

Prouska, R. & Psychogios, A. (forthcoming). Do not say a word! Conceptualizing employee silence in a long-term crisis context. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*.

**Do not say a word! Conceptualizing employee silence in a long-term crisis context**

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## **Do not say a word! Conceptualizing employee silence in a long-term crisis context**

### **Abstract**

Although research has emphasized the organizational and individual factors that influence employee voice and silence at work, it is less known how employee voice/silence is affected by the economic context, particularly when this context is one of intensive and long-term economic crisis in a country with weak institutional bases. In this study we explore how employee silence is formulated in long-term turbulent economic environments and in more vulnerable organizational settings like those of small enterprises. The study draws on qualitative data gathered from 63 interviews with employees in a total of 48 small enterprises in Greece in two periods of time (2009 and 2015). This study suggests a new type of employee silence, *social empathy silence*, and offers a conceptual framework for understanding the development of silence over time in particular contexts of long-term turbulence and crisis.

### **Keywords**

Employee voice, employee silence, crisis, social empathy silence, small enterprises, Greece

## **Introduction**

Voice is a broad term, often used interchangeably with concepts such as participation, engagement, involvement and empowerment (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014; Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). We frame this paper within the employment relations (ER) view that voice is about providing an opportunity to employees to be able to raise issues that concern them (Marchington, 2008). This includes individual and collective channels of expressing dissatisfaction, complaint or grievance over an issue to management (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington & Ackers, 2004). Our paper is not framed within the Organizational Behavior (OB) view of 'prosocial' voice which assumes that employees communicate ideas, suggestions, concerns or opinions about work issues with the intent to benefit the organization, because such an approach narrowly interprets voice at work as a vehicle to assist management (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016).

Voice is not always present in organizations. *Employee silence* is a concept used to describe the reluctance to speak up about organizational issues (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003). This reluctance may be caused by individual employee motivations (conscious choice), or by management and institutional structures which organize employees out of the voice process (Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2011). Regardless of how silence is caused, it can undermine organizational decision-making, damage employee trust and morale and lead to demotivation, dissatisfaction and low commitment (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), as well as to stress, cynicism and employee disengagement (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000). Employee silence can directly affect work by reducing managerial access to critical information and indirectly affect work by influencing employee well-being (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). In some contexts remaining silent can carry as much or more of a message as speaking-up (Brinsfield, 2014; Cullinane & Donaghey, 2014) while research has also explored how a culture of corporate silence can be broken through whistle blowing,

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which occurs when silence is broken in order to draw attention to illegal or immoral organizational practices (Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Park, Blenkinsopp, Oktem & Omurgonulsen, 2007; Park & Blenkinsopp, 2008).

Although employee silence bears negative consequences for organizations, there are still significant gaps in our understanding of this phenomenon (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013). Recent research has studied the effects of various antecedents on silence, such as individual factors (individual personalities, work experience, tenure, position) and organizational contextual factors (supervisor's openness and trustworthiness, culture, leadership, structure) (e.g. Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). However, it seems that employee silence has not been greatly investigated within the recent macro-economic context of the global financial crisis (with the exception of Kranz & Steger, 2013 and Schlosser & Zolin, 2012) and especially during a long crisis period in countries with weak institutional bases in terms of their employment policies, employment protection, industrial relations and social protection. Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon and Wilkinson (2011) argue that the literature is neglecting the institutional opportunities employees have for expressing voice; where these are absent or ineffective may explain the existence of employee silence, although not to imply that where these are present they guarantee voice (Harlos, 2001). In addition, employee silence in small enterprises seems to be neglected (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014). The significance of studying smaller enterprises lies in the argument that in turbulent economic contexts, small businesses need positive behaviors to achieve employee participation, organizational learning, innovation and receptiveness to change (Schlosser & Zolin, 2012). Particularly because the employment relationship is informally managed in small enterprises (Gilman, Raby & Pyman, 2015), it is important to study how voice are expressed, or not, in times of crisis and discuss the implications of this for theory and practice. Given the particular gap in research on employee

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silence in small enterprises it is also important to explore employee silence concepts and typologies in these organizations which have so profoundly been affected by the recent economic crisis.

In this respect, this paper explores employee silence in small enterprises that operate in an economic crisis environment in a country with weak institutional bases and focuses on exploring this phenomenon from an employee perspective. We use the context of the Greek economic crisis to explore the following research question: how do employees that work in small companies perceive the effects of the recent economic crisis on their ability to freely express concerns to management? By drawing on empirical evidence from the Greek crisis of 2009-2015, we study how this context affects employee voice in smaller enterprises, particularly the reasons causing silence and how these evolve during the continuation of crisis. The paper contributes to employee silence theory by proposing a new type of employee silence and presenting a conceptual framework for understanding the evolution of silence in a long-term crisis context. It specifically contributes to the special issue of *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* on 'Voices Unheard', by exploring organizations with few formal avenues for voice, such as small enterprises. By studying employees who feel that they cannot freely express concerns at work, we can expand our understanding regarding the (re)formulation of voice within small companies in times of long-term crisis.

The paper is organized in four main sections. The first part provides the context of the Greek long-term economic crisis, examines employee voice and silence in smaller enterprises, and explores the factors inhibiting employee voice within an economic crisis context. The second part explains the methodology applied, while the third analyses the qualitative data collected. The final part discusses the main findings of this study, presents a new type of silence and offers a new conceptual framework of understanding the evolution of silence in crisis environments.

## **Employee Silence in Context**

### ***The Greek Long-Term Economic Crisis***

Since the global financial crisis (2008) and the Eurozone crisis (2010) research has focused on the consequences of these crises on institutional arrangements across different models of capitalism (e.g. Hassel, 2014; Heyes, Lewis & Clark, 2012; Lallement, 2011). There has been a particular interest on how European peripheral economies responded to crisis, considering the impact on their debt and banking systems (Tsolacos, 2014). Research has been conducted on the impact of crisis on human resource management (HRM) (e.g. Psychogios & Wood, 2010), working conditions (e.g. Psychogios, Brewster & Parry, 2016) and employee health and well-being (e.g. Kondilis et al., 2013). But there is lack of research particularly on how countries with weak institutional bases, operating in long-term economic turbulence and crisis, have responded to these labour issues, particularly on how the crisis has affected voice at work in these contexts. Although in the majority of these economies the crisis seems to bring new balances into the financial operation of their systems, in Greece the situation remains critical and turbulent after the emergence of this problem in 2009. The Greek crisis has passed through various phases and, although stabilization was observed in aspects of the system, turbulence dominated the system in the end (Wood, Szamosi, Psychogios, Sarvanidis & Fotopoulou, 2015). This indicates that the crisis in Greece, in contrast to other economies affected, and particularly those in Western and Northern Europe, has been institutionalized and has taken a long-term form (O'Reilly, Lain, Sheehan, Smale & Stuart, 2011). Therefore, Greece makes for an interesting case to study employee voice in such a long-term turbulent economic context.

The Greek crisis led to both endogenous and exogenous institutional change (Williams & Vorley, 2015). Greek institutions are traditionally weak (Prouska & Kapsali, 2011) and have become even more dysfunctional since the crisis, in terms of regulating labor markets and securing viable and sustainable growth (Kornelakis & Voskeristian, 2014). A further confirmation of this is that the Greek economy remains in deep recession since 2009 with high unemployment and no visible signs of a recovery soon (Kosmidou, Kousenidis & Negakis, 2015).

Greek financial institutions have been deteriorating since the beginning of the crisis when the country entered a strict austerity regime with extensive market reforms (Samitas & Polyzos, 2016). Since 2009 Greece has been experiencing a decline in wages, an increase in part-time and fixed-term employment, resulting in increased job insecurity according to the European Job Quality Index (Leschke, Watt & Finn, 2012). Greece suffered the greatest hit from the crisis, with a near collapse of its economy, and austerity measures having a critical impact on the labour force, particularly amongst younger workers (Psychogios, Brewster & Parry, 2016). Greece experienced a 22% increase in job insecurity during the crisis (2007-2012) compared to an EU-27 average of 4% and a 0.7% increase in temporary employment compared to an EU-27 average of -0.6% in the same period (Eurofound, 2016). Among EU member states, the highest unemployment rates were observed in Greece (24.6 %) (Eurostat, 2016a). In addition, Greece reduced its minimum wage by 22% since 2008, the highest cut in the EU (Eurofound, 2016). The national minimum wage in 2016 stood at €683 per month, in comparison, for example, with the UK (€1,529) (Eurostat, 2016b). This crisis led to one of the worst humanitarian crises in Modern Greek history (Zartaloudis, 2014). It has affected Greece's socio-economic life more than any other European country and this is evident in the recorded increased levels of unemployment, job insecurity, mental disorders, suicide and homicide mortality rates, substance abuse, and infectious diseases (Kondilis et al., 2013).

The effects of this long-term crisis are critically negative for many Greek companies (Arghyrou & Tsoukalas, 2010), especially Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) (OECD, 2016a). The Greek business system is dominated by SMEs, mostly small (counting less than 50 employees) family businesses with concentrated ownership structures within a few large holders (Prouska & Kapsali, 2011). These firms have received a negative impact since 2009; not only did they have to counter and overcome increased taxation, but also cope with the inability of the country's banks to financially support them. Also, a significant number of small and micro companies had liquidity problems being unable in many cases to pay their suppliers and employees (Kouretas & Vlamis, 2010). This problem intensified in June 2015 when capital controls were implemented in an effort to stop a likely bank run due to the political instability in the country (Samitas & Polyzos, 2016). Moreover, increased layoffs and decreased salaries have led to high uncertainty and employee dissatisfaction especially within SMEs (Arghyrou & Tsoukalas, 2010). This resulted in fewer people being employed by SMEs, and therefore increased levels of workload and pressure for those remaining (INE/GSEE, 2013), with bullying behaviors observed between employer to employee, manager to employee and among employees (Galanaki & Papalexandris, 2013; Kanellopoulos, 2012).

The economic crisis brought more labor market deregulation, with higher effect on employee voice, limiting the extent employees can 'be heard' especially on issues related to organizational decision-making (Wood, Szamosi, Psychogios, Sarvanidis & Fotopoulou, 2015). In SMEs, employee voice has been traditionally marginalized (Featherstone, 2008). Before the crisis employee representation was highly fragmented with high levels of centralisation of collective bargaining, leaving a large number of small enterprises uncovered by collective bargaining agreements (Featherstone, 2008). In addition, a significant percentage of employees do not have the opportunity to join a trade union owing to the fact



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that 96 per cent of firms in the country employ less than the minimum number of 21 employees required for a union to be established (Kouzis, 2000). This practically means that official employee voice is limited especially within smaller firms.

In the wider ER context, Greece's entrance in the Eurozone (Makridimitris 2001; Michalopoulos & Psychogios, 2003) and the increased competition in the single European market for products and services (Mandaraka & Kormentza, 2000) have meant enhanced forms of voice through new patterns of employee representation (Psychogios & Szamosi, 2007). However, the crisis has meant a rapid decentralization of collective bargaining to enterprise level (since 2011) and a decrease in the number of labor market regulations deriving from sector-level and occupational collective employment agreements (Ioannou & Papadimitriou, 2013). In the past, Greek trade unions were considered a politicized form of employee representation with strong confrontational and militant strategies hence making employment relations highly conflictual in collective negotiations (Mihail, 1995). However, since 2009, there has been a decline in trade unionism with an evident relaxation in the strictness of employment protection for regular contracts, temporary contracts and dismissals (OECD, 2016b). Although unions are the most important form of employee representation, the law also provides for work council structures. These are only found in a few companies and, where they exist, they work closely with the local union, while where there is no union in place, there will not be a works council (ETUI, 2016). The crisis also resulted in the emergence of 'associations of persons' – a 2011 law enables these associations to operate without a time limitation and with the authority to sign collective agreements for companies of any size, provided there is no union in place and 60% of the workforce is a member of the association (ETUI, 2016). But representatives of these associations have no permanent mandate and no protection against mistreatment by the employer. In our study, none of the SMEs we researched had an association of persons present. In terms of the incidence of

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collective action in Greece, it is moderately high (Wallace & O'Sullivan, 2006). However, although general strikes have been organized throughout Greece since 2010 to protest against the Memorandum particularly from workers in large organizations (Lampousaki, 2014), employees from smaller enterprises do not often have this collective avenue for expressing voice (Kouzis, 2000).

The pressures placed on Greek SMEs due to the crisis and the limited options their employees have for collective representation makes such enterprises an interesting case to study. Nevertheless, beyond a very limited number of studies cited above that attempt to explore ER in the Greek crisis context, there is no empirical evidence of the forms of silence within smaller enterprises in a crisis environment. In this respect, it would be interesting to explore the formulation of employee silence within such a context.

### ***Employee Voice and Silence in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)***

Voice is practiced in different ways in SMEs<sup>1</sup> than in large organizations and the employment relationship differs by organizational size and sector (Wilkinson, Dundon & Grugulis, 2007). It is often the case that SMEs do not have HRM departments (Kotey & Slade, 2005) and rather rely on informal management practices (Behrends, 2007). HRM in SMEs is often informal, emergent and reactive, rather than applied through a systematic approach (Psychogios, Szamosi, Prouska & Brewster, 2016). In terms of employee relations, it has been argued that SMEs develop healthier employee relations than larger organizations (Forth, Bewley & Bryson, 2006) and that job satisfaction in SMEs is partly achieved through informal employee relations (Tsai, SenGupta & Edwards, 2007). Informal management practices are often utilized by SMEs in order to control their employees because formal

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<sup>1</sup> This study follows the definition of SMEs given by European Commission (2003/361/EC). SMEs can be distinguished in Medium sized companies (<250 Employees & 50m Turnover), Small companies (<50 Employees & 10m Turnover) and Micro companies (<10 Employees & 2m Turnover).

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communication and control structures do not exist (Wilkinson, 1999) or are seen as bureaucratic processes (Katz, Aldrich, Welbourne & Williams, 2000). Furthermore, small firms are mostly non-unionized as a result of the paternalistic nature of their employment relationship (Bae, Chuma, Kato, Kim & Ohashi, 2011) but may incorporate more direct and informal voice channels between employer and employees (Marlow & Gray, 2005), with the level of formalization depending on a variety of internal and external factors (Hay, Beattie, Livingstone & Munro, 2001; Kotey & Slade, 2005; Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014). Beyond the studies above, there is less understanding of how employee voice is formulated in SMEs while any reference to smaller enterprises operating in the periphery is limited. For example, literature on Greece has explored how larger employers are inclined to promote unionization, with some large companies having very active unions in the private sector (Ioannou & Papadimitriou, 2013). In SMEs the situation is different; employee voice is mainly driven by management-employee relationships making smaller employers less keen to engage in the creation and development of unions (Prouska & Kapsali, 2011). However, there is no extensive research focusing on understanding issues of voice and silence in such small enterprises in this periphery. Taking this lack of research into consideration, the next section explores the literature on employee silence and presents factors inhibiting voice in an economic crisis context.

### ***Factors Inhibiting Voice in an Economic Crisis Context***

Voice can lead to positive outcomes but silence is often noted for its negative effects (Schlosser & Zolin, 2012). Table 1 highlights key silence typologies and concepts (for a comprehensive overview see Brinsfield, 2014) and categorizes them according to their cause.

--Insert Table 1 about here--

But which of these concepts and typologies are more relevant when studying employee silence in contexts operating in economic turbulence and crisis? At the employee level, research has established the effects of economic insecurity on physical health (e.g. Bourbonnais, Brisson, Vezina, Masse & Blanchette, 2005; Kim, 2003) and mental health (e.g. Kondilis et al., 2013) raising questions about employee and manager behavior in the workplace in difficult economic times (Galanaki & Papalexandris, 2013; Kanellopoulos, 2012). In such contexts, voice may seem risky, or as a waste of time and effort (Morrison, 2014).

Furthermore, Schlosser and Zolin's (2012) work on voice and silence during stressful economic times argues that a difficult economic and social context pressures employees and supervisors, creating a nervous tension and discouraging employees from expressing their own opinions and dissatisfaction. This happens because the key characteristics of the economic crisis are increased levels of unemployment and job insecurity (Chung & Van Oorschot, 2011). In addition, there is evidence suggesting that when people experience serious job insecurity due to crisis they are more likely to attend work when being genuinely sick, which renders them more likely to have an accident but at the same time less likely to report it (Livanos & Zagellidis, 2013). Therefore, employees and managers are significantly affected by increased work pressures and concerned over pay cuts, restructuring, downsizing and layoffs (Russell & McGinnity, 2014), particularly in contexts of long-term economic uncertainty where there is no visible way out of the crisis (Psychogios, Szamosi & Brewster, 2015).

Further to this, specific job, social and organizational stressors and strains have been presented by Ng and Feldman (2011) as negatively affecting voice in the workplace and we can expect these to be magnified in an economic crisis period. Job stressors include lack of job autonomy and dissatisfaction with work conditions, pay and promotions. Social stressors

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include strained relationships with supervisors and co-workers, dissatisfaction with supervisors and co-workers, and supervisor interactional unfairness. Organizational stressors include breaches of promises, distributive and procedural unfairness, lack of organizational support, lack of communication, lack of openness to employee voice and fear of retaliation. Their study reports that employees who experience high levels of stress in relation to their particular job, their social work environment and the organization overall are less likely to speak up. It has been widely recorded that an economic crisis increases job insecurity and work pressures (e.g. Chung & Van Oorschot, 2011; Russell & McGinnity, 2014). Therefore, we would expect an increase in the various job, social and organizational stressors all of which would create implicit beliefs about the futility or danger of voice and, therefore, inhibit voice at work (Morrison, 2014).

Detert and Edmondson's (2011) work sheds light into how self-protective implicit voice theories link upward voice about certain issues and situations to risk and explain the various schemata individuals develop to guide their behavior when interacting with authority figures. This relates to an 'if-then' assumption that speaking up in certain types of work situations will lead to negative consequences. During an economic crisis, employees would have their own implicit beliefs about the futility or danger of speaking up. These would be shaped by previous experiences or knowledge of colleagues' experiences, as well as their own evaluation of the economic situation with particular reference to their own job safety or insecurity. Therefore, the *climate of silence* concept (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) is relevant because it relates to 'widely shared perceptions among employees that speaking up about problems or issues is futile and/or dangerous' (p. 708), as well as the *defensive silence* concept which is based on a fear of extrinsic consequences associated with speaking up (Brinsfield, 2013; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003). In addition, a *climate of fear* has been widely recorded as an

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underlying reason for employee silence on different types of work issues (e.g. Detert & Trevino, 2010; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino and Edmondson (2009) argue that fear is a multi-dimensional concept, a powerful and pervasive emotion that influences human perception, cognition and behavior. They discuss how, on the one hand, silence driven by low intensity fear can lead to intentional defensive silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003) after a conscious recognition of alternatives or evaluation of costs and benefits. On the other hand, they argue that silence driven by high intensity fear should be conceptualized as an automatic response and propose that repeated episodes of fear-driven silence can lead to *habituated silence* (see also Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Morrison & Rothman, 2009), a natural outcome of people's innate tendency to avoid the unpleasant characteristics of fear. In addition, within a climate of fear, individuals may also experience *empathetic anger* on behalf of others (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino & Edmondson, 2009) spurring a natural feeling of retaliation, as in cases when an employee observes colleagues being the recipients of organizational downsizing, restructuring and layoffs during an economic crisis.

At the organizational level, Kranz and Steger (2013) argue that when an economic crisis turns into a corporate crisis, it leads to observable changes in decision-making and employee participation. The emphasis turns to hierarchical decision-making and authoritarian leadership styles with an explicit rejection of decentralization and consensus-oriented decision-making, hence directly influencing decisions concerning employee participation. Abusive leadership (Morrison, 2014) has also been found to affect voice in the workplace. Xu, Loi and Lam (2015) found that abusive supervision interacts with leader-member exchange (LMX) and leads to employees' feelings of emotional exhaustion and their subsequent silence response. Detert and Trevino (2010) also found a direct impact of leaders on subordinates' voice perceptions and explored the leaders' culpability in inhibiting the free flow of concerns.

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As decision-making tends to become centralized in times of economic crisis and authoritarian leadership styles are exhibited in organizations (Kranz & Steger, 2013), abusive leadership practices become more frequent in organizations and this inhibits voice in the workplace. Therefore, we would expect that in an economic crisis context employees would feel that the situation is beyond their control and hence resign from speaking up (or be passively silent) as discussed by the *ineffectual silence* and *acquiescent silence* concepts (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003).

The above studies provided a direction of employee silence during economic downturns. However, we are lacking empirical results from economic environments in long-term economic crisis and from smaller workplaces to better conceptualize employee silence in such contexts. The Greek economic crisis which has hit Greece the last few years still dominates over the political, economic and social agenda of the country. It presents us with a unique opportunity to study how employee silence in small organizations is formulated in a long-term crisis period. The next section presents our methodology for collecting data.

## **Research Methods**

Research on employee silence has traditionally been conducted using a positivist approach (e.g. Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & Redman, 2015). However, similarly to other qualitative studies on the dynamics at work (e.g. Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003), we wanted to capture employee perceptions of workplace voice during the crisis period. Our purpose was to explore silence at work as it was experienced by employees. Therefore, an interpretivist approach was most suited as this approach has the purpose to understand human actions, motives, feelings, experiences, and sense-making from the perspective of organizational members (Bryman & Bell, 2003). We used an exploratory

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qualitative research design. The data collection method used was semi-structured interviews, since we wanted to flexibly collect data in order to capture original points made by the participants, explore their perceptions, and probe for more information and clarification (Wengraf, 2001).

A significant aspect of this study was that it has been conducted in two different times during the crisis, attempting to capture the long-term implications of the crisis on employee silence. In particular, we conducted interviews in two different time phases with 63 employees in a total of 48 small enterprises. The employees were holding various positions and professional specializations in their organizations. The enterprises were operating in three main industries namely, manufacturing (11 businesses), retail (18 businesses) and services (including professional services) (19 businesses). Each participant was interviewed twice in these two interview phases (in some cases where the employee had left the organization, we interviewed another employee working in the same function). The first phase was conducted between December 2010-February 2012, a period at the beginning of the crisis, and the second phase between March 2014-May 2015, a period characterized by the long-term existence of the crisis and even more so, a significant worsening of the crisis. The sample of companies was obtained from the researchers' professional network. An attempt was made to include small enterprises from all three industries operating in the two main urban centers: Athens (31 businesses) and Thessaloniki (17 businesses). All of them can be classified as small companies having 50 employees or less, taking into consideration that the great majority of organizations in Greece belong to this category (Psychogios & Wood, 2010). Only a small minority (6 businesses) of the companies selected had an organized trade union in place. Table 2 provides an overview of the businesses that participated in the study and the position of the interviewees, their gender and age.



--Insert Table 2 about here--

### ***Data Collection and Interview Protocol***

Each participant was interviewed by one of the authors. The interviews lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour and were conducted at the location that was most convenient for the participants, either at work or at a local meeting point. The interviews were conducted in the Greek language to capture delicate nuances and ensure participants felt at ease during the interview by speaking in their everyday language. Therefore, the interview questions were written in English, translated into Greek, piloted, reviewed and revised and then used in the main stage of data collection. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed and translated into the English language.

Each interview started with a brief description of the study and an assurance to respondents that all personal information would be kept confidential. The interview questions were organized in four sections:

1. Participants' demographic data;
2. Reflections on how employees have experienced the economic crisis in general.
3. Reflections on situations inhibiting employee voice at work since the beginning of the economic crisis (or since the last interview in the second phase of the research). The focus was on types of issues raised/not raised and reasons for not speaking up, perceptions on consequences of speaking up, witnessing others speaking up and outcome of this, examples of unresponsive leaders to issues raised.
4. Reflections on changes in employee relations since the beginning of the economic crisis (or since the last interview in the second phase of the research). The focus was

on employee involvement for non-unionized workplaces; social protection, worker rights and representation for unionized workplaces.

### ***Data Analysis***

We used thematic analysis to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method independent of research theory and epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006), often framed as a realist/experiential method (Roulston, 2001) that can be used for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. The fact that the method is characterized by theoretical freedom makes it a flexible method and useful research tool which can potentially provide complex accounts of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

We engaged in an inductive process of developing and refining a coding scheme (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes & Wierba, 1997). Both authors independently engaged in the coding process and checked replication to ensure inter-rater reliability as is appropriate with semi-structured interviews (Morse, 1997). We had an 85.7% inter-rater reliability score calculated as  $(\text{no. of agreeing themes}) + (\text{no. of disagreeing themes}) / (\text{total no. of observed themes})$  (Marques & McCall, 2005). Themes identified were strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 2015). We reviewed the transcripts for themes relating to employee voice and silence at work, without paying attention to the themes that previous research on the topic has identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We did this in order to code diversely while undertaking a semantic approach to the level at which themes were identified. This means that the themes were identified within the explicit meaning of the data. The analysis then moved from a description to interpretation, where we attempted to theorize the significance of patterns, their meanings and implications in relation to previous literature. The final part of our analysis involved a comparison between the findings in the first and second phase of the

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research to explore similarities/differences in how our participants discussed the reasons for silence at work. It needs to be mentioned, that in our analysis we did not find any particular differences among sectors, industries, positions, age and gender. We think that this may be due to the widespread impact of the economic crisis across business sectors, industries and employees of varying positions, age and gender. Therefore our analysis is focused on the comparison of the two different time frames.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### ***The Reasons and Development of Employee Silence over the Crisis Period***

The fact that we conducted the study in two time periods in the crisis revealed some very interesting findings in respect to the reasons for employee silence at work. The main types of issues employees did not speak up about were relating to reductions in salary (including unpaid work or unpaid overtime work), reductions in benefits (for example paid leave), increase in working hours and worsening working conditions (e.g. lack of infrastructure or resources). Our analysis identified three main categories of silence. The following discussion presents these categories and explores how these developed through the two phases of our research.

#### ***1. Silence as a Fear of the Consequences***

The first category arising from our analysis is silence due to a fear of the consequences of speaking up. At the first phase of the research, employees discussed fear as *defensive silence* (Brinsfield, 2013; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003) caused by a fear of the extrinsic consequences associated with speaking up. For example, our interviewees discussed how the fear of being labeled a

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‘troublemaker’ and the consequences this would bring inhibited their voice at work. They also explained their silence by giving examples of how they feared that speaking up would affect future performance appraisals. Furthermore, many attributed their silence to a fear of damaging working relationships, particularly with supervisors making decisions over promotions, similarly to *relational silence* (silence out of fear of harming a relationship) (Brinsfield, 2013; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003).

However, the second phase of the research shows that the fear of the consequences intensifies and it becomes a widely shared fear that voice is dangerous and can result to retaliation through salary withholding or reduction, redundancy or even loss in employment. The fact that this fear is widely shared and is related to a fear of the long-term consequences of speaking up makes this type of silence similar to Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) *climate of silence*, meaning that there is a widespread belief that voice is dangerous. Table 3 provides indicative quotes of silence due to a fear of the consequences from both research phases.

--Insert Table 3 about here--

## *2. Silence as a Response to the Perceived Duration of the Crisis*

The second category arising from our analysis is silence due to an evaluation of the perceived duration of the crisis which leads to either a decision to tolerate difficulties (hence not speak up) or not. In the first phase of the study, we identified feelings of support for the organization as a reason for not voicing concerns. Similar to Organ’s (1988) *sportsmanship* type of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (employees are willing to tolerate inconveniences and impositions of work without complaining) and Wang, Hsieh, Tsai and Cheng’s (2012) *cooperative silence* (employees remain silent about issues that might disturb the functioning of the workplace), we also found evidence of silence due to the employees’

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perceived ability to put up with the various difficulties for the duration of the crisis, which at that point was perceived as ‘short-term’. The willingness of employees to endure difficulties is demonstrated through OCBs (support for the organization regardless of the difficulties presented). Therefore, this type of silence is dependent on an individual’s evaluation of their ability to endure the consequences of the crisis (e.g. reduction in salary, unpaid overtime hours, changes in employment contracts, cuts in training and development budgets etc.) for its duration, where ‘duration’ is subjectively evaluated by the individual (i.e. short vs. long-term).

In the second phase of the research, however, we observed a shift from support to the organization during the perceived ‘short-term’ crisis, towards a realization that crisis is ‘here to stay’ and there is nothing that can be done to change its negative consequences at work. Our findings from the second phase of research show widespread feelings of futility (speaking up will not bring change) similar to *ineffectual silence* (Brinsfield, 2013; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003), *acquiescence silence* (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003) and *disengaged silence* (Brinsfield, 2013). Table 4 provides indicative quotes on silence due to the perceived duration of the crisis from both research phases.

--Insert Table 4 about here--

### 3. *Silence as the Norm*

The third category arising from our analysis is silence because it is the norm. In the first phase of our research there was strong evidence of silence as a response to the observable emotions and behaviors of others at work (e.g. I am afraid because everyone is afraid or I don’t speak up because no one speaks up). Many participants discussed how their choice to

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remain silent was based on heard stories, including from the media coverage of the crisis, on their observations of people around them, and on the perception that everyone experiences the economic crisis in a similar way, and therefore, needed to experience it and respond to it in a similar manner. We propose that this is a new type of silence, *social empathy silence*, and explain it in more detail in the following section.

In the second phase of the research, this type of silence intensifies and becomes a more concrete culture of uncertainty and fear as participants realize the long-term implications of the crisis. This type of silence is similar to the *climate of fear* (e.g. Detert & Trevino, 2010; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000) leading to *habituated silence* as discussed by Morrison and Rothman (2009) and Morrison and Milliken (2000). Table 5 provides indicative quotes on silence as the norm.

--Insert Table 5 about here--

*Social Empathy Silence*. We propose this new type of silence which we conceptualize as drawing elements from two concepts: Firstly, the *spiral of silence* concept (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), which explains why people are unwilling to express their opinions when they believe they are in the minority. The premise of the *spiral of silence*, as originally posited by Noelle-Neumann (1974), is that public opinion can affect public discourse in certain circumstances and influence people's behaviors and attitudes. Due to a fear of isolation, people scrutinize their social environments for opinion trends; when there is a perception that their opinions are in tune with the majority they are more likely to express them, while when there is a perception that their opinions are unpopular or against the majority they are less likely to express them (Lee, Detenber, Willnat, Aday & Graf, 2004). In addition, the media is portrayed as an influential player in formulating the surrounding opinion climate (Kim, Han,

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Shanahan & Berdayes, 2004). Because of this, the *spiral of silence* has been widely used in media and communications studies focusing on silence around controversial issues, although it has not yet received much attention in the management literature (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). However, Noelle-Neumann's (1974) concept applies to issues with moral implications. Our proposed new type of *social empathy silence* draws on Noelle-Neumann's (1974) original idea of the *spiral of silence*, but applies to issues with socioeconomic, rather than moral, implications. In other words, the international economic crises (the global financial crisis and then the Eurozone crisis) have become a matter of public discourse since their beginning. This has been the case particularly in Greece where the crisis has created an extremely volatile socioeconomic and political climate. In addition, the Greek media have played a key role in creating an opinion climate regarding the economic crisis and its impact on the political and socioeconomic arenas. This is because in Greece, there is close link between politics, the media, and business; Greek mass media owners also own other key businesses in a variety of sectors, therefore making it common practice for Greek political parties to provide financial and administrative support to media owners in exchange for political support (Mylonas, 2014). Our study suggests that Greek employees scan their immediate environment to determine the dominant opinion, including the opinion climate shaped by the Greek media who are largely influenced by the dominant pro-austerity political parties. This interaction with the dominant worldview of the crisis seems to make them accept, more readily, the crisis as the new norm, and, therefore, make them less likely to express opposing views.

Secondly, we conceptualize *social empathy silence* as also drawing from an extension of *general empathy*, defined as 'the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition' (Eisenberg, 2000, p. 671). An extension of general empathy has been used by Hoffman (2008) to establish the concept of *empathetic anger* referring to the sense of

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violation one experiences on behalf of someone, who has suffered an infraction by another individual, which spurs a natural feeling of retaliation (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino & Edmondson, 2009). However, given our data, we argue for a different extension, towards *empathetic fear*. Whereas empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings related to another's state or condition, *empathetic fear* includes an element of emotional response on the other's behalf, a mimetic feeling of fear. It has been argued that fear is also learned through indirect experiences, such as through observation or hearing about the experiences of others (Rachman, 1990). In an economic crisis context, employees observe changes in the environment and interact with others to share experiences of these changes. For example, at the micro level, employees observe and talk about the increased levels of unemployment and job insecurity (Chung & Van Oorschot, 2011); at the meso level, they observe and talk about the social crisis created in the Greek society as a result of the economic crisis (Kondilis et al., 2013; Zartaloudis, 2014); at the macro level, they observe and talk about the institutional changes implemented at government level as a result of the economic crisis (Williams & Vorley, 2015). Through their observations and conversations with other members of the organization and wider community, fear is learned and shared between individuals/employees, creating a mimetic effect, that of *empathetic fear*, which affects their consequent emotions and behaviors.

We, therefore, conceptualize *social empathy silence*, as the combination of people's unwillingness to express their opinions on socioeconomic issues when they believe they are in the minority, when this belief is largely shaped by the media and their other interactions (adjusted from Noelle-Neumann's, 1974, *spiral of silence*), and of people's *empathetic fear* on behalf of others (extended from Eisenberg's, 2000, *general empathy* and Hoffman's, 2008, *empathetic anger*). We define this type of silence as silence caused by the employees' subjective understanding of reality as they formulate it through their interactions with work



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groups and management, as well as with other social groups and the media, and leading to an assumption that, firstly, the economic crisis is posing an immediate danger to their employment survival since this is also the widespread opinion climate, and secondly, that the antecedent of silence (in our case the economic crisis) is experienced similarly by members of the work group, and hence, the response to it should be similar. This creates a mimetic type of emotional and behavioral reactions of ‘*I am afraid because everyone is afraid*’ or ‘*I am silent because everyone is silent*’.

This proposed new type of silence has its basis on social interactions (with work groups and management, as well as with other social groups and the media) and the influence these interactions apply on individuals in their free expression of concerns at work. It differs from other typologies based on a perception that negative consequences will occur if you speak up (hence people decide to keep silent), such as *defensive silence* or the *climate of silence*. Therefore, *social empathy silence* is not simply a fear of being the recipient of negative consequences when speaking up. It is about the process (social interactions in their wider sense; and in our study the impact of the wider economic context on those interactions) through which such a fear is cultivated, hence limiting the free expression of concerns at work. This new type of silence, we suggest, sheds light on some of the reasons for which employees in small businesses in Greece do not voice their concerns in times of economic crisis.

### ***The Role and Power of Unions for Voicing Concerns***

Unionization helps employees feel more secure and avoid self-protective behaviors associated with defensive silence (Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003). As our sample also consisted of a few workplaces unionized at sectoral level, we looked at similarities and/or differences between these workplaces and the non-unionized ones. We found no differences

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in the types of silence, a finding which can be attributed to the apparent absence of work councils in Greek SMEs (Lampousaki, 2011) and to the weakened role and power of unions (Ioannou & Papadimitriou, 2013). Participants in unionized workplaces referred to the weakening of social protection, worker rights and representation as a direct result of the economic crisis in the first phase of our research, with similar views in the second phase. This means that although some workplaces were unionized at sectoral level, employees did not feel they were receiving additional protection from the union. Most participants perceived them to be ineffective at representing employees and achieving results. Table 6 provides indicative quotes on the participants' views on social protection, worker rights and representation for both phases of our research.

--Insert Table 6 about here--

### **Conclusion: An Emerging Framework**

This study explored how the economic crisis creates silence at work. The effects of various antecedents on silence have been studied, such as individual factors and organizational contextual factors (e.g. Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Premeaux & Bedeian, 2003; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). We add to this body of knowledge by studying the wider economic context (particularly the context of long-term economic turbulence in a country with weak institutional bases) and its impact on employee voice/silence at work adding to the work of Kranz and Steger (2013) and Schlosser and Zolin (2012). Furthermore, we studied small enterprises where employee silence represents an under-researched area (Sameer & Ozbilgin, 2014). The literature argues that voice in SMEs is practiced differently than in large organizations due to a lack of formalization (Psychogios, Szamosi, Prouska & Brewster,

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2016). Most businesses in our study were non-unionized, and only a few had some type of formal representation at work. Our study did not find great differences in the types of silence observed between the two. This was due to an apparent absence of work councils in the workplace (Lampousaki, 2011) and a weakening of the role and power of trade unions corroborating previous research on this issue (Ioannou & Papadimitriou, 2013; OECD, 2016b).

Most importantly, the study makes a contribution by proposing a new type of employee silence and by presenting a conceptual framework for understanding the evolution of silence in contexts of turbulence and crisis. The fact that our research was conducted in two different time periods of the Greek economic crisis provided us with a unique opportunity to compare results between the two phases of data collection. Figure 1 presents an overview of our findings.

--Insert Figure 1 about here--

Our findings show three main categories of silence present in times of economic crisis. Firstly, *silence as a fear of the consequences* relates to the choice individuals make not to speak up because they are afraid of the consequences of voice. In the short-term, they are afraid of what the outcome of speaking up will be (e.g. being labelled a ‘troublemaker’, consequences for performance appraisal, damaging a relationship), while in the long-term there is a widely shared perception that speaking up about problems or issues is futile and/or dangerous (climate of silence).

Secondly, *silence as a response to the perceived duration of the crisis* relates to the decision an employee makes to either tolerate difficulties (hence not speak up) or not depending on the perceived duration of the crisis period. In the short-term, employees seem willing to put up with inconveniences at work if they feel that the crisis will end soon (sportsmanship and cooperative silence typologies). However, in the long-term this behavior changes as they realize that the crisis is so deep and ongoing that speaking up is futile and that change will not be accomplished (ineffectual, acquiescence and disengaged silence typologies).

Thirdly, *silence as the norm* relates to the decision employees make not to speak up, because everyone else is not speaking up. In the short-term, we propose a new type of silence present, *social empathy silence*, while in the long-term this type of silence turns into a climate of fear, where silence is embedded or habituated. Drawing on our findings, we suggest the following conceptual framework for the evolution of silence over time (see Figure 2).

--Insert Figure 2 about here--

Our study found that fear is a key motivator for employee silence, not surprisingly as the literature has greatly explored this aspect (Brinsfield, 2013; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003). This fear intensified during the crisis; from low intensity fear (being labelled a 'troublemaker', consequences for performance appraisal, damaging a relationship), to high intensity fear (speaking up is dangerous). In addition, we found a change from employee willingness to tolerate difficulties (Organ, 1988; Wang, Hsieh, Tsai & Cheng, 2012) when

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they perceived the crisis to be short-term, to feelings of futility and disengagement (Brinsfield, 2013; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003) when they understood that the crisis was forming the new reality. Finally, and most importantly, we found the embeddedness and habituation of silence due to the economic crisis as the new norm over time. Our proposed *social empathy silence* can be conceptualized as a typology drawing on people's unwillingness to express their opinions on socioeconomic issues when they believe they are in the minority, when this belief is largely shaped by the media and their other social interactions, and on people's *empathetic fear* on behalf of others. It explains how employees shape their subjective understanding of reality through their interactions with work groups and management, as well as with other social groups and the media. These interactions create mimetic emotional and behavioral reactions, firstly in how they perceive the crisis as posing an immediate danger to them, and secondly, in how their response to it (i.e. silence) should be similar to others around them. In the long-term, we observed intensification of this type of silence towards a fuller embeddedness and habituation of silence as the new norm (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Morrison & Rothman, 2009).

The implications of *social empathy silence* are important for HRM practice because it raises questions in relation to the perceived risk of sharing concerns with management in times of economic crisis. Our research participants gave us plenty examples of how they felt that fear of the consequences intensified during the crisis and how they perceived management as unable to do anything to solve employee problems at work. However, none of them questioned employer approaches to work issues during the crisis or mentioned any employer strategies used to help manage employee fear. Therefore, two questions arise: Are employers taking advantage of the crisis to create a climate of fear and adopt highly authoritarian leadership practices which would mean decreasing employee voice at work? Or

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are employers, particularly smaller enterprises which have received a significant hit in this economic crisis, in a similar boat to their employees, feeling afraid about their business, and keeping silent too? HRM literature suggests open and clear internal communication in times of crisis (Psychogios, Perry & Brewster, 2015), but our study raises questions in relation to this in Greek SMEs. An analysis of the employers' and managers' role in enabling voice in workplaces operating in such turbulent crisis contexts is crucial, if we are to understand whether employees should be feeling fear/danger or if their feelings are falsely created by their employer's/manager's communication techniques or actions. Research has looked at the employers' perspective on silence (see for example Willman, Bryson & Gomez, 2006) as well as the role of leaders in inhibiting voice at work (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Kranz & Steger, 2013; Morrison, 2014; Xu, Loi & Lam, 2015). However we now need more research on employer management structures, as well as institutional structures, which may be organizing employees out of the voice process in times of long-term economic turbulence, at a time when we are also observing a decrease in social protection and alternative forms of employee voice at work. Our study did not focus on the employer/managers' view, but further research can incorporate this aspect and re-conceptualize *social empathy silence*, as well as how silence develops to become the new norm in such contexts, in light of new evidence.

Beyond the HR implications, our research has some wider implications for businesses that experience silence at work while at the same time have to perform their regular business functions under extremely uncertain economic conditions. Literature has suggested that employee silence can reduce managerial access to critical information (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008) at a time when such information is needed the most to enable the organization to respond to the challenges the economic environment is placing upon them (for example the recent capital controls in Greece). Future research can move beyond the

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impact of silence from the employees' perspective and focus on also understanding the consequences of silence for organizations that need employee input to maintain their operations in difficult economic times. In this respect, studying employer's as well as managers' views would provide a much wider understanding of silence in times of crisis.

Overall, our findings and proposed framework are important in helping organizations and especially small enterprises understand employee responses to long-term turbulent economic conditions, particularly in terms of how and why these conditions affect the free expression of voice in the workplace. Our research was qualitative, to develop a depiction of the current state and suggest a framework. Within this framework, we proposed a new type of silence. However, the analysis was based on data generated from varied individual respondents within organizations across different industries. Such a design comes with limitations including potentially compounding crisis effects with what may be industry differences in management. Therefore, generalizations of results from the present sample to others must be done with caution pending future research replications with improved methodologies which may also incorporate quantitative approaches to lead to greater generalizations. In this respect, future research can compare different crisis contexts attempting to expand knowledge and understanding in relation to employee silence and focus on the employers' perspective of silence in turbulent economic times. Finally, further studies can explore how the crisis may be hindering solidarity among employees at a time when it is needed the most for raising concerns to management.

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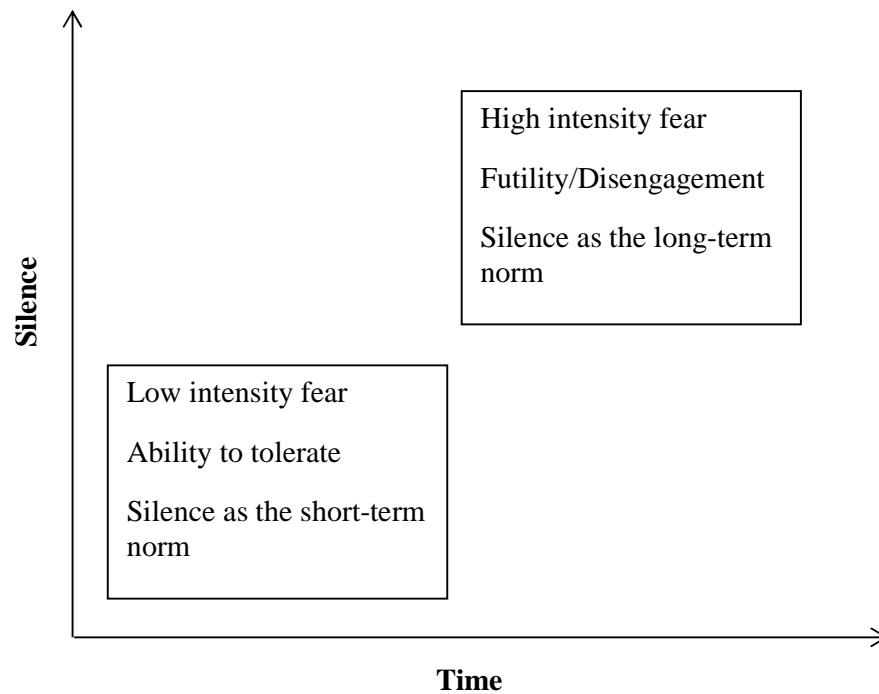
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**Figure 1: Summary of Findings**

		Type of Silence		
		Silence as a fear of consequences	Silence as a response to the perceived duration of the crisis	Silence as the norm
Time	Short-term	Defensive silence Relational silence	Sportsmanship Cooperative silence	Social empathy silence
	Long-term	Climate of silence	Ineffectual silence Acquiescence silence Disengaged silence	Climate of fear Habituated silence

**Figure 2: A Conceptual Framework for the Evolution of Silence over Time in Contexts of Turbulence and Crisis**



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**Table 1: Concepts and Typologies of Silence**

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Concept</b>	<b>Explanation</b>	<b>Literature</b>
Social pressure for conformity	<i>Pluralistic ignorance</i>	Expressing agreement because of a belief that most other group members agree.	Allport (1924)
	<i>Diffusion of responsibility</i>	Assuming reduced responsibility to act in an emergency when others are present.	Latane & Darley (1968) Henriksen & Dayton (2006) LePine & Van Dyne (1998)
	<i>Groupthink</i>	Not challenging prevailing views in groups and instead reaching to an early consensus.	Janis (1972)
	<i>Spiral of silence</i>	Unwilling to publicly express opinion because of a belief that they are in the minority.	Noelle-Neumann (1974) Bowen & Blackmon (2003)
	<i>Abilene paradox</i>	Suppressing open communication due to a desire for conformity.	Harvey (1974)
Hope: situation will improve	<i>Loyalty</i>	Not speaking up, hoping that the situation will improve in the near future.	Hirschman (1970)
Reluctance to hear or be the conveyer of bad news	<i>Mum effect</i>	The reluctance to convey negative information because of the discomfort associated with being the conveyer of bad news.	Conlee & Tesser (1973) Rosen & Tesser (1971)
	<i>Deaf ear syndrome or deaf effect</i>	The reluctance to hear bad news.	Peirce, Smolinski & Rosen (1998) Cuellar, Keil & Johnson (2006)
Willingness to be a good organizational citizen (cooperation)	<i>Sportsmanship</i>	Willingness to tolerate difficulties at work without complaining.	Organ (1988) Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003)
	<i>Prosocial silence</i>	Keeping proprietary information confidential.	Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003)
	<i>Cooperative silence</i>	Remaining silent about issues that might disturb the functioning of the workplace.	Wang, Hsieh, Tsai & Cheng (2012)
Fear (organizational level): voice is futile or dangerous	<i>Climate of silence</i> <i>Or</i> <i>organizational silence</i>	Widely shared perceptions among employees that speaking up about problems or issues is futile and/or dangerous.	Morrison & Milliken (2000)
Fear (individual level): afraid to speak	<i>Defensive silence</i>	Afraid to proactively speak up due to a fear of extrinsic consequences.	Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003)

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up or uncertain how to react			Brinsfield (2013) Detert & Edmondson (2011) Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin (2003)
	<i>Employee silence - Quiescence silence</i>	Disagreement with one's circumstances, awareness of existing alternatives, yet unwilling to speak up because of fear.	Pinder and Harlos (2001)
	<i>Diffident silence</i>	Remaining silent to avoid negative outcomes because of one's insecurities, self-doubt or uncertainties regarding the situation or what to say.	Brinsfield (2013)
Voice is futile and cannot bring change	<i>Ineffectual silence</i>	Perception that speaking up is not useful in effecting change.	Brinsfield (2013) Morrison & Milliken (2000) Pinder & Harlos (2001) Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003)
Fear of harming a relationship	<i>Relational silence</i>	Remaining silent because of fear of harming a relationship.	Brinsfield (2013) Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin (2003)
Acceptance: the situation cannot change	<i>Acquiescence silence</i>	A deeply-felt acceptance of organizational circumstances, a taking-for-granted of the situation and limited awareness that alternatives exist. Based on resignation, employees are passively silent because they do not believe they can make a difference.	Pinder and Harlos (2001) Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003)
	<i>Disengaged silence</i>	Based on disengagement, partially overlapping with the acquiescent dimension of silence as proposed by Van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003).	Brinsfield (2013)
Deviant behavior	<i>Deviant silence</i>	Deviant workplace behavior when employees intentionally withhold important information.	Brinsfield (2013) Gruys & Sackett (2003)

**Table 2: Overview of Businesses & Employees Participating in the Study**

Industry	Sector	Size	Location	Positon of interviewees	Gender ***	Age ***
Manufacturing	Leather & shoes	15	Thessaloniki	Production	Male	30
	Chemicals*	45	Athens	Human resources Sales**	Female Male	27 32
	Pharmaceuticals*	46	Athens	Human resources Accounting	Female Male	31 36
	Construction	25	Thessaloniki	Supply chain management	Male	40
	Building materials	18	Athens	Administration**	Female	42
	Wood & furniture*	48	Athens	Human resources Sales	Female Male	36 28
	Paper*	49	Athens	Sales Human resources	Male Female	29 33
	Leather & shoes	28	Athens	Sales**	Female	29
	Plastics*	43	Thessaloniki	Human resources Accounting	Male Male	28 29
	Wood & furniture	32	Athens	Accounting	Male	43
	Metallurgy*	45	Thessaloniki	Human resources Operations**	Male Male	42 45
Retail	Food wholesaler	22	Athens	Sales	Female	42
	Electronics retailer	38	Athens	Marketing	Female	38
	Super market	48	Athens	Human resources Sales**	Male Female	33 35
	Clothes/garment wholesaler	33	Thessaloniki	Administration	Female	27
	Electronics retailer	25	Athens	Sales	Male	27
	Automotive retailer	44	Athens	Human resources Sales**	Female Male	37 39
	Electronics retailer	35	Thessaloniki	Sales	Female	41
	Clothes/garment wholesaler	29	Athens	Accounting**	Male	30
	Food wholesaler	33	Athens	Operations	Male	29
	Automotive retailer	49	Athens	Marketing Accounting**	Male Male	47 35
	Super market	43	Thessaloniki	Finance	Male	33
	Food wholesaler	39	Thessaloniki	Marketing** Administration	Male Female	32 29
	Clothes/garment wholesaler	41	Athens	Marketing Administration	Female Female	36 39
	Super market	45	Thessaloniki	Marketing	Male	45
	Automotive retailer	39	Athens	Sales**	Female	27
	Super market	42	Athens	Sales	Male	27
Clothes/garment wholesaler	44	Thessaloniki	Sales Accounting	Female Female	29 37	
Electronics retailer	47	Athens	Marketing	Male	29	
Services	Tourist agency	25	Athens	Marketing**	Female	36
	Business consultancy	22	Thessaloniki	Public relations	Female	33
	Transportation	39	Athens	Logistics**	Male	34
	Information technology	45	Athens	Sales Marketing	Male Female	32 35



	Logistics	49	Thessaloniki	Accounting	Male	40
	Communication & advertising	37	Athens	Sales**	Male	34
	Training services	29	Thessaloniki	Marketing	Male	32
	Logistics	38	Athens	Administration	Male	29
	Tourist agency	45	Thessaloniki	Marketing	Female	27
	Printing & publishing	48	Athens	Sales	Male	33
	Business consultancy	37	Thessaloniki	Administration	Male	29
	Communication & advertising	24	Athens	Customer relations	Female	32
	Business consultancy	19	Athens	Marketing	Male	31
	Tourist agency	32	Thessaloniki	Administration	Female	30
				Sales**	Male	41
	Logistics	35	Athens	Operations	Male	38
	Banking, finance & insurances	47	Athens	Sales**	Male	31
				Human resources	Female	30
	Business consultancy	35	Athens	Marketing**	Female	31
	Banking, finance & insurances	27	Thessaloniki	Marketing	Male	32
	Business consultancy	49	Athens	Customer relations	Female	36

\*indicates a trade union present in the workplace

\*\* indicates that the participant was different between the first and second phase of the study

\*\*\* Gender and age refers to the second phase of the interviews

**Table 3: Indicative Quotes – Silence as Fear of the Consequences**

<b>First Phase (Dec 2010-Feb 2012)</b>	<b>Second Phase (Mar 2014-May 2015)</b>
<p><b>Fear of being labelled a ‘troublemaker’</b> (defensive silence)</p>	<p><b>Fear of retaliation (salary withholding, salary reduction, redundancy, dismissal)</b> (climate of silence)</p>
<p><i>‘Everyone has to work longer hours for less money. I don’t want to be seen as the only one complaining.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Once a colleague talked about the unpaid overtimes to the manager and he was instantly seen as a rioter.’</i></p>	<p><i>‘I am worried that if I speak up the manager will not give me the bonus.’</i></p> <p><i>‘I know that I am not getting my full salary and that I am not paid the overtimes. But if I say something and then I lose my job, what will I do? Employers speak to one another. I won’t be able to find another job.’</i></p>
<p><b>Fear of consequences in performance appraisal</b> (defensive silence)</p>	<p><i>‘Let’s face it. Losing your job now means remaining unemployed for a long time. It is not the time to annoy your boss.’</i></p>
<p><i>‘People are afraid of the general manager because of the performance appraisals...’</i></p> <p><i>‘Competition amongst colleagues is fierce; everyone is worried about their performance evaluation; everyone wants to escape the next redundancy list.’</i></p>	
<p><b>Fear of damaging a relationship</b> (relational silence)</p>	
<p><i>‘If I complain about something other colleagues will see this as an opportunity to show to our supervisor that they are better than me, that they don’t complain.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Relationships with managers are more formal and cold and not so harmonious anymore. If I speak up I am afraid of how this will change my relationship with my manager.’</i></p>	

**Table 4: Indicative Quotes – Silence as a Response to the Perceived Duration of the Crisis**

<b>First Phase (Dec 2010-Feb 2012)</b>	<b>Second Phase (Mar 2014-May 2015)</b>
<p><b>Support for the organization in difficult times (organizational citizenship behavior)</b> (sportsmanship / cooperative silence)</p>	<p><b>Feelings of futility: speaking up will not make a difference</b> (ineffectual silence / acquiescence silence / disengaged silence)</p>
<p><i>‘I am still being owed several months’ salary... If I leave, I will never get the money and I will end up long-term unemployed like many others. I have to stay and support my company so that they can overcome this difficult time.’</i></p> <p><i>‘The measures taken by the government and the new company policies create great anxiety to me. Of course I have to do as I am told to help the organization, but I don’t really know for how long I can stand this pressure.’</i></p>	<p><i>‘I tried to resist and to fight against these new conditions which made my life hell! I work for less money and on top of everything I work more than ever before. But nothing can change and, quite frankly, I don’t care anymore.’</i></p> <p><i>‘There is no point in fighting when you cannot change anything...I tried to point out to colleagues that we need to accept it and find the best way to cope with it’.</i></p> <p><i>‘Even though it is very hard to work with all this stress, pressure and constant fear, I have to accept it because I need this job.’</i></p>

**Table 5: Indicative Quotes – Silence as the Norm**

<b>First Phase (Dec 2010-Feb 2012)</b>	<b>Second Phase (Mar 2014-May 2015)</b>
<p><b>Social empathy</b> (<i>spiral of silence / empathetic fear of behalf of others</i>)</p>	<p><b>Culture of uncertainty and fear</b> (<i>climate of fear / habituated silence</i>)</p>
<p><i>‘Everyone is afraid of what will happen... It doesn’t make sense not to feel insecure within this climate.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Of course I am afraid, everyone is afraid of what will happen to our jobs and our lives. If you say that you are not afraid people look at you as if you are crazy.’</i></p> <p><i>‘I have been talking to my co-workers about this. Everyone is very afraid of this crisis. Everyone knows of someone who has lost their job or is facing significant financial problems. People are leaving the country. So of course I am very worried too, I have to be.’</i></p> <p><i>‘The media are mainly responsible for the feeling of fear, but it seems that this is true. After all this period of time I do not feel secure at all.’</i></p>	<p><i>‘The feeling of uncertainty is getting bigger and bigger... We do not know what will happen tomorrow. Are we going to work? Are we going back to the drachma again? Are we going to be able to live? What will happen to our children? We have learned to live and work with these uncertainties and fears.’</i></p> <p><i>‘There is nothing the managing director can do. Our company is not the only one affected by the crisis. The situation is generalized. So there is no point in arguing with management; there is nothing they can do. We know this now and we are used to it.’</i></p> <p><i>‘We don’t even have heating in the office. We are lacking basic working conditions to do our job. But what can we say? The austerity measures mean cuts in budgets. Nothing will happen even if we speak up.’</i></p>

**Table 6: Indicative Quotes – Social Protection, Worker Rights and Representation**

<b>First Phase (Dec 2010-Feb 2012)</b>	<b>Second Phase (Mar 2014-May 2015)</b>
<p><i>‘I do not know if these protests have some impact...the trade unions are very party dependent, following a partisan agenda, trying to blame the one party or the other party instead of giving emphasis to our problems.’</i></p> <p><i>‘I am not convinced from the strikes that are taking place and generally from the activities of the labor unions. I feel that I have no protection.’</i></p>	<p><i>‘I am very unhappy because of how political parties abuse our unions. There is no real representation...’</i></p> <p><i>‘Concerning the labor unions, I’m not satisfied at all. I think they are totally ineffective. And this is reflected by the fact that the measures pass... there is no one who will listen to us and take seriously the problems we face.’</i></p>