population and finally organizational silence questionnaire was confirmed ($\alpha = 0.752$).

5. Research findings

5.1. Finding from descriptive analysis

Based on descriptive statistics mentioned in Fig. 1, 18% of the population is female and remained 82% is male. In terms of marital status, 81% is married and 19% is single. Likewise, 77% of the population consists of >40 year – old people. In terms of education, 65% of the population has M.A., 18% has M. A., 11% has associate of arts, 5% has diploma and 1% has Ph. D. or higher degrees.

Regarding job experience, the highest record is between 6 and 10 years of experience (32%). The job experience of 78% of the population is less than 15 years.
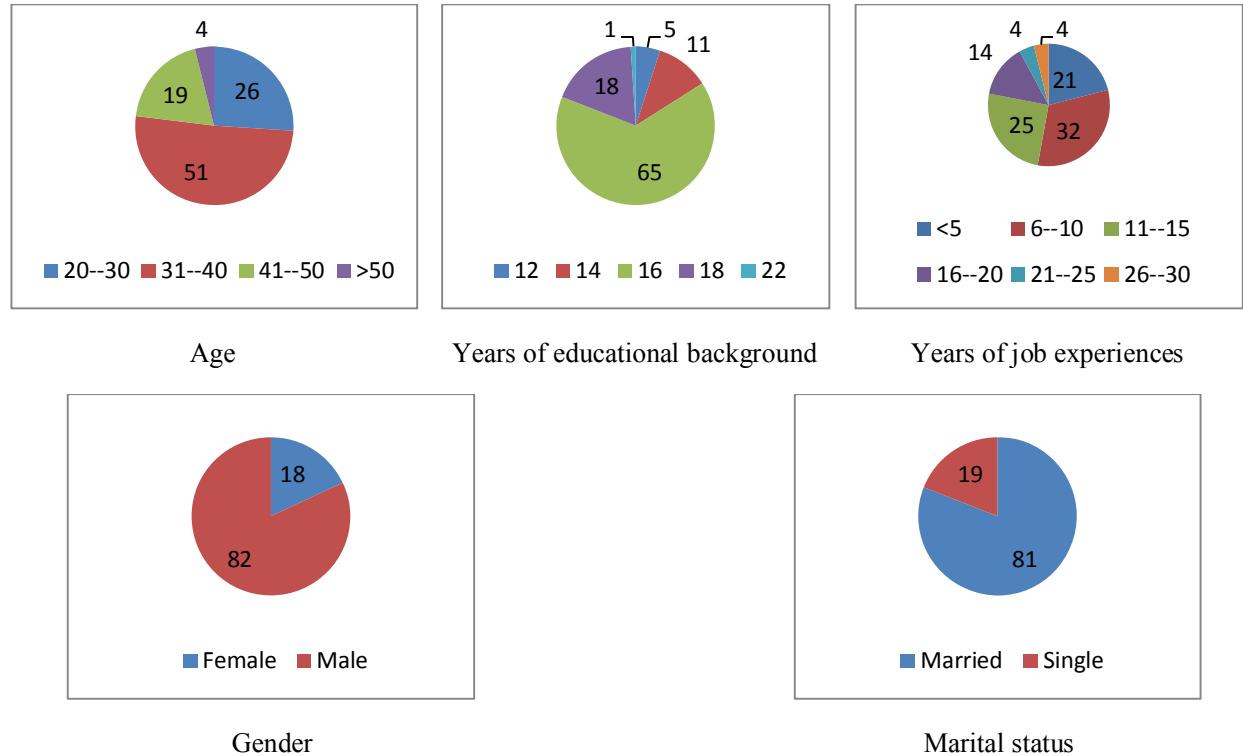

Age

Years of educational background

Years of job experiences

Gender

Marital status

Fig. 1. Personal characteristics of the participants

Table 3 shows organizational silence descriptive statistic in each organization. On this basis, the total average of organizational silence is 3.38. However, organizational silence in some selected organization is higher than others. The highest organizational silence extent is seen in Qom Governor General Office (3.9) followed by Prisons Organization (3.7). The lowest organizational silence extent is seen in Agricultural Jihad (2.74) followed by Veterinary Directorate (2.89).

Table 3
Organizational silence descriptive statistics in each organization

Organization	#	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Governor General Office	5	3.68	4.18	3.9	0.206
Martyrs Foundation	22	2.09	4.59	3.34	0.673
Social Security Directorate	6	2.91	4.14	3.46	0.507
Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare	5	2.09	4.59	3.48	0.918
Assets and Docs Registry	6	2.95	4.86	3.65	0.788
Agricultural Jihad Directorate	10	1.77	3.95	2.74	0.798
Finance and Economy Directorate	5	2.09	4.05	3.1	0.912
Veterinary	4	2.23	3.45	2.89	0.517
Medical Science University	10	2.32	4.82	3.56	0.904
Prisons Directorate	10	2.05	5	3.7	0.934
Power Regional Company	10	2.09	4.23	3.45	0.776
Industry, Mines and Commerce Directorate	9	2.36	4.95	3.63	0.822
Sport and Youth Directorate	13	2.64	3.64	3.13	0.36
Total	115	1.77	5	3.38	0.755

5.2. Findings from research hypotheses

To use parametric parameter, one should initially study the normality of data. To this end, Kolmogorov – Smirnov is used and findings are shown in table 4. Since significance figure is greater than significance level (0.05), H_0 namely the normality of variables is supported.

H_0 Relevant variable is normal.

H_1 Relevant variable is not normal.

Table 4
The normality of research variables

Variable	QTY	Kolmogorov Smirnov Z	sig	Result
Organizational silence	115	0.581	0.889	Normal

According to table 5, we conclude that data are normal. Concerning data normality, one can use average test of a statistical population in order to test major and minor hypotheses. Textual and statistical states of research hypotheses are:

Statistical state	Textual state of hypotheses
H_0: $\mu_1=3$	The average of employees' organizational silence in selected organizations is in medium level.
H_1: $\mu_1 \neq 3$	The average of employees' organizational silence in selected organizations is not in medium level.

Table 5
The results of a population average test

Organization	T	df	Sig	Confidence Low	Confidence High	Test result	Organizational silence status	Result
Governor General Office	9.688	4	0.001	0.64	1.15	Refusing H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Martyrs Foundation	2.438	21	0.024	0.51	0.64	Refusing H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Social Security Directorate	2.27	5	0.72	0.06	1	Accepting H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare	1.174	4	0.306	0.65	1.62	Accepting H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Assets and Docs Registry	2.041	5	0.097	0.17	1.48	Accepting H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Agricultural Jihad	-1.011	9	0.338	-0.82	0.31	Accepting H_0	Medium	Desired
Finance and Economy	0.264	4	0.805	-1.02	1.24	Accepting H_0	Medium	Desired
Veterinary	-0.399	3	0.717	-0.92	0.71	Accepting H_0	Medium	Desired
Medical Science University	1.977	9	0.08	0.08	1.21	Accepting H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Prisons Directorate	2.389	9	0.041	0.03	1.37	Refusing H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Power Regional Company	1.876	9	0.093	0.09	1.01	Accepting H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Industry, Mines and Commerce	2.324	8	0.049	0	1.26	Refusing H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Sport and Youth Directorate	1.398	12	0.188	0.078	0.35	Accepting H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible
Total	5.411	114	0	0.24	0.52	Refusing H_0	Higher than medium	Reducible

According to Table 5, one can say that organizational silence average of ten organization is higher than medium. In Governor General Office, Martyrs Foundation, Social Security Directorate, Cooperative, Labor and Social Welfare Directorate, Assets and Docs Registration Directorate, Medical Science University, Prisons Organization, Power Regional Company, Industry, Mines and Commerce Directorate and Sport and Youth Directorate the average of employees' organizational silence is higher than medium level and it is capable to be improved and to mitigate organizational silence. Agricultural Jihad Directorate, Economy and Finance Directorate and Veterinary Directorate are in medium and favored status.

5.3.Other findings

Here, we try to clarify the average of organizational silence in Qom selected organizations based on demographic variables (gender, marital status, age, educational level and years of service). The textual and statistical shapes of hypotheses are as below:

H_0: $\mu_1=\mu_2=\mu_3$	There is no significant difference between the averages of employees' organizational silence in Qom selected organizations based on demographic variables.
H_1: $\exists i, j \Rightarrow \mu i \neq \mu j$	There is a significant difference between the averages of employees' organizational silence in Qom selected organizations based on demographic variables.

Noteworthy, bi-independent population average test is used to investigate organizational silence and based on gender and marital status and one-way variance analysis is used to investigate organizational silence on the basis of age, years of service and educational level. Brief results of both tests are shown in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6
The results of bi-independent average test

Variable	organizational silence average	Variance test F	sig	t	df	sig	Averages equality test Average differences	Standard error	95% confidence distance for averages Lower level	Higher level
Gender	Variances equality hypothesis	0.063	0.802	0.171	113	0.864	0.03139	0.183	-0.331	0.394
	Variances inequality hypothesis			0.163	28.08	0.872	0.03139	0.192	-0.363	0.424
Marital status	Variances equality hypothesis	1.033	0.312	0.250	112	0.803	0.04594	0.183	0.317	0.409
	Variances inequality hypothesis			0.226	26.8	0.823	0.04594	0.203	0.371	0.463

The first part of Table 6 indicates variances equality test (Leven Test). H_0 show the equality of variances and its contrary hypothesis also show the inequality of variances. That is:

H_0: $(\delta_f)^2 = (\delta_m)^2$	Variances of both groups are equal.
H_1: $(\delta_f)^2 \neq (\delta_m)^2$	Variances of both groups are not equal.

Also, the first part of above table indicates that sig for gender and marital status is greater than 0.05. Therefore, H_0 is supported and one can conclude that variances of both groups (male/female, married/single) are equal. Thus, averages equality test continues with variances equality hypothesis (first line).

According to other parts of Table 6, since sig for average equality test is greater than 0.05, H_0 is supported and one can conclude that there is no significant difference between organizational silence averages of male/female employees in Qom selected organizations. Also, one can conclude that there is no significant difference between organizational silence averages of married/single employees in Qom selected organizations.

Table 7
The results of one-way variance analysis test

Variable	Organizational silence	Total	Freedom	Squares	(F)	sig
Age	Inter – groups	2.51	3	0.75	1.327	0.269
	Intra – groups	62.759	111	0.565		
	Total	65.01	114			
Job experience	Inter – groups	1.728	4	0.432	0.751	0.559
	Intra - groups	63.282	110	0.575		
	Total	65.01	114			
Educational level	Inter - groups	5.75	5	1.151	2.117	0.069
	Intra - groups	59.255	109	0.544		
	Total	65.01	114			

In Table 7, since sig for age is greater than 0.05, H_0 is supported namely one can say that that there is no significant difference between organizational silence averages of employees in Qom selected organizations at different intervals. Likewise, one can conclude that since sig for job experience is greater than 0.05, H_0 is supported namely there is no significant difference between employees' organizational silence in selected organizations and different job backgrounds. In the meantime, since sig for educational level is greater than 0.05, H_0 is supported namely one can say that there is no significant difference between employees' organizational silence in selected organizations and different educational levels.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Organizational silence is a new issue in organizational behavior and management needs precise and profound studies. The reason for conducting present study was that organizational silence was a phenomenon, which impacts on many behavioral variables of people and organizations. The findings indicate that organizational silence in Qom was higher than medium level and it should be mitigated. In the meantime, there were three organizations with desired organizational silence level namely Agricultural Jihad, Finance and Economy and Veterinary Directorates. Likewise, the findings have showed that there was no significant difference between organizational silence average in terms of demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level and years of service.

Below recommendations are provided to mitigate organizational silence in Qom selected organizations:

1. Establishing proper material/spiritual awarding and compensating system to provide applied and intact viewpoints and suggestions;
2. Identifying employees' mental and practical capabilities and using them in administrative affairs as well decision makings;
3. Assigning and designating some responsibilities to employees based on their psychological, personality and identity traits;
4. Training the skills to communicate with managers and superiors to employees through training workshops;
5. Emphasis on communications through official and effective channels;

6. Enhancing team working in Qom organizations through emphasizing on avoiding collective thinking;
7. creating a trusted and goodwill climate by management in order to make better and more efficient communications between employees and managers/supervisors;
8. Creating the feeling of accountability to organization among employees by avoiding personal interests;
9. Establishing a flat structure and avoiding hierarchical structures and lack of concentration in decision making.

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