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Examining the relationships among trust, silence and organizational commitment

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Abstract

Purpose – Previous studies examined the relationships between trust, organizational commitment and the unitary construct of silence. The authors believe that previous studies' primary shortcoming is the lack of an understanding of the motives of employees in withholding work related issues when they have a lack of trust in their organization and supervisor and a lack of knowledge regarding the form of silence that impacts more organizational commitment. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the impacts of trust in organization and trust in supervisor on acquiescent and defensive silence and examines the effects of acquiescent and defensive silence on organizational commitment.

Design/methodology/approach – The study utilized structured equation modeling to analyze data from 753 highly skilled employees in South Korea.

Findings – The findings revealed that trust in organization is associated with acquiescent silence; trust in supervisor is related with defensive silence and acquiescent silence demonstrated strong relationship with organizational commitment.

Originality/value – This study is the first to explore the associations between trust in organization and acquiescent silence and the relationships between trust in supervisor and defensive silence. Moreover, our study reports the strong link between acquiescent silence and organizational commitment.

Keywords Organizational commitment, Trust in organization, Trust in supervisor, Acquiescent silence, Defensive silence

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Employee silence refers to intentionally concealing information, ideas and opinions with relevance to improvements in organization (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Employees are perceived to be a main source of feedback to solve work-related issues (Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Thus, when the members of organization are silent, it is difficult to identify the pros and cons of different types of solutions (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000). Moreover, employee silence reduces organizational commitment (Vakola and Bouradas, 2005), increases corruption (Ashforth and Anand, 2003), impedes innovation at workplace (Argyris and Schon, 1978) and causes absenteeism, turnover and other undesired behaviors (Carla, 1996). Individuals who intentionally restrict themselves from communication suffer from stress and physiological problems (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Beer and Eisenstat, 2000). Therefore, investigating the factors that are related with silence remains a fundamental issue in organization management.

Trust has substantial impact on information sharing and exchange (Creed and Miles, 1996; Dirks, 1999; Kimmel *et al.*, 1980; Mellinger, 1959; O'reilly, 1978; Smith and Barclay, 1997). Trust fosters communication and information sharing (Creed and Miles, 1996). If employees trust their managers and supervisors, they share their concerns without hesitation (Nikalaou *et al.*, 2011). In case of refraining from information sharing and speaking up, individuals are less likely to have organizational commitment (Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005).

Previous studies on silence examined the associations among trust (Nikolaou *et al.*, 2011) organizational commitment (Nikolaou *et al.*, 2011; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005) and the unitary construct of silence that focusses on the tendency and the frequency of expressing opinions. Besides unitary construct of silence there is a multidimensional construct of silence that focusses on the motives of individuals from being silent such as acquiescent, defensive and pro-social silence, etc. Acquiescent silent individuals withhold information based on their disengagement from organizational issues and low efficacy to make difference in their workplace; defensive silent individuals refrain themselves from sharing information based on the self-protection and fear; individuals with pro-social silence withhold information based on the pro-social motives not to harm their organization (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

Investigating the behavior of silence itself is insufficient because it does not attribute the intentions of individuals to be silent (Brinsfield, 2013). Thus, examining the associations between trust and unitary construct of silence does not fully explain the intentions of individuals from being silent when they have a lower level of trust in their organization or supervisor and does not describe what motives from being silent have more influence on organization commitment. Hence, to advance this knowledge there is a need for a study that addresses the associations between trust in organization and supervisor, multidimensional form of silence that attributes the intentions of individuals from being silent and organizational commitment. Therefore, our study aims to address these gaps in the literature by examining the impacts of trusts in organization and supervisor on distinct forms of silence such as acquiescent and defensive silence. Then, our study examines the influence of acquiescent and defensive silence on organizational commitment and identifies what form of silence has more effect on organizational commitment.

Literature review and hypotheses
Silence
Morrison and Milliken (2000) viewed silence as the powerful force in organizations that did not receive enough research attention that it deserved. The reason for a little attention to silence was explained by its absence. Silence is the absence of behavior and it is more difficult to learn absent behavior than obvious behavior (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). When behavior does not exist, it is difficult to realize a problem related with it, as a result individuals do not concern non existing behavior. Morrison and Milliken (2000) used the term "Organizational silence" that is perceived to be organizational level phenomenon. Pinder and Harlos (2001) viewed the silence as an individual phenomenon and used the term "employee silence." Employee silence is different from organizational silence, the former occurs at an individual level the latter occurs at organizational level (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). In our study we focus on employee silence.

According to Pinder and Harlos (2001) silence is a conscious, active and purposeful behavior. When individuals do something that is expected without expressing their thoughts it could be the sign of protesting organizational practices (Brinsfield *et al.*, 2009). Pinder and Harlos (2001) introduced two types of silence: quiescence and acquiescence silence and compared two forms of silence in terms of their eight dimensions: voluntariness, consciousness, acceptance, stress level, awareness of alternatives, propensity to voice, propensity to exit and dominant emotions. Pinder and Harlos (2001, p. 348) suggested employee quiescence "as one form of silence that represents deliberate omission." According to these authors, despite the fact that quiescent silent employees conceal information based on some motives, they are ready to share their concerns to make difference in their environment that created silence.

Acquiescence is neglecting existing choice and reluctance to seek out for any (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Acquiescent silent individuals are reluctant to make a difference in their environment in contrast with quiescent ones (Pinder and Harlos, 2001). Similarly, Van Dyne *et al.* (2003) did not view the silence as the absence of voice and they emphasized the intention of individuals in remaining silent by discussing the three forms of silence: resignation, fear and cooperation. Van Dyne *et al.* (2003) drew acquiescent silence from Pinder and Harlos's (2001) conceptualization and suggested defensive and pro-social silence. According to Van Dyne *et al.* (2003), acquiescent silent individuals withhold work related issues based on low self-efficacy to make change and disengagement from organizational issues. When superiors do not respond to delivered information from employees or management discourages employees' participation in discussing organizational issues, employees perceive that speaking up is useless and does not make any change consequently, based on this perception employees become acquiescent silent.

Defensive silence is withholding opinions and information based on the fear and self-protection (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). Employees who are aware of being punished, fired from their jobs and labeled as a trouble maker, protect themselves from negative outcomes of raising organizational issues by becoming reluctant to uncover organization problems. Pro-social silence is related to concealing the job related information, opinions and ideas with the intention of benefiting other individuals or the organization (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

In our study we investigate acquiescent and defensive silence because our study aims to investigate the dimensions of silence that negatively influence organizations. Pro-social silence is not included in this study because it is not perceived to be harmful to organizations (Wang and Hsieh, 2013).

Trust
Interpersonal trust differs from institutional trust, interpersonal trust is rational and it is based on dependability and responsibility whereas institutional trust refers to emotional investment (Costigan *et al.*, 1998). Moreover, interpersonal trust depends on personal characteristics of individuals and it evolves from frequent contacts among people whereas institutional trust is developed by structured relationships and rules of the organization (Fox, 1974). Similarly, Tan and Tan (2000) indicated that although trust in supervisor and trust in organization are positively and significantly correlated they are argued to be distinct constructs each with its own set of determinants and consequences. According to Tan and Tan (2000), trust in supervisor positively related with proximal constructs such as ability, benevolence and integrity of supervisors, and trust in organization is more strongly associated with global variables such as justice and higher organizational commitment. Employees may have higher levels of trust to their supervisor while having lower level of trust to their organization, because there can be a good relationship between employees and their supervisors that enables individuals to trust supervisors (Tan and Tan, 2000). Because trust in organization and trust in supervisor are perceived to be two distinct constructs, they may induce different dimensions of silence and therefore, we included them in our study to specify the form of silence that is generated by a lack of trust in organization and a lack of trust in supervisor.

Trust in organization and silence
Organizational trust refers to the positive expectations people have about the behaviors of organization's employees based on the relationships, organizational roles and

interdependencies (Shockley-Zalabak *et al.*, 2000). Organizational trust is categorized as a form of institutional trust and associated with employees trust in organizations senior management and employing organization (Fox, 1974).

Trust in top leaders and senior management is positively associated with the self-efficacy of employees (Yang and Mossholder, 2010). In other words, the higher the trust in organization the higher there will be self-efficacy of individuals to make difference in organization. Therefore, we believe that employees with higher level of trust are tend to have higher level of self-efficacy that enable them to share their concerns to make difference in their organization whereas individuals with lower level of trust are more likely to have low of self-efficacy to make change with their suggestions and remain acquiescently silent.

Moreover, individuals who trust in their organization are more likely to feel confident with the outcomes of their behavior and reactions of senior management whereas employees who have lower level of trust in organization tend to have less confidence with their action and the reactions of top leaders. Because, speaking up is perceived to be a risky behavior that challenges the status quo (Detert and Burris, 2007), individuals with lower level of trust in organization are more likely to feel unsafe to share their concerns and have defensive silence. Hence, we propose followings:

H1. Trust in organization is negatively related to acquiescent silence.

H2. Trust in organization is negatively related to defensive silence.

Trust in supervisor and silence
Mayer *et al.*'s (1995) model discussed the characteristics of trustor and trustee. Trustee's characteristics are ability, benevolence and integrity (Knoll and Gill, 2011). Ability refers to the combination of skills, competencies and characteristics that gives an opportunity to influence within a certain domain. Benevolence is derived from the belief that the trustee intends to help the trustor. Integrity is based on the quality of the trustee that is identified when the trustor perceives that the trustee has a set of principles that are acceptable to the trustor. When trustor believes that these set of principles to be unacceptable, the trustee is perceived to be not to have integrity (Mayer *et al.*, 1995). Individuals assess the benevolence and integrity of supervisors before sharing information because subordinates protect themselves by making sure that their supervisors intend to benefit them and follow a set of principles and therefore, will not punish them for delivering information. By assessing integrity, employees assess their supervisor's principles and analyze previous instances when information was delivered to them. In the event that supervisor is discovered to hold a negative attitude toward information-sharing, individuals draw conclusions about the supervisor's principles and have a lower level of trust in their supervisor.

In situations of reduced trust, individuals do not feel safe sharing work-related opinions because they may face problems, such as punishment, and therefore those individuals avoid sharing their concerns due to fear or self-defense. Hence, there is positive relationship between trust and risk-taking behavior (Dirks and Ferrin, 2001; Mayer *et al.*, 1995). The more individuals have trust in their supervisors, the more they feel safe about supervisors' reaction for speaking up. Thus, employees with higher level of trust are more likely to express their opinions and concerns whereas employees with lower level of trust are more likely to withhold their thoughts based on the fear and self-defense.

Moreover, when assessing integrity of supervisors, employees concern the attention of supervisors for shared information. When supervisors do not take some measures

for shared information, employees will have lower level of trust in their supervisors and therefore, perceive that speaking up does not make a change. Based on this perception, employees give up raising their work-related concerns and withhold those issues by becoming acquiescently silent. Therefore, we propose following hypotheses:

H3. Trust in supervisor is negatively related to acquiescent silence.

H4. Trust in supervisor is negatively related to defensive silence.

Silence and organizational commitment
As noted earlier, acquiescent silent individuals do not expose their concerns based on the belief that they cannot make any change or because of their disengagement from organizational issues (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003). When employees believe that they are engaged in organizational issues they are tend to have self-expression (French *et al.*, 1960) indirect voice and opportunity to impact different levels of organization (Glew *et al.*, 1995; Locke and Schweiger, 1979); and therefore, those individuals are more likely to put in effort beyond the norm for the success of their organization (Patchen, 1970; Martin *et al.*, 1995). On the contrary, individuals who are disengaged from organizational issues, are less likely to be committed to their organization (Alutto and Belasco, 1972; Alutto and Acito, 1974). Hence, we assume that acquiescent silence individuals are less likely to have commitment to their organization. Moreover, acquiescent silent individuals withhold information based on the low self-efficacy to make a difference (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003) in their organization. A number of researchers reported positive relationship between self-efficacy and commitment (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2004; Riggs and Knight, 1994; Jex and Bliese, 1999). Therefore, we believe that acquiescent silent employees who have lower level of self-efficacy are less likely to be committed to their organization because of their silence that is caused by the belief that they cannot make any change in their workplace by sharing information.

As noted earlier, defensive silent individuals withhold their concerns based on the fear and threat. When individuals have a feeling of threatened they are less likely to have commitment due to the risky situation (Wong, 2005). Tsai and Young (2010) discovered negative associations between risk perceptions and commitment. Moreover, previous research on silence also (Deniz *et al.*, 2013) documented the negative relationship between defensive silence and organizational commitment. Thus, we believe that individuals with defensive silence are less likely to be committed to their organization. Therefore, we propose following hypotheses (Figure 1):

H5. Acquiescent silence is negatively related to organizational commitment.

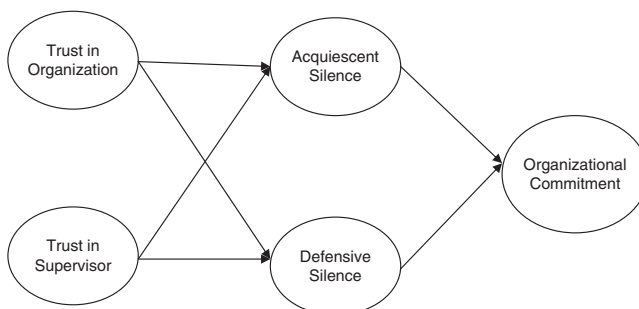*H6.* Defensive silence is negatively related to organizational commitment.

Figure 1.
Research model

Methods

Data and sample

The data analyzed in this study were collected from highly-skilled employees of heavy industry companies in South Korea in 2012-2013. Questionnaires were distributed by the management of organizations. To ensure confidentiality, survey participants were not asked to identify themselves in the questionnaires. Respondents returned completed survey forms directly to the researchers by placing them in sealed envelopes. We received 823 responses from a total of 1,060 individuals. Among the 823 responses, we excluded 70 due to incompleteness, and thus had a total of 753 responses (a response rate of 71 percent) for the final analysis. Participants responded to questions pertaining to trust in organization, trust in supervisor, acquiescent silence, defensive silence and organizational commitment. Of the 753 respondents, 34.3 percent were female and 65.7 percent were male. With respect to age, 25.1 percent were between 25 and 35 years of age, 44.4 percent were between 36 and 45 years of age, 20.1 percent were between 46 and 55 years of age, and 10.5 percent were between 56 and 65 years of age.

Common method bias test. Because the data were collected from the same participants at the same time, we examined that extend of method variance in our study. To address the potential common method bias, we conducted Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). According to the assumptions of this technique, when a substantial amount of common method bias exists, either a general factor accounts for the majority of the covariance among the items or a single factor will account for the majority of the covariance. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis using a principal components extraction and a viramax rotation on the scales. Findings revealed that five factors, first factor explaining 22.8 percent of the variance. As an additional safeguard, we conducted a single-factor measurement model by combining all items into a single factor (Liu *et al.*, 2010; Rhee *et al.*, 2010). Analysis indicated very poor model fit for a single factor ($\chi^2 = 6535.828$, $\chi^2/\text{df} = 20.172$, CFI $= 0.428$, AGFI $= 0.449$, RMSEA $= 0.160$, SRMR $= 0.169$). Hence, these findings provide additional evidence that common method bias is not likely to be a significant problem in this study.

Measures

The measures we used were adapted from scales that originally appeared in English language literature. All of the items were translated into Korean language by professional translators, and then English and translated version of questionnaire were given to bilingual experts to assess the appropriateness and the semantic equivalence of the translation. To ensure the content validity of the measures (Schwab, 2005) the review process was repeated until no further inaccuracies in translation were detected by bilingual experts. Additionally, we followed Brislin's (1993) recommendation by back-translating the questionnaires into English. In this study all questionnaire items were rated on a five-point Likert scale.

Trust in organization. Trust in organization was measured using five items from Cummings and Bromiley (1996) study. Example items from this scale include "In my opinion, this organization is reliable," "We think that this organization does not mislead us," "We feel that this organization negotiates with us honestly." The α coefficient of this sample is 0.827.

Trust in supervisor. To measure trust in supervisor, seven items were adapted from Robinson's (1996) study. Example items from this scale include "I believe my supervisor

has high integrity," "I can expect my supervisor to treat me in a consistent and predictable fashion" and "My supervisor is always honest and truthful." The α coefficient for this sample is 0.938.

Silence. The items that we used to measure acquiescent silence and defensive silence were developed by Van Dyne *et al.* (2003). Example items include: "I keep any ideas for improvement to myself because I have low self-efficacy to make a difference," "I do not speak up and suggest ideas for change, based on fear." The scales' α reliability values in this study are 0.842 and 855, respectively.

Organizational commitment. To assess the organizational commitment, five items (e.g. "I am willing to put in effort beyond the norm for the success of the organization" and "I show by my actions that I really care about the fate of this organization") were adapted from Tsui *et al.* (1997) study. The scale's α reliability is 0.872.

Control variables. Gender and age of respondents were controlled in previous studies of silence (Wang and Hsieh, 2013) because of their potential impact on information sharing. Therefore, in our study we also controlled age and gender of respondents.

Analyses
To investigate overall measurement model we conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We assessed model fit by addressing the standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), and adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI). These indices include absolute indices (AGFI, SRMR, RMSEA) as well as an incremental fit index (CFI). Because different indices can provide different information and are sensitive to different aspects of model fit, multiple indices should be addressed. For instance, SRMR is more sensitive to the specified factor covariance structure, and RMSEA is more sensitive to the specified factor loadings (Hu and Bentler, 1999). According to Hair *et al.* (2010), AGFI and CFI values greater than 0.90 are associated with a model that fits well. Applied rules of thumb specify acceptable fit for RMSEA < 0.10, moderate fit for RMSEA < 0.08 and close fit for RMSEA < 0.05 (Browne and Cudeck, 1993). Hu and Bentler (1999) recommended a cut-off value for SRMR of 0.08 or less to be used along with either a cut-off value of close to 0.95 for CFI or a cut-off value close to 0.06 for RMSEA.

The CFA showed that the measurement model fits the data well (χ^2/df = 1.527, CFI = 0.985, AGFI = 0.946, RMSEA = 0.026, SRMR = 0.027). To present further evidence for the validity of our measures, we calculated each construct's average variance extracted (AVE; i.e. the average variance explained by the items composing each scale) as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). According to this procedure, two criteria must be met to support construct validity: the AVE of each scale should exceed 0.50, and the squared correlation between two scales should be less than the AVE of each of the two scales. This latter criterion indicates divergent validity. Consistent with both criteria, the AVE of all constructs exceeded 0.50 (AVE ranged from 0.511 to 0.691 fulfilling the first criterion), and all squared correlations between scales were lower than the AVE of the compared scales (fulfilling the second criterion). These analyses demonstrate the validity of our study's constructs. The reliability of measurement refers to how well the items for one construct correlate or move together (Straub *et al.*, 2004). We tested reliability of constructs using to indicators such as Cronbach's α and composite reliability. Constructs with Cronbach's α (Nunnally, 1978) and composite reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981)

values greater than 0.70 are considered highly reliable. In our study, all Cronbach's αs (ranged from 0.827 to 0.938) and composite reliabilities (ranged from 0.734 to 0.888) exceeded 0.70.

Table I presents the correlations among the variables. Acquiescent silence is negatively correlated with trust in organization ($r = -0.096^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). Defensive silence is negatively associated with trust in supervisor ($r = -0.369^{**}$, $p < 0.05$) and positively associated with acquiescent silence ($r = 0.078^{*}$, $p < 0.05$). Organizational commitment exhibits a positive correlation with trust in organization ($r = 0.109^{**}$, $p < 0.05$) and trust in supervisor ($r = 0.143^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and demonstrates a negative correlation with acquiescent silence ($r = -0.178^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and defensive silence ($r = -0.120^{**}$, $p < 0.01$).

Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis

We employed SEM procedures with maximum likelihood estimation to test the hypotheses. The structural model analysis showed a good fit, as judged from the goodness-of-fit indices: (χ^2/df = 1.459, CFI = 0.983, AGFI = 0.943, RMSEA = 0.025, SRMR = 0.036). Standardized estimates were used to identify the validity of the hypotheses in our study.

The findings show that trust in organization ($\beta = -0.108$, $p < 0.05$) has a significant and negative relationship with acquiescent silence. Therefore, H1 is supported. However, trust in organization has no significant relationship with defensive silence ($\beta = 0.035$, $p > 0.05$); thus, H2 is not supported. H4 states that trust in supervisor negatively influences defensive silence. Table II illustrates that trust in supervisor is negatively associated with defensive silence ($\beta = -0.394$, $p < 0.01$). Meanwhile, trust in supervisor has no significant relationship with acquiescent silence ($\beta = -0.071$, $p > 0.05$). Hence, H4 is supported and H3 is not supported. According to Table II, acquiescent silence ($\beta = -0.143$, $p < 0.01$) and defensive silence ($\beta = -0.118$, $p < 0.05$) negatively influence organizational commitment. Therefore, H5 and H6 are supported. Results reveal that control variables, age and gender of employees do not influence their intention to share information.

Discussion

This study investigated the associations between trust in organization, trust in supervisor and different forms of silence namely, acquiescent and defensive silence and measured the relationships between acquiescent, defensive silence and organizational commitment.

Our findings revealed that trust in organization negatively impacts acquiescent silence. This means, when individuals believe that, their organization is reliable and

	Variables	Mean	SD	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1	Trust in organization	2.707	1.048	0.511	1				
2	Trust in supervisor	2.624	1.191	0.691	−0.023	1			
3	Acquiescent silence	3.384	1.064	0.526	−0.096**	−0.048	1		
4	Defensive silence	3.486	1.063	0.553	0.025	−0.369**	0.078*	1	
5	Org.commitment	2.758	1.136	0.587	0.109**	0.143**	−0.178**	−0.120**	1
	Cronbach's αs				0.827	0.938	0.842	0.855	0.872
	Composite reliability				0.734	0.888	0.750	0.771	0.784

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Table I.
Descriptive statistics, AVE, correlations and consistency reliabilities

Path	Standardized coefficient	t-Value
Direct effects		
Trust in organization→Acquiescent silence	−0.108	−2.362*
Trust in organization→Defensive silence	0.035	1.018
Trust in supervisor→Acquiescent silence	−0.071	−1.545
Trust in supervisor→Defensive silence	−0.394	−9.799**
Acquiescent silence→Organizational commitment	−0.143	−4.687**
Defensive silence→Organizational commitment	−0.118	−3.122*
Gender→Acquiescent silence	0.221	0.587
Gender→Defensive silence	0.072	0.255
Age→Acquiescent silence	0.068	0.742
Age→Defensive silence	−0.020	−0.293
Goodness-of-fit statistics		

$\chi^2 = 576.2$; $\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.459$; $p = 0.000$; CFI $= 0.983$; AGFI $= 0.943$; RMSEA $= 0.025$; SRMR $= 0.036$

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

Table II.
Standardized structural estimates from the structural model

keeps its promises, employees are less likely to withhold information based on the low self-efficacy to make a difference in organization. Our findings are consistent with study of Yang and Mossholder (2010) who reported the associations between trust and self-efficacy. Meanwhile, results show that trust in supervisor does not affect acquiescent silence. Typically, first employees address their supervisors with their suggestions. If they perceive that supervisor is reluctant to take some measures for shared information, employees try to address their top management. Hence, employees have some expectations and hope from their top management to react shared information which was ignored by supervisors. In case of experiencing organization's reluctance to react the shared information, employees lose their all hopes and expectations to make change and eventually, give up raising issues and become acquiescent silent. Therefore, trust in organization can induce acquiescent silence among employees rather than trust in supervisor.

The results demonstrate that, a lack of trust in supervisor generates defensive silence. In other words, when employees believe that their supervisors do not treat employees in a consistent and predictable fashion and they do not have good intentions and motives, employees perceive that information sharing is risky and therefore, become reluctant to share concerns with their supervisors based on the self-defense. Our finding is consistent with the studies of Dirks and Ferrin (2001) and Mayer *et al.* (1995). According to those authors trust is positively associated with risk taking behavior. However, findings indicate that trust in organization does not influence defensive silence. The potential reason for this finding can be explained in a following way.

South Korean organizations have high power distance oriented culture (Hofstede, 1980). In high power distance oriented societies individuals develop less personalized, regimented and formal relationships with their top leaders (Tyler *et al.*, 2000) and perceive their leaders unapproachable (Hofstede, 1980). Hence, in these organizations there is less interaction between top leaders and employees. In other words, lower level employees do not directly interact with their top leaders as they do with their supervisors in their daily work. Supervisors are more aware of employees' behavior in their work and therefore, they are the first individuals who asses and make decision for inappropriate behaviors of employees. Hence, employees expect more threat and

danger from their supervisors rather than senior management of organization. Because senior management represent the organization (Fox, 1974), employees are less likely to expect threat from their organization. Therefore, employees trust in organization may not influence their defensive silence.

Moreover, results reveal that, acquiescent silence reduces organizational commitment. In other words, when employees are unwilling to speak up with suggestions for change because they are disengaged from organizational issues or withhold information based on the low self-efficacy to make change, they become reluctant to put in effort beyond the norm for the success of the organization. This finding is consistent with the findings of Alutto and Belasco (1972) and Alutto and Acito (1974) who posited that a feeling of disengagement leads individuals to reduce their commitment to their organization.

Concordant with the findings of Deniz *et al.* (2013), our results demonstrate that defensive silence reduces organizational commitment of employees. Further, the findings revealed that compared to defensive silence acquiescent silence has more impact on organizational commitment. That is to say, individuals who conceal information based on the disengagement from organizational issues and who have low self-efficacy to make change are less likely to be committed to their organization compared to defensive silent individuals who withhold work-related concerns based on the self-defense and fear.

Theoretical implication

Present study contributes to the silence literature by providing a deeper understanding of the relationships between trust in organization, trust in supervisor and different dimensions of silence such as acquiescent and defensive silence and organizational commitment. Our study makes several key theoretical contributions.

First, Nikolaou *et al.* (2011) examined the effects of trust in organization and trust in supervisor on the unitary construct of silence and therefore, did not report the motives of individuals from concealing information when there is a lack of trust in organization and supervisor. In order to examine the form of silence that is generated by the lack of trust in organization and a lack of trust in supervisor, our study investigated the relationship between trust in organization, trust in supervisor and distinct forms of silence such as acquiescent and defensive silence. Our study extends the silence literature by discovering the impact of trust in organization on acquiescence silence and by exploring the effect of trust in supervisor on defensive silence.

Second, despite the fact that previous studies (Nikolaou *et al.*, 2011; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008; Vakola and Bouradas, 2005) investigated the associations between silence and organizational commitment, very little was known about the dimension of silence that has more impact on organizational commitment of employees. Thus, this study contributes to the silence literature by discovering acquiescent silence as the main predictor of organizational commitment.

Practical implications

This study suggests practical implications for the management of organizations. According to the results, a lack of trust in organization increases acquiescent silence of employees. Therefore, the importance of elevating employees' trust in organization is explained to the managers of organizations. Employees' trust in organization can be enhanced by providing accurate information to employees and by establishing open communication with top management (Butler, 1991). Moreover, human resource management practices such as reward, performance appraisal can influence employees' trust in organization (Nikolaou *et al.*, 2011).

Results indicated that a lack of trust in supervisor generates defensive silence among employees; therefore, supervisors are suggested be honest, truthful to employees and treat them in a consistent and predictable fashion. Moreover, supervisors should concern interactional justice at work to attain higher level of trust (Wong *et al.*, 2002) by treating all employees fairly. In addition, our results demonstrate negative association between acquiescent silence, defensive silence and organizational commitment. Acquiescent silence demonstrates more influence on organizational commitment; therefore, management of organizations should focus on reducing acquiescent silence by giving attention to shared information and seeking employees' opinions on work-related problems to increase organizational commitment of employees.

Limitations and directions for future research
Although our study contributes to the literature by exploring the impacts of trust in organization and trust in supervisor on distinct forms of silence (acquiescent and defensive silence) and by discovering the effects of acquiescent and defensive silence on organizational commitment, it has several limitations.

First, despite the fact that present study examines the associations between trust, two forms of silence such as acquiescent and defensive and organizational commitment, it fails to take account investigating other forms of silence such as deviant, relational (Briensfield, 2013) and opportunistic (Knoll and Dick, 2013). Thus, future researchers should include those forms of silence in their model.

Second, our study investigated the link between two forms of silence and general construct for organizational commitment. Therefore, there might be a lack of knowledge on the associations between multidimensional construct of silence and various components of organizational commitment. Thus, we recommend future studies to examine the association between multidimensional construct of silence and different forms of commitment such as calculative, normative and affective.

Third, we studied only organizational commitment as the consequence of silence. Thus, we suggest future researchers include other consequence of silence such as stress (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Beer and Eisenstat, 2000) in their model and investigate the associations between multidimensional construct of silence and stress.

Fourth, the generalizability of the results can be another limitation of our study because we conducted a survey in single country, South Korea. Thus, we suggest future researchers to investigate this type of study in several countries by conducting a comparative study.

Fifth, present study used a cross sectional design. We suggest that a longitudinal study may be more appropriate for this type of study because the relationships of trust in organization, trust in supervisor and silence are established over time.

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Trust, silence and organizational commitment

1857

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