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Democracy and Culture of Silence in Work Life

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between the reflection of democratic values to organizations and the silence behavior of employees. In today's world, both political participation and freedom of expression at the institutional level tend to decline. The fact that employees express their ideas clearly threatens not only the innovation and learning processes of organizations, but also the sustainability of democratic culture. Although the silence in the literature (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003) has been frequently examined in the organizational context, the relationship between this phenomenon and democratic values has not been adequately addressed. This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by discussing the culture of silence in both organizational and political dimensions. The research deals with its employee silence in defensive, acceptance and prosocial dimensions; He discusses the effects of these forms of silence on democratic participation behaviors. In addition, factors such as authoritarian management styles, high power distance and lack of psychological security reinforce the culture of silence. Findings show that the tendency of silence in the workplace does not only have institutional consequences, but also may play a role as a factor that limits citizens' participation in political processes. In summary, the internalization of democratic values in business life, the support of employees' voice and overcoming the culture of silence is critical for both the sustainable success of organizations and the strengthening of democratic societies. The study offers the theoretical and practical contributions to managers, policy makers and researchers.

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1. Introduction

The essence of democratic values is that individuals can express themselves freely, participate in decision-making processes, and articulate different views in the face of conflict. However, it is seen that these values are eroded at both political and organizational levels. The decline in voter turnout, the weakening of political debates, and the passivation of social participation on the political level; and in business life, employees' avoidance of sharing their thoughts, bringing criticism, or offering alternative suggestions, are reflections of the same tendency in different contexts. At this point, the conflict between the "Culture of Silence" and democracy is not only an academic debate, but also a critical issue that shapes the future of today's societies. The concept of silence in organizations entered the literature with the studies of Morrison and Milliken (2000) ^[15], which showed how employees consciously withheld their voices in relation to organizational climate. Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) ^[21] classified silence in three dimensions-defensive, acquiescent, and prosocial-and elaborated the underlying psychological dynamics of this behavior.

Silence may function for individuals to avoid punishment, threats to security, or conflict in the short term; however, in the long run, it negatively affects organizations' innovation capacity, learning processes, and democratic administrative culture. In institutions where employees' voice behavior is not encouraged, suppressing creative ideas, hiding mistakes, and leaving problems unresolved becomes normalized. A similar situation exists at the political level. Citizens' withdrawal from using freedom of expression, the weakening of a culture of criticism, and the decline in participation in democratic mechanisms contribute to the erosion of representative democracies. In this context, the parallelism between organizational silence and political silence should not be ignored. When individuals suppress their voices in business life, they tend to exhibit a similar passivity in their citizenship roles. In other words, the silence learned in the workplace is reproduced in the social sphere, thereby weakening democratic culture. This article aims to examine the relationship between employee silence and democratic values from a multidimensional perspective. First, the organizational causes and individual motivations of the culture of silence will be discussed; then the reflections of this phenomenon on political participation will be analyzed. Although silence has been widely investigated in the literature (e.g., Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & Van Dick, 2013) ^[3, 12], its ties with democracy and political participation have not been adequately illuminated. For this reason, the main contribution of the study is to highlight the intersection between democratic values in business life and individuals' political attitudes and behaviors. The silence–democracy tension offers a critical field of discussion at both the micro (organizations) and macro (society) levels. Encouraging employees' voice behaviors is considered not only a prerequisite for organizational performance, but also for the sustainability of democratic culture.

2. Micro Democracy: Political Implications of Participation in the Workplace

Although democracy is traditionally associated with political systems, modern social sciences reveal that this phenomenon is reproduced not only at the level of state and society, but also within micro-structures such as organizations. Workplaces can be seen as small-scale democratic laboratories in the context of giving employees a voice, involving them in decision-making processes, and allowing the free expression of diverse ideas. In this context, the concept of micro-democracy refers to the existence of transparency, participation, and pluralism in organizational governance. Strengthening participation in business life not only increases organizational performance but is also directly reflected in individuals' roles as citizens. The parallelism between mechanisms of participation in organizations and political participation is remarkable. Just as employees' involvement in decision-making, providing feedback to management, and freely expressing themselves resembles citizens' voting, exercising their right to representation, and engaging in political debates. In other words, individuals who experience participation in the workplace tend to participate more actively in political processes. Conversely, the dominance of a culture of silence in organizations can diminish individuals' trust in democratic processes and foster passivity in political participation. Kahn's (1990) studies revealed that individuals' sense of psychological safety when expressing themselves in the workplace is decisive.

Edmondson (1999) ^[6], further conceptualized psychological safety as the fundamental precondition of organizational learning. Employees in psychologically safe organizations can express their ideas without fear of mistakes, and the presence of diverse perspectives is considered an asset. Such a climate not only nurtures democratic values within organizations but also supports freedom and participation in citizenship roles. The concept of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (Organ, 1988) is also critical in this context. The voluntary contributions of employees, support for organizational functions beyond formal tasks, and the assumption of social responsibility parallel the principles of democratic citizenship at the political level. Individuals who experience participation in the workplace tend to act as active citizens in society. Therefore, strengthening micro-democracy at the organizational level contributes to the revitalization of democratic participation at the macro level. Recent research has shown that participatory management approaches influence not only organizational efficiency and employee commitment, but also perceptions and attitudes toward political processes. For example, Detert and Burris (2007) ^[5], emphasize that when employees are given the opportunity to provide direct feedback to managers, both their job satisfaction and their social participation are strengthened. Similarly, the meta-analysis of Frazier *et al.* (2017) ^[7], revealed that psychological safety enhances learning behaviors as well as innovative attitudes. These findings show that the internalization of democratic values in the workplace is vital not only for organizations but also for the sustainability of political systems. Moreover, the need for micro-democracy is critical not only for employees but also for managers. While participatory management models provide legitimacy to managers, authoritarian and repressive management styles fuel a culture of silence within organizations and pave the way for authoritarian tendencies at the societal level. Thus, democratic deficiencies in the workplace lead individuals to withdraw from political freedom of expression and disengage from democratic processes. In short, organizations are not merely structures serving economic purposes but also social arenas where democratic values are learned, reinforced, or weakened. Participation experiences at the micro level shape individuals' political behaviors at the macro level; and the culture of silence threatens not only organizational innovation but also the sustainability of democratic societies.

3. The Unspoken Worker, The Silent Citizen: The Bridge Between Silence and Participation

Silence in organizations means that individuals do not express their knowledge, ideas, and criticisms, and often withdraw from communication. The pioneering studies of Morrison and Milliken (2000) ^[15], revealed that employees have made "silence" a strategic choice, which is closely related to organizational norms and leadership styles. Van Dyne *et al.* (2003) ^[21], classified this phenomenon in three dimensions-defensive, acquiescent, and prosocial silence-emphasizing that silence is not a one-dimensional passive state, but a complex behavior based on different intentions. Similarly, silence at the political level manifests itself when citizens avoid participating in democratic processes, withdraw from public debates, and suppress their critical voices. This is not only individual passivity but also the manifestation of a broader social culture. The concept of the "silent majority" is used in political literature to describe

citizens who possess democratic rights but refrain from actively using them. Here, the bridge between organizational and political silence emerges clearly: individuals who cannot make their voices heard in the workplace also tend to be passive as citizens; silence learned in the organization is reflected in political participation. In both contexts, lack of confidence lies at the basis of silence. Employees fear punishment, exclusion, or career setbacks when they raise their voices (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). At the political level, citizens fear stigmatization, alienation from their social circles, or even legal sanctions. Thus, silence is often perceived as a “protective” strategy: while it may provide short-term security for individuals, it weakens both organizational and political functioning in the long term. Furthermore, silence is a learned behavior. As individuals repeatedly experience that voicing criticism yields no results or leads to negative reactions in the workplace, they begin to believe that speaking is risky while silence is safe (Knoll & Van Dick, 2013) ^[12]. A similar mechanism operates in political processes: citizens who see that participation does not create change disengage from various forms of participation, from voting and petitioning to protesting. Thus, the “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) ^[16], manifests itself in both organizational and political contexts. Silence can create an illusion of harmony in the short term; however, it is destructive in the long run. At the organizational level, silence blinds innovation, conceals errors, weakens employee commitment, and halts learning processes (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003) ^[14]. At the political level, silence prevents democratic mechanisms from functioning effectively, strengthens authoritarian tendencies, and weakens citizens’ ties with the state. In this way, individuals’ micro-level preferences for silence can turn into a macro-level democracy crisis. One of the most important dynamics explaining the bridge between organizational and political silence is the perception of belonging and legitimacy. Employees who cannot make their voices heard in the workplace gradually become alienated from the organization; similarly, citizens who cannot express themselves in the political system lose trust in state institutions. In both contexts, silence turns individuals into passive objects rather than participatory subjects. Today, this bridge of silence has gained new dimensions with digitalization. The visibility provided by social media has created alternative arenas where individuals can make their voices heard both in organizational and political contexts. However, factors such as digital surveillance, fear of dismissal, or the rise of “lynching culture” strengthen tendencies toward silence in digital media. Employees may refrain from voicing criticism in the workplace and instead choose to hide their identities on social media, remaining silent or participating only through anonymous expressions. This shows that organizational and political silence is being reproduced in parallel within new media environments. In short, the bridge between the non-speaking employee and the silent citizen reveals that the culture of silence experienced in different life domains is not merely an analogy but a mutually reinforcing phenomenon. Strengthening democratic values in the workplace is therefore critical not only for institutional efficiency but also for the sustainability of democracy at the societal level.

4. The Anatomy of Silence: Fear, Comfort, and Authority

Silence is not only a simple form of behavior that individuals prefer; it is a multi-layered phenomenon shaped by organizational and social structures. The similarities between employee silence and political silence point to three basic dynamics that explain why individuals avoid speaking up: fear, comfort, and authority. These dynamics pave the way for silence to become both an individual-level psychological reaction and a collective social norm. Fear is one of the most powerful triggers of silence. In organizational contexts, employees remain silent due to concerns about managers’ negative reactions, loss of career opportunities, or threats to job security (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) ^[15]. At the political level, citizens fear exclusion from society, being targeted on social media, or facing legal sanctions under authoritarian regimes. In this sense, silence functions as a kind of “security shield.” However, this security is misleading: while it protects individuals in the short term, it erodes organizational effectiveness and democratic functioning in the long term. Fear-based silence can arise not only from external pressures but also from internalized beliefs. The idea, “If I speak, nothing will change,” reflects a state of learned helplessness. Such beliefs direct individuals toward passive adaptation, distancing them from active participation. The second reason for silence is the search for comfort. Speaking up requires responsibility, effort, and risk-taking; whereas remaining silent offers an easy and risk-free strategy. As Pinder and Harlos (2001) ^[20], point out, silence is sometimes the result not only of fear but also of avoiding the difficult path. In organizations, some employees find it more convenient to adapt to the status quo rather than voicing problems, focusing only on their own work while remaining silent. Similarly, at the political level, citizens may perceive participation in democratic processes as time-consuming, burdensome, or lacking personal benefit. This comfort-based silence is not active resistance but rather passive indifference. However, such silence fosters apoliticization at the societal level and contributes to the erosion of democratic culture. Authority and hierarchy also strongly reinforce silence. Hofstede’s (1980) concept of power distance reveals the extent to which societies are egalitarian or hierarchical in subordinate–superior relations. In organizations and societies with high power distance, questioning authority is discouraged, making silence the norm. In organizational life, authoritarian leaders perceive criticism as disloyalty; in political systems, authorities frame opposition as a “threat” or “enemy.” The silencing of diverse voices in such environments is reinforced not only through repressive mechanisms but also through cultural norms. While employees internalize the idea of “not questioning the ruler,” citizens may adopt the view of “not conflicting with the state.” In this way, silence ceases to be an individual strategy and becomes a form of social adaptation. When the dynamics of fear, comfort, and authority converge, silence is shaped not only by external pressures but also by behaviors internalized by individuals. Knoll and Van Dick (2013) ^[1], explain this through the perception that “speaking is risky, silence is safe,” which eventually becomes a learned habit. Thus, silence becomes part of individuals’ identities and turns into a chronic behavior in both organizational and political contexts. This

chronicity not only reduces individual agency but also leads to the reproduction of a culture of silence. Employees become role models for newcomers in organizations; citizens disengage from political processes, thereby turning passivity into a social norm. Silence thus becomes a cultural heritage, transmitted from individuals to society and across generations. Digitalization has a dual effect: it both weakens and strengthens the phenomenon of silence. On the one hand, social media offers platforms for individuals to make their voices heard; on the other hand, surveillance, the risk of dismissal, and the prevalence of “lynching culture” increase tendencies toward digital silence. Instances where employees face disciplinary action or termination due to critical posts about their workplace show that the culture of silence is being reproduced in digital environments. At the political level, alongside the rise of digital activism, phenomena such as digital silence and self-censorship have become increasingly visible. In short, when examining the anatomy of the culture of silence, it is seen that fear pushes individuals toward silence as a protection reflex, comfort keeps them from assuming responsibility, and authority institutionalizes silence. These three elements combine to transform silence into a learned and internalized behavior, leading to the erosion of democratic values in both organizations and political systems.

5. The Enemy of Innovation? The Invisible Cost of a Culture of Silence

Although the culture of silence creates the impression of stability and harmony on the surface for organizations and societies, it produces invisible costs that erode both organizational performance and democratic values in the long run. When individuals withhold their voices, these costs accumulate and manifest not only at the economic level, but also at psychological, ethical, and political levels. Silence is a direct obstacle to organizational innovation capacity. Employees' hesitation to express their ideas blocks creative processes and weakens organizations' ability to adapt to change (Detert & Burris, 2007) ^[5]. Especially in today's highly competitive business world, the culture of silence condemns organizations to stagnation. Failure to share errors, concealment of risks, and covering up problems make it impossible to cope with crises. As Edmondson (1999) ^[6], emphasizes, there is no possibility of becoming a learning organization in the absence of psychological safety. The culture of silence also causes deep wounds in employees' psychological well-being. Employees who cannot make their voices heard become alienated from the organization, feel devalued, and experience burnout (Brinsfield, 2013) ^[3]. This reduces job satisfaction and organizational commitment, while increasing turnover intentions. Moreover, silence creates a dual pressure: authoritarian forces from outside and self-imposed tendencies to remain silent from within. This dual burden weakens employees' emotional ties to the organization and undermines organizational citizenship behaviors. Ethical risks also grow in the soil of silence. Employees' silence in cases of corruption, discrimination, bullying, or harassment renders unethical behaviors invisible (Miceli & Near, 2005). In organizations where whistleblowing mechanisms are weak, silence produces institutional ethical blindness. Similarly, at the political level, citizens' silence strengthens authoritarian tendencies and normalizes illegality. Silence thus becomes not merely an individual choice, but a mechanism that accelerates systemic

corruption. At the societal level, silence erodes participation—the very foundation of democracy. Declining voter turnout, reduced public debate, and the transformation of citizens into a “silent majority” reduce democracy to a mere formal procedure. Noelle-Neumann's (1974) ^[16], spiral of silence theory shows that individuals prefer silence when they believe their opinions contradict the majority view. This mechanism silences innovative ideas in organizations and undermines pluralism in society, leading to the dominance of a single voice. The culture of silence also generates a cycle of insecurity in organizations and societies. Managers cannot identify real problems unless employees speak up; employees lose trust in managers when problems are ignored. Similarly, political elites cannot respond to societal needs unless citizens voice them; this erodes citizens' trust in the political system. Unless this cycle is broken, the culture of silence deepens and causes systems to enter a crisis of legitimacy. Perhaps the most overlooked cost of silence is the loss of opportunities. An unspoken idea, an unresolved problem, or a silenced criticism limits the developmental potential of organizations and societies. An innovative product, a democratic reform, or a social change can be buried in history simply because it was never expressed. In this sense, silence represents not the protection of the status quo, but the loss of the future. In summary, the culture of silence leads to loss of innovation, ethical risks, weakened commitment, and burnout for organizations; and to erosion of democratic participation, authoritarian tendencies, and lost opportunities for societies. Therefore, silence must be recognized not merely as an individual strategy but as a systemic threat to both organizational sustainability and democratic life.

6. Democratic Workplaces: Models that Encourage Voice and Participation

The negative effects of the culture of silence in organizations reveal the importance of integrating democratic values into business life. Democratic workplaces not only increase efficiency and productivity; they also support employees' psychological well-being, strengthen trust, and contribute to the development of a more participatory understanding of democracy in society. Organizations where employees can express their ideas freely, where criticisms and suggestions are valued, function as micro-level laboratories of democracy. Participative management ensures that employees have a voice not only in daily business processes but also in strategic decisions. This approach replaces the traditional one-way command-and-control chain in manager–employee relations with a bidirectional communication mechanism. Detert and Burris (2007) ^[5], emphasize that both innovative behaviors and employee commitment increase in organizations where feedback is systematically encouraged. Open communication channels create confidence that individuals will be heard when they speak, while also allowing problems to be addressed without concealment. In this model, meetings are not merely sessions where managers transmit information; rather, they become democratic platforms where employees express opinions, suggestions, and criticisms. Consequently, employees who enjoy voice in business life also become more likely to participate actively as citizens in political processes. Perhaps the most critical feature of democratic workplaces is the presence of psychological safety. As described by Edmondson (1999) ^[6], this concept refers to the belief that individuals will not be punished for admitting mistakes, offering new ideas, or

taking risks. Employees in organizations with high psychological safety can express criticism without perceiving it as a personal threat. This, in turn, strengthens both organizational learning and innovation. Google's well-known Project Aristotle revealed that the common characteristic of successful teams is not technical expertise but psychological safety—showing that a democratic workplace culture is not merely an ideal, but a concrete requirement for success. Leadership style plays a key role in overcoming the culture of silence. While authoritarian leaders see diverse voices as threats, ethical, authentic, and participatory leaders embrace different perspectives as valuable. Avolio and Gardner (2005) ^[2] highlight that authentic leadership, through transparent communication and value-based, trust-based relationships, amplifies employee voice. Similarly, Greenleaf's (1977) ^[8] servant leadership model emphasizes shared authority, prioritizing employees' needs, and empowering them. These approaches are essential for building democratic organizational cultures. To overcome the culture of silence at the institutional level, concrete policies must be developed. Employee suggestion systems, anonymous feedback channels, ethics hotlines, ombudsman mechanisms, and regular employee satisfaction surveys are critical tools. Moreover, performance evaluations should consider not only task completion but also employees' innovative contributions, critical thinking, and willingness to collaborate. In such an environment, voice becomes institutionalized—no longer dependent solely on individual courage. Global workplace practices provide successful examples. Toyota's Kaizen philosophy has fostered a culture where every employee's idea is valued through continuous improvement. Spotify has promoted transparency and participation with employee feedback forums directly linked to management. Airbnb's open-door policy has allowed employees to access managers directly, making employee voice an institutional norm. In the public sector, participatory bureaucracy models in Scandinavian countries enable employee representatives, alongside managers, to play active roles in decision-making processes. These cases demonstrate that democratic workplace models can succeed in both private and public institutions. Democratic workplaces not only foster peace and productivity within organizations; they also reinforce democratic values at the societal level. When employees become accustomed to expressing their ideas freely in the workplace, they carry this habit into their roles as citizens, becoming more courageous and active in political participation. Thus, democratic workplaces function as foundational building blocks of democratic societies. In short, democratic workplaces are no longer optional but a necessity for overcoming the culture of silence. Participative management, psychological safety, ethical leadership, and transparent human resource policies are key elements in breaking silence and encouraging employee voice. Implementing these practices will ensure both organizational sustainability and the vitality of democratic societies.

7. From Institutional Silence to Political Silence: The Intersection of Two Worlds

Although the culture of silence may appear to be an individual choice on the surface, it produces serious consequences when it becomes a collective norm in both organizations and societies. There is a two-way and profound interaction between organizational silence and political silence. The individual who has a weak voice in the

workplace tends to be silent in the social sphere; likewise, the citizen who becomes passive in the political field also refrains from raising their voice in organizational contexts. Thus, silence at the micro (organizational) and macro (political) levels becomes a cycle that reinforces itself. Individuals carry social identities and behavior patterns across different domains. An employee who learns that speaking up in the workplace is risky will repeat this behavior in their citizenship roles. Therefore, organizational silence influences not only business life but also political participation. In the literature, this dynamic is called Behavioral Spillover (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999). In other words, experiences in one domain directly shape behaviors in another. Organizational silence leads to employees' alienation from their organizations; political silence causes citizens to feel alienated from the state and democratic institutions. Employees whose voices are not heard lose their emotional ties to their organizations; similarly, citizens who are silenced in the public sphere lose trust in political institutions. This alienation parallels Marx's concept of alienation. In organizational psychology, it is associated with a decline in job satisfaction, commitment, and belonging (Ashforth, 1993) ^[1]. As alienation deepens, both organizations and democracies enter a crisis of legitimacy. Noelle-Neumann (1974) ^[16] demonstrated through the spiral of silence theory that individuals remain silent when their views contradict the majority opinion. This mechanism functions in both organizational and political contexts. Employees avoid speaking up under managerial or majority pressure, while citizens suppress criticism in the face of dominant social discourses. As a result, silence becomes not merely an individual strategy but a social norm. Organizational silence reinforces political silence, and political silence in turn reproduces silence in organizations. In societies with strong democratic cultures, employee voice becomes the norm, and individuals who speak freely in the workplace are also empowered in the public sphere. Conversely, in authoritarian contexts, as citizens remain silent, authoritarian leadership styles become legitimized. This mutual interaction generates a continuous feedback loop between organizations and political systems. For instance, in Scandinavian countries, a strong democratic culture has been reflected in organizational practices: participative management, protection of trade union rights, and transparent communication models have become institutional norms. On the other hand, in societies dominated by authoritarian regimes, both the public sphere and workplaces have become arenas where silence is reproduced. The culture of silence triggers legitimacy crises in both organizations and democracies. Employees' silence prevents managers from recognizing real problems, thereby reducing the quality of decisions. Citizens' silence allows those in power to evade accountability. Without participation, both organizational leadership and political authority become fragile. This fragility sustains only short-term harmony but undermines long-term sustainability. Today, digitalization has made the intersection between organizational and political silence even more visible. Employees who voice criticism on social media sometimes face dismissal, reinforcing self-censorship on digital platforms. Similarly, at the political level, citizens may silence themselves on social media due to concerns about surveillance or the prevalence of "lynching culture." Thus, silence is reproduced not only in organizations and political systems but also in digital public spaces. In short, the bridge between organizational and

political silence shows that individuals' behaviors in different domains mutually reinforce each other. Employees who cannot raise their voices at work tend to become passive citizens, while citizens accustomed to silence in the political sphere more readily submit to authority in the workplace. Breaking this cycle is crucial not only for organizational success but also for the future of democratic societies.

8. Conclusion

Although the culture of silence seems to provide harmony and stability on the surface, it seriously weakens the innovation capacity of organizations, the psychological well-being of employees, and the democratic vitality of societies in the long run. For this reason, breaking silence and strengthening democratic values in the workplaces of the future has become not only an organizational goal but also a social responsibility. To overcome the culture of silence, multidimensional strategies are required. The first step is to ensure that employees feel safe. According to Edmondson (1999)^[6], psychological safety means that individuals know they will not be punished for expressing different ideas. In future workplaces, managers should act as "learning facilitators" rather than "error hunters." In such an environment, employees will share mistakes instead of hiding them, and they will feel pride instead of fear when offering criticism. Democratic workplaces do not leave decision-making processes solely under the control of ruling elites; they encourage the contribution of all employees. Regular feedback meetings, cross-functional project teams, open forums, and digital surveys are concrete mechanisms to enhance participation. Participatory management strengthens not only job satisfaction but also organizational belonging. This participation, experienced at the micro level, also contributes to individuals' political participation in their citizenship roles. Leadership style is another critical factor in overcoming silence. While authoritarian leadership suppresses employee voice, ethical leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006)^[4], authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005)^[2], and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977)^[8] treat diverse voices as assets. Future leaders must be guides who listen, understand, and encourage multiple perspectives. Such leadership is the cornerstone of cultural transformation that breaks silence. Employee voice must also be institutionalized beyond individual courage. Human resource policies should reward behaviors such as generating innovative ideas, problem-solving, and collective contributions in performance evaluations. Suggestion systems, innovation awards, and anonymous feedback mechanisms make voice a permanent part of organizational culture. Democratic workplaces must also protect collective voice. Trade unions, employee assemblies, and representative systems are strong tools to break silence. Strong union representation contributes not only to rights advocacy but also to the institutionalization of democratic culture in organizations. Thus, employees can express themselves not only individually but also collectively. Digitalization offers important opportunities to break silence in future workplaces. Anonymous digital platforms, such as feedback applications or suggestion boxes, can provide employees with invisible protection, especially in hierarchical organizations. With the rise of hybrid and remote work, digital participation channels must become integral parts of democratic workplace culture. Beyond structures, cultural awareness is also crucial. Employees should be trained on the importance of voice, freedom of

expression, and the contributions of democratic workplace culture to social democracy. Leadership programs should strengthen managers' listening skills and instill expression courage in employees. Ultimately, democratic workplaces strengthen not only organizational success but also social democracy. Employees who become accustomed to voicing their opinions at work are more likely to be active and courageous participants in political processes. Thus, organizations are not only economic institutions but also social spaces where democracy is learned. Breaking the culture of silence in the workplace is therefore a strategic step toward overcoming silence in society. General Evaluation: This study examined the interaction between democratic values and the culture of silence in both organizational and political contexts, making visible the intersection between employee silence and citizens' silence. Findings reveal that silence is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by organizational structures, leadership styles, social norms, and political climates rather than an individual choice. Although organizational silence may appear to provide stability and harmony in the short term, it ultimately becomes one of the most serious obstacles to innovation, creativity, and learning. When employees cannot express problems, hide risks, or refrain from offering suggestions, the problem-solving capacity of organizations is weakened. At the same time, silence negatively affects commitment, job satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Brinsfield, 2013)^[15, 3]. At the political level, silence erodes participation, the cornerstone of democracy. Declining voter turnout, weakening public debate, and the silencing of critical voices reduce democracy to a mere formality, undermining pluralism and paving the way for authoritarian tendencies (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)^[16]. Silence thus represents not only the suppression of freedom of expression but also the blindness of democratic culture. One of the main contributions of this study is to reveal the strong bond between organizational silence and political silence. Individuals who cannot make their voices heard in the workplace carry this behavioral pattern into their citizenship roles. Likewise, citizens who remain silent in the political sphere learn to withhold their voices in business life. In this way, silence at the micro level (organizations) is reproduced at the macro level (society), creating a cycle in which political silence reinforces organizational silence and vice versa. This mutual interaction contributes to legitimacy crises in both democracies and organizations. Overcoming the culture of silence is possible through the construction of democratic workplaces. Ensuring psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999)^[6], implementing participatory management models (Detert & Burris, 2007)^[5], adopting ethical and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005)^[2], strengthening employee representation mechanisms, and using digital participation channels effectively are strategic priorities. These measures will secure sustainable success in organizations while reinforcing democratic vitality in society. Future workplaces must be more than economic production centers—they must be social spaces where democratic values are learned and reinforced.

Conclusion: Organizations where employees can speak freely, where ideas are valued, and where diverse voices are encouraged will also serve as the building blocks of democratic societies. Breaking silence in business life is not only essential for organizational productivity but also for the

sustainability of democracy. To break the culture of silence means participation, not passivity; confidence, not fear; cooperation, not authoritarianism. Ending silence is therefore one of the most critical steps in guaranteeing the future of both institutions and societies.

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