Management techniques and organizational silencing: a manager's account

Técnicas de gestão e silenciamento organizacional: o relato de um gerente

Marcos Júnior de Moura-Paula[a]
Patricia Aparecida Abreu Moreira[b]
Deise Luiza da Silva Ferraz[b]

[a] Instituto Federal de Brasília, Brasília, DF, Brazil
[b] Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

Abstract

this study analyzes the changes in the relations established in the work environment conditioned by the implementation of management techniques characterizing a Toyotist model and that produced the phenomenon of organizational silence. The story of a financial system worker was used as a guide for structuring our argument. Observations and documents mediated the understanding of the individual story along with the general social relations. Guided by the categories singularity, particularity and universality, we established the links among the worker's situation, the company's management techniques and the productive restructuring movement. The results show that the various management techniques were means of silencing built up throughout the worker's career, as frustrations accumulated and the needs of the work process changed. What in the life of a manager is frustration and silence, in the totalization movement are changes in the being manager marked by the emptying of planning and controlling functions.

Keywords: Life Story; Management Techniques; Organizational Silence; Organizational Silencing; Managerial Function.

Resumo

Objetivou-se analisar as mudanças nas relações estabelecidas no ambiente de trabalho condicionadas pela implementação de técnicas de gestão que caracterizam um modelo toyotista e produziram o fenômeno do silêncio organizacional. A história de um trabalhador do sistema financeiro estrutura nosso argumento. Observações e documentos mediaram a compreensão da história individual com as relações sociais gerais. Guiados pelas categorias de singularidade, particularidade e universalidade, estabelecemos os nexos entre a situação do trabalhador, as técnicas de gestão da empresa e o movimento de reestruturação produtiva. Os resultados mostram que as várias técnicas foram meios de silenciar construídos ao longo da carreira do trabalhador, à medida que as frustrações foram acumuladas e as necessidades do processo de trabalho se alteraram. O que na vida de um gestor é frustração e silêncio, no movimento de totalização são alterações no ser gestor, marcado pelo esvaziamento das funções de planejamento e controle.

Palavras-chave: História de Vida; Técnicas de Gestão; Silêncio Organizacional; Silenciamento Organizacional; Função Gerencial.

Introduction

It is well known that management techniques have been undergoing a continuous process of sophistication, especially in recent decades, as part of the development of productive forces. Regarding the human resource management, several authors (Alves, 2000; Faria, 2011; Gaulejac, 2007) highlight the sophistication of control techniques, which at the time of the Taylorist-Fordist model, controlled bodies and their behavior with direct vigilance and the speed of the conveyor belt, but currently discard it with the constant vigilance of the supervisor. The same controlling gaze subjectivized the objectivity of the work process, requiring a lower number of participating mechanisms to enhance subordinates' day-to-day work practices. Furthermore, the proximity between supervisor and subordinate associated to trade unions, which were closer to workers, ensured the workers with relative freedom of speech. Generally speaking, in the supervisor-subordinate case, the work process was enhanced and, in trade union case, better working conditions were claimed (Alves, 2000).

The automation of some forms of control using microelectronic-based technologies dispensed with part of the apparatus responsible for supervision, flattening the hierarchical structure, and resulting in, among other factors, a necessary increase in worker participation (Bessi, Zimmer, & Grisci, 2007), whether to enhance the work process or to provide managers with information that enabled the improvement of the decision-making processes. This could still be observed in the 1970s with the implementation of quality circles, from which a countless number of other participative programs ensued, such as co-management, suggestion boxes, and teamwork (Faria, 2009). However, the programs implemented have limitations, as shown by Morrison and Milliken (2000) in their conceptual research on organizational silence, a term coined to express the phenomenon of the spontaneous non-participation of workers in suggestions, information, concerns, or ideas that would otherwise benefit the companies. These researchers aimed to diagnose their causes as well as suggest the implementation of new instruments of participation, attempting to identify the reasons for such passivity, manifested by silence or refraining from speaking up.

Our objective, although close to that of researchers on organizational silence, is different, based on dialectical-historical materialism, we seek to analyze the changes in the relations established in the work environment that were conditioned by the implementation of management techniques common in the Toyotist model and producing this phenomenon of organizational silence. Moreover, it is worth considering that Toyotist management techniques were not restricted to automotive industry alone, but they were adopted by and adapted to different sectors (see Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2006).

Thus, to achieve our objective, we employ a distinct theoretical background, based on authors such Marx and Mészáros and Brazilian critics, such as Tragtenberg and Faria, whose critical research in organizational studies have shown theoretical originality (Misoczky, Flores, & Goulart, 2015), among other researchers. Furthermore, we contribute to the literature by seeking – similarly to other researchers (Brown & Coupland, 2005; Fletcher & Watson, 2007) – a theoretical background different from positivism, which has guided most of the research on organizational silence (Moura-Paula & Ferraz, 2015).

The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, we discuss the theoretical background on which our analyses and considerations are based. Subsequently, we discuss the method used to conduct the research and analyze the data. In the penultimate section, we present the analysis, and in the last section, we offer our conclusions.

Theoretical background

The need for capital to appropriate the knowledge of the worker in an environment with intensive use of technology has created the need for greater worker participation in the work process. The rigidity of the Taylorist-Fordist regulatory model imposed a series of restrictions on capital that had to be overcome,

such that so-called flexible accumulation (Harvey, 2013) enabled the achievement of this goal. Worker participation, which was previously restricted, came to be encouraged, since it could offer corrections or suggestions that improved productivity and simultaneously enable any managerial flaws to be addressed and even corrected.

Taylor was already concerned with the knowledge that workers held, but his intention was to observe how their work was performed, to systematize it – identifying the best way to execute it – and later to induce the adoption of a "new" form of working prescribed by management (Behr & Nascimento, 2008). The Taylorist-Fordist crisis in the 1970s and the emergence of new microelectronic-based technologies led to changes in both work control process and way in which workers supposedly participate. It is not by chance that Toyotism called the Western's attention during this period considering the manner in which the work process was managed, which enabled greater worker participation, although this participation was restricted and did not ultimately eliminate workers' alienation (Antunes & Alves, 2004).

In addition to importing practices developed in Japan, such as total quality management and quality circles, researchers of organizational behavior also highlighted employee voices in organizations as an important way to achieve greater participation. Although researchers have been inspired by the work of Hirschman (1973), in the 1930s and even before, there was already concern that workers should collaborate with decisions by providing information to decision-makers (Timming & Johnstone, 2015). Currently, the focus of participation is on both voice and silence (Gollan & Xu, 2015). What does not seem to change since the earlier studies is the notion that participation only serves for workers to support decisions that they did not create and to co-opt them, thereby preventing their even greater alienation in the work process from leading to an escalation of conflict in the workplace (Faria, 2009).

As previously mentioned, to overcome the structural crisis of capital in the 1970s, new physical and management technologies were necessary to recover the profit rates of capitalist endeavors, which were low at the time. Thus, managerial levels could be cut. With fewer personnel responsible for supervision, workers had to speak out more and to express their opinions constructively, ending or modifying organizational practices (Morrison, 2014). Researchers note, however, that workers often "choose" to remain in silent. Morrison and Milliken (2000) are the first to tackle this problem and to use the term **organizational silence**, which is considered by them the withholding of concerns and opinions on organizational problems by employees. Pinder and Harlos (2001), in turn, indicate that employee silence is a multifaceted concept, which can be defined as any form of genuine expression on organizational circumstances by those perceived as capable of modifying or redressing them. The researchers then seek to understand why workers choose to remain silent, and which types of silence are beneficial or detrimental to organizations. Contrary to some studies, we prefer using the term **organizational silence** to **employee silence**, as this is a collective phenomenon, albeit manifested individually (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). An understanding of the individual factors that would make employees choose for silence should not lose sight of the context in which these silences are constructed or forged.

According to Morrison and Milliken (2000), employee reluctance to report problems is related to the fear of receiving negative feedback from managers and to a number of implicit beliefs that employees have of managers. Moreover, silence may be caused by social norms or pressure in groups and by the desire to not be the spokesperson of undesirable ideas or bad news, as well as the fear of being negatively labeled, suffering retaliation, reducing chances of career progression, or being fired (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Considering that silence can reduce innovation in the workplace, interfere with organizational change, and reduce certain positive attitudes in workers, such as satisfaction and commitment (Wang & Hsieh, 2013), researchers defend the need to seek manners of overcoming silence, undoing managers and workers' fears and assumptions, thereby enabling the upward flow of information to correct deviations outside the field of vision of both immediate management and upper levels of the organization.

To overcome organizational silence, firstly, it must be identified. Considering that van Dyne, Ang e Botero (2003) propose three types of silence widely used by researchers (e.g., Chou & Chang, 2017; Knoll & van Dick, 2013; Pirie, 2016; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011; Wang & Hsieh, 2013) to understand why

employees remain silent beyond the reasons already pointed out by their predecessor scholars (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). According to the authors, the types of silence are (1) acquiescent, which occurs when relevant ideas are withheld due to feelings of resignation; (2) defensive, which is the result of a strategic reflection on which ideas should or should not be withheld; and (3) pro-social, which occurs when information, opinions or ideas are withheld to benefit another individual or the organization itself. Of these proposed types, only pro-social silence is not considered detrimental to the organization, since it impedes confidential information from reaching competitors (Rafferty & Restubog, 2011).

The emphasis on cases in which silence is both beneficial and detrimental to the organizational objectives reveals managerialist bias of researchers on organizational behavior, which narrows the questions that can be asked and the explanations that can be offered (Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon, & Wilkinson, 2011), in addition to disregarding the fact that silence can be a form of challenging management as well as a form of resistance (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Cullinane & Donaghey, 2014). When criticizing the conception of organizational silence in organizational behavior that is predominant in the literature, Donaghey et al. (2011) note that very often management can create a number of institutional norms and arrangements that result in a number of questions being excluded from the voicing processes that exist in the work environment.

The supposed overlap of interests between workers and employers guiding researchers indicates that workers should speak whenever it benefits the employers, since workers would also benefit. Moreover, the critiques call attention to the ideological question involved in studies about silence (Moura-Paula & Ferraz, 2015), based on the notion that convergence between interests of labor and capital possibly exist, it leads researchers to create a whole set of ideas resulting in the sophistication of worker exploitation. The capital-labor conflict is concealed and the phenomenon of silence as a way of confronting or resisting management is the factor silenced by researchers and even erased from their definitions of organizational silence.

Method

The analysis of workers' life story provides us with data to reconstruct the relations they established at work before, during and after the implementation of management techniques and, by their statements, we can analyze changes that occurred over time and results in silence as a form of resistance. Marx, in a 1864 letter to Annenkov, wrote

> From this it can only be concluded that the social history of man is never anything else than the history of his individual development, whether he is conscious of this or not. His material relations form the basis of all his relations. These material relations are but the necessary forms in which his material and individual activity is realised. (Marx, 1975, par. 8)

The empirical corpus of this study is composed of the life story of a bank manager, the observations of his daily work routines, and documents produced by the bank that this manager worked over the course of its story. The guiding thread of this text uses the story of Christopher (a fictitious name), a bank employee who over the last 20 years has implemented countless control techniques in the work process. Furthermore, banks are representative of the restructuring movement of production that intensified in Brazil in the mid-1990s (Grisci & Bessi, 2004). We opt to use Christopher's story only as a guiding thread for the argumentative structure and, when necessary, we use other data collected to corroborate our informant's statements, which serve as a manner to understand the individual story that constitutes and is constituted in – and by – labor relations.

However, before we begin the analysis itself, it is worth to stress the basis of understanding that we have on the possibility of the technique of data collection on "life story" to contribute to the proposed analyses guided by dialectical-historical materialism (see Ferraz, Biasotto, & Tonon, 2010; Minini & Ferraz, 2015). To do so, we turn to succinct explanations that enable some considerations.

Firstly, we turn to the debate by Sève (1975, p. 215), which highlights the individual biography and set of social relations. The decisive point of the argument is the "determining fact that human activity is socially objectified and remains exterior to individuals, in the world of social relations where the social individuality developed finds its true foundation" and it is through the "singular biography" that "the contradictions of the objective social relations [are] integrated" (Sève, 1975, p. 257).

Marx (2011), when studying the historical development of the social relations of production, shows that beneath capital, we establish social relations of dependency between mutually indifferent subjects, consolidating the conditions necessary to exacerbate the construction of a particular manifestation of human generality, the rationally selfish individual. The social and technical division of labor intensifies the progress of individuation and social isolation. The experiences by which each and every subject lives are a form of manifestation of a general movement of the constitution of a social being. Thus, these experiences, although lived as unique and exclusive experiences, do not occur except in that movement – the very isolation is social.

The objective of this study is to analyze the relationships established in the work environment that were constituted through the implementation of management techniques and produced the phenomenon of organizational silence. Thus, if the movement of the constitution of the social being beneath capital produces the social being as a rationally selfish individual, one of the privileged modes of accessing this reality is through experiences lived by individuals. However, this is not done with the objective of understanding the "exclusivities" of each individual, but rather the determinant elements that resulted in the individual remaining silent. Thus, singularity, particularity and universality are relevant categories in this analytical movement (Lukács, 1966; Pasqualini & Martins, 2015). Through the abstraction process we depart from the concrete particularities towards the understanding of the totalization movement (Gurgel & Justen, 2015). As Marx (2011, p. 54) highlighted, "the concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of diverse."

However, an understanding of these determinants does not occur exclusively by the reports of the subject involved in the reality under analysis, since we are interested in understanding more than only the knowledge of the subject regarding itself; it is ultimately not of our interest judge individuals by what it is said about themselves, as highlighted by Marx and Engels (2007), although this does interest us as it is one of the constitutive elements of the reality. Thus, additional information is sought according to the movement of the apprehension of the real by means of thought so required for a materialist understanding of history. We use the internal analyses of the reports to extract the common elements from the individual story, seeking to identify how the common is manifested in the individual. Once the determining points of the subject's silencing of the subject are established, they are subsumed to an analysis of the reality in which the silence is produced in the process of the material reproduction of existence.

Finally, we stress that the life story is used not as a research method but as a data collection technique, which is one of the many pathways used by researchers to observe and to conceive of reality in their minds in such a manner that enable their thoughts to appropriate the reality, and to reproduce it as a reality in the mind (Marx, 2011).

Analysis

Christopher is the manager of a bank branch. He began working at the company in 1983 and since 1990, he has held the role of branch manager, totaling 25 years of experience as a manager in 2015. According to him, "we do not have a personal life and a professional life: we have a life, and the profession is part of it." Upon analyzing his recollections about his life trajectory, we noted how work is central to him. He joined the company by chance, but as he was there, he decided: "I'm going to build a career." Furthermore, he spared no efforts to do so. In 1983, he encountered a favorable environment for his aspirations.

At the time, the company assigned new employees to an internal operational area with flexible hours, which enabled employees to attend university, even though, at the time the company did not value degrees,

as Christopher mentioned. Professional ascension, resulting in salary increases, took place through internal contests and recommendation processes for interviews, in which the person who recommended was the determining factor. Christopher's profile fit the company needs at his hiring, as he was available to live in any city of the country, and wanted to "grow at the bank." It was a period in which workers had to contribute constructively to company objectives, as the bank was undergoing changes that required new ideas to ease continuous improvements in processes and performance. In other words, it was an environment favorable to engage in voice (van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Furthermore, the reification of social relations was manifested in the objectivization of the other as a resource to be managed. This occurred in such a manner that the worker regarded his or her work as a privilege or a challenge for his or her professional self-realization and did not understand that it was the maximization of the exploitation of his or her own work and the work of the others (Gaulejac, 2007).

In 1986, the bank was restructured and, as it was one of the banks belonging to the Brazilian government, it lost some preferences for government financial transactions. The government authorized the bank to operate in several financial areas as a compensation for the loss. It was transformed from an agricultural and developmental bank to a full-service bank. Thus, it was a time when business was expanding, a time of changes that required workers to question the status quo, to give their opinions and suggestions to might help the company achieve its objectives – in other words, to engage in voice. The control mechanisms were still incipient. The position of general manager was the ultimate supervisory figure. The other sphere of control, on a state level, was very distant from the reality of the branches. Because of this and the fact that branch managers' attributions were more generic, they had greater autonomy to make decisions. Despite the existence of norms through internally distributed guidelines, managers had some freedom to use their creativity in the managerial process.

During the 1980s, Christopher, young both in age and at the company, did not remain silent. He participated, shared his opinions, was heard by the general manager, and he knew managers who encouraged him to pursue career growth. Some initiatives were taken maximizing bank profits and lent visibility to the manager and Christopher's activities. At this time, other workers who were more experienced no longer had the profile the company needed. As Christopher states,

> He [the general manager] had extraordinary vision. We identified with each other a lot, so much so that there came a time when I, instead of the deputy manager, was actually his business partner. The deputy manager was also a very fine individual and skilled at work, . . . but he had no interest in or aptitude for the business. He was more involved in processes. (2015)

Christopher provides a clue about the changes that occurred in the logic of the company. The focus had shifted to relationships with clients and the search for new business, and it was no longer restricted to controlling processes. The function of the general manager was not only to control team activities, but also to seek new business, to win new clients and to offer more products to increase productivity and to generate profits for the company.

Christopher was appointed branch manager in August 1990, a period that still being a highlight of his career. The structural change in capital was beginning to affect the daily life of Brazilian companies, generating structural adjustments. The first adjustment at the bank occurred in April 1994, when regional head offices (RHOs) were created. This was another hierarchical level monitoring results and increasing control over managerial activities. RHOs were responsible to manage a grouping of branches by region. Previously, this responsibility lay with the state head office (SHO), which made closer oversight of all the branches more difficult. Before the RHOs were established, contact with the SHO was rare, sometimes occurring only every 6 months. With RHOs, more frequent supervision of fewer branches became possible. After a period of consolidation of the involvement of RHOs, they become a mechanism to transform the way activities were controlled at the branches. The creation of this structure seems to go against the thread, cutting managerial levels. However, these cuts occurred at branches, since the structure of the positions underwent a major change with the adoption of new physical and management technologies. Individuals needed to be led, and by people considered as intellectually able,

who directed and defined work for those who were considered to have only manual ability (Faria, 2011). At this time, it appears that the "brain" was being transferred from the heads of general managers to those of regional supervisors. The technology celebrated at one of the branches where Christopher worked, where the employees themselves contributed to purchase the first computer used for work, is the same that some years later enabled an increase in the control over the work of managers at the branch.

A period of crisis began in 1995: between the first semester of 1995 and the end of 1996, the bank had accumulated losses of R$ 11.2bn. At this time some changes occurred in human resources policy. The government issued a capital call of R$ 8bn in the second semester of 1996, to deal with the issue of accumulated losses. To resolve the "human resource problem," the bank launched two programs in 1995: the Voluntary Dismissal Program and the Position Adjustment Plan, which resulted in the dismissal of almost 20,000 employees between December 1995 and December 1998.

The sudden change in Christopher's superiors regarding his performance as a manager coincided with the beginning of the crisis in 1995. By the end of 1994, he had changed branches and begun to receive death threats from clients for collecting late payments, including those of guarantors for city officials. It was not conventional to collect from clients in that area and, due to the aforementioned accumulated losses at the end of 1996, it seems that the same scenario repeated itself in branches around the country. A biannual performance assessment presented a contradictory outcome. Christopher was praised for his performance but he received an ultimatum to find a new branch to work. Was it possible that Christopher, by collecting debts, generated conflicts with powerful individuals in the region? Was it possible that, in standing out for meeting bank targets, Christopher was showing himself as a potential competitor to his supervisor? An affirmative answer to either these questions would have justified the sudden change in attitude of his superiors in relation to his value as a manager.

Christopher moved to another state in August 1996 and began a new and brief cycle of generating profit for the company. He achieved a number of goals and expanded the visibility of the bank in the region until, after a disciplinary procedure concerning the exemption of transaction fees from key personnel of a prefecture not authorized by the RHO, he lost the position of general manager. "From there on", Christopher states, "my career stagnated" (2015). The bank had become more normative. The participative techniques used before with managers, which led them to express their ideas and opinions more openly, enabling these ideas to be incorporated and resulting in new norms and operating procedures were excluded. Now, there was no more room to innovate, even if it resulted in more profits to company. The norms had become direct and a breach of them resulted in severe punishment.

Between 1995 and 2002, the bank underwent technological transformations. The number of centers for client service increased – yet another reason for the creation of RHOs – and the profile of transactions changed, moving from tellers' counters to automatic teller machines (ATMs) and internet. Operations previously performed at branches were now managed using ATMs. From 1998, the number of ATM transactions surpassed those of operations using tellers.

The client base almost doubled between 1996 and 2001. A new managerial profile was necessary for the new bank and managers had to be up to the task. In August 2001, the bank granted salary increases of up to 152% to around 3,400 employees, including supervisors and branch managers, who received raises according to the degree of branch complexity. For example, the salary raise for the manager of a branch with a higher level of complexity was 62.5%. The message that the new remuneration structure transmitted was very clear: to obtain a real raise, bank workers should seek to move to new roles in the company and to adapt to the requirements of the managerial role. It was clear that the emphasis was on roles, not positions. At any time, the manager could lose his or her role and return to his or her initial position. The raise for performing the role was a considerable part of his or her salary. Workers began to chase promotions to become managers, to improve both their material conditions of existence and their status in society, thereby reinforcing competition. In this context, the greatest and – let us be honest – sole beneficiary was the capitalist himself or herself,

although it is expressed in this study in the figure of the state, since the capital system is the one benefiting from competition between workers (Marx, 2013). Notably, between 1996 and 2001, a wage freeze occurred in the Brazilian banking sector. Between 1996 and 2001, bonuses were granted instead of salary readjustments; from 1996 to 1999, both bonuses and salary readjustments were denied; and, in 2000 and 2001, readjustments of 1.7% and 2%, respectively, were granted.

Why should bank workers strove for greater efficiency when their earnings were so low and the risks of retaliation by the company were so high? Career stagnation is a risk that is not worth taking. This change in the remuneration structure shows that workers suffered heavy losses, affecting both their material conditions and their subjectivity, as well as their forms as social beings. There is a process of subjectivization in capital that qualifies and ranks differences, known as subjectivities. In this process, the manifestation of the verticalization of subjectivities occurs, hampering the mechanisms of collectivity. A consequence of the verticalization of subjectivity is that those who live from work (the workers) seek to "forge" a subjectivity compatible with his or her work relations, the concrete conditions presented to them, as in the case of professional qualifications and the extension of these relations to their everyday life (Antunes, 2006).

The managerial role prioritizes control over the activity of others as a path toward increasing company profits, rather than understanding the work process as a form of liberation. Furthermore, the managerial role masks the alienation of workers, whether managers or not, since workers often feel rewarded by the "privilege" of being managers or being a worker so committed to company objectives (Gaulejac, 2007).

In addition to the change in the remuneration system, in the mid-1990s, branches began to be supervised more closely with the consolidation of the involvement of the RHOs. The proximity of the head offices associated with technological development and the use of managerial reports enabled controlling activities from a distance, and currently, almost in real time. Over the years, knowledge about products, services and the way to achieve the goals of profitability expected by shareholders was mapped. Historical data were considered, and the participation of employees was no longer necessary. Computerized systems performed this role. Standards, which were defined by upper management responsible for planning, arrived at the worker via a descending hierarchy. Therefore, the worker has had to adapt to a form of work planned by others (Faria, 2011). At this time, in our example company, the managers closer to operations ended up having to exercise control in a manner that had been planned by others, providing their subordination to the "upper" managers. The so-called brains of the general managers "lost their function." The general manager became merely a spokesperson for the regional supervisor. In one of our observations, we arrived at the branch to find a general manager with a desolate look on his face. After being asked what had happened, he explained that he had held a general meeting to plan the weekly sales and, after the meeting end, his regional supervisor called and asked for something different from what he had planned. In resignation, he called the team back to communicate the change in plans.

Christopher had his own critiques concerning this type of control.

> I believe that the company, the people comprising the company, especially this group of regional supervisors, act in way that – you might find this exaggerated to say – is very similar to the way the Gestapo operated. How was it that they operated? They would spread fear between the Germans in such a way that one German would mistrust the other. Individuals didn't communicate, didn't share ideas, didn't share secrets because they didn't know who they were talking to. They didn't know if they were talking to someone from the Gestapo or someone who was a friend of a friend who was from the Gestapo. And so, the pressure the Gestapo put on the German people was such that it created this fear when it came to speaking out. (2015)

Criticism of management began within the branches. As Christopher states: "at the bank, for the last 10 years what matters is [meeting goals], and a detailed analysis of the management is not performed. . . . No, it's reductionist: [you met the goal], great; otherwise, it's terrible" (2015) This is the central point of

silencing. The level of daily control over performance at the branches turns the branch managers into mere spokespeople of higher-ups. There is no room for dialogue and planning amid branch managers. Figures are the only thing that really matter. About the pressure to meet these figures, Christopher goes on to say:

> If you meet with more than one [branch] manager, the subject reaches the point of becoming monotonous. . . . They say it's hard, it's complicated. Someone even sent me a message on WhatsApp another day saying: "Damn it, it's impossible to work at this bank." Why? Because… one day they told me about receiving 76 WhatsApp messages. (2015)

He showed us some messages from a managerial group on WhatsApp instant messaging application he was receiving at his smartphone during the interviews. The messages were from supervisors pressuring them for results or announcing fresh challenges, as well as messages from managers answering that they had met the target, that they were trying to do so, or indicating how far along they were every hour, and so on. All this vigilance to ensure productivity and the very quest for "administrative harmony" (Tragtenberg, 2006) has made managers wary of responding to supervisors. Much of what is said on WhatsApp is intertwined with silence through the regulation of what can or cannot be said. There is no room for managers to create or plan team activities, and they are being engulfed by demands placed on them by regional supervisors so that. In addition to meet the goals set for each branch, they also have to help meet the goals of the RHOs, although this is not discussed on WhatsApp. Roughly speaking, each branch has to sell products and services based on a figure to be achieved, which is the goal. Each product is priced and it is a variable on the list of items to achieve. Each branch, RHO, and the SHO has a list with these variables. Instead of the manager having autonomy to decide together with his or her team at the branch on the strategies to use to achieve the items on the list, he or she receives daily orders for a certain product or service to be pushed that month, that week, or even that day, although this is not discussed on WhatsApp. Writing about the subject is much more difficult than talking about it, since the written record instills more fear than the spoken word.

There are institutional forms of participation in the company, that is, channels that allow all employees, regardless of position, to speak up, but the topics are pre-selected. Therefore, not everything can be discussed, as previously pointed out by some researchers who criticize the mainstream studies that assume that workers opt to remain silent, disregarding the relations of power, and that management itself wants to identify priority areas for workers to participate in or ignore (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Donaghey et al., 2011; Moura-Paula & Ferraz, 2015).

Thus, although Christopher is a manager, at the same time, he is not, since he wants to be a manager the way he was before. He wants freedom to create strategies for taking action, he wants there to be shared planning and he wants the managerial system to work at the highest potential so that the company maximizes profits and achieves results. He criticizes the "certain few" who take advantage of the current model and achieve meteoric ascent. He returns to the problem of the conditions of the game instituted by the company. At no point is the purpose of the game itself questioned; after all, in the logic of the company everyone is playing for the same objective-profit:

> You could be the smartest guy in the world, but you have to work with the team and your team has to shine. If it doesn't shine, my friend, you won't shine alone; 30% to 40% don't make it. The guy arrives, and then the guy stays in this mode of… every man for himself. So he wants [the team] to do what he needs them to, and this is a mentality I don't understand, man, because if all the branches do what the branches need, the sum of this, . . . The guy, he doesn't want a threat, you see, to his career. He wants to be executive manager, he wants to be a director, so please, get out of the way. Don't get in my way. Getting in my way means not doing as I say, the way I'm saying, it has to be done, because you're not the manager, right? (2015)

Professional growth in a bank occurs by individual merit. There are few commissioned roles for too many workers who start their careers at the company. Being labeled a troublemaker can make it more difficult to be promoted, and silence ends up being the best way to protect both oneself and any colleagues who share the same view. Thus, the same silence that appears to be defensive and motivated by fear of retaliation can also be pro-social, but not necessarily pro-management (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). The company also encourages employees to seek these roles; after all, for the company, "this is how a considerable salary increase is possible." Thus, pushing for salary raises through collective bargaining is discouraged, and a competitive climate is established between workers.

Nowadays, Christopher does not realize that he was adequate for what the bank needed from a manager in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when, from a structural point of view, the possibility for greater control over the activities of the manager did not exist. He was responsible for creating profitable conditions. Christopher is a manager who seeks to be heard in order to enhance his performance and that of his colleagues – in other words, a manager who wants to do his job, serving the interests of capital, and who regards himself as prevented from doing so. In Christopher's view, changing the model means placing people who benefit by it in an uncomfortable situation. He believes that individual interest, through the promotion of a few, undermines the individual interest of many others, who also want to grow in their careers. Christopher wants to serve capital, but in his own way, as this is how he learned from the managers preceding him. This was another form of management that the work process previously demanded, this was how he worked for more than 20 years at the company and that is how he understands his role as manager.

When the bank controls not only the product or service offered, but also to whom and when it is offered, with the advent of controls enabled through technological development, a different managerial profile is required. The focus on control and supervision of work is intensified, and phases of planning and strategy definition fade away. Christopher, over the course of his career, slowly became obsolete as his views on his role did not reflect this change in profile:

> This is the point we have reached at the bank. We don't talk to each other, we don't exchange ideas: we complain. We hold meetings and everyone is whining – man, it's too hard, man, the guy does this, pressures for that. But in terms of real decisions, this group of people who feel diminished, disrespected, scorned – none, not even one, complains. Because management based on fear was instated, leading to distrust. (2015)

Owing to the fear of retaliation, of being labeled negatively, remaining silent ends up being the best alternative to avoid retaliation (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Even some of Christopher's colleagues who are general managers have adapted to the scenario that he describes. They complain among peers, and sometimes also to subordinates. However, they do whatever is necessary to grow professionally, to achieve the branch's targets and to fulfill the special requests daily sent by the regional supervisor. In addition to the fear-based management mentioned by Christopher, what has also become encouraged is the self-management of one's career. Many employees seek professional growth but Christopher is no longer interested, as he does not believe there is room for his beliefs at the bank.

Conclusion

Christopher's statements on the events that have taken place over the years in his career allowed us to draw parallels with the concrete conditions that were present throughout the history of the company at which he worked. The human resource management system changed since Christopher joined the company. At that time, employees who sought to educate themselves and attend university were considered under-committed to the job. Today, with the discourse having changed to management skills, the company now encourages this type of education, granting scholarships to employees for both undergraduate and graduate degrees.

To be eligible to compete for other roles, employees must educate themselves, take courses, and earn certifications for their knowledge. Qualification becomes a prerequisite for career advancement and salary increases. This in itself appears to be a paradox. After all, higher qualifications are encouraged while less strategic involvement is demanded from employees. This paradox becomes apparent when we observe the changes in the university education system during this same period, which has changed from a more thoughtful space of reflection to one of technicist education (e.g., Bologna Process).

Through Christopher's descriptions, we noticed a few instances that could be translated as silencing in the forms proposed by van Dyne, Ang e Botero (2003), acquiescent silence and defensive silence, in particular. Moreover, we noted a sense of loneliness and lack of solidarity with other managers in recent decades. At the same time, Christopher's example allowed us to observe that the critiques against the approach developed by van Dyne, Ang e Botero (2003) and other authors on organizational behavior ignore important questions, such as power relations (Brown & Coupland, 2005) and how a company's upper management can remain as the only sphere area able to communicate freely (Moura-Paula & Ferraz, 2015), thereby dictating what is worthy or not worthy of consideration. Upper management dictates which types of silence may be maintained or broken, although in principle, the choice appears to reside with the workers, even if their silence is a form of resistance (Donaghey et al., 2011).

The bank controlled the types of silencing that built up throughout Christopher's career as his frustrations accumulated and the expectations of managers changed according to the way the work process was organized. New profiles of supervisors, managers, and employees are required at today's banks. The failure to adapt – operated by resistance and behavioral change – resulted in suffering.

Marx (2013) mentions that being a productive worker is not a stroke of luck but a misfortune, since as workers speak up on issues related to work with the intention of improving labor processes, they contribute, even if unknowingly, to their increased exploitation. We noted Christopher's concern about the sustainability of the company in the market and remaining profitable – in other words, that the bank continues to exploit the workforce of many other individuals – but also, his desire that workers are recognized, feel a part of the results and are able to help the company reach its objectives – that is, that they be rewarded at the individual level, as if this were possible in the social metabolism of capital.

The organizational silencing related to the lack of discussion on how careers are structured at the company, mechanisms of competition between workers, and incentives for individuality were not even perceived. Christopher did not discuss the exploitation of capital, since this was not a visible issue to him. Furthermore, he was concerned with his own "the here and now," the same "the here and now" that he criticized in his supervisors, except that his own "the here and now" was the individual forum: doing his job his way and preserving himself. Christopher's silence often reflected his suffering given the changes the company had undergone and the impossibility of him remaining productive given the new demands placed on him. The more the worker produces wealth, the poorer he becomes, and the product of his work and the work itself become commodities (Marx, 2013). There is a contradiction in capitalist society, since the more the worker by his or her labor appropriates the sensuous nature, that is, the external world, the less dominion he or she has on the fruits of labor and the more precarious physical existence becomes (Marx, 2008). This was evident in Christopher's story and occurred because, in this society, objectified work is appropriated by the other, resulting in work becoming a negation instead of an affirmation of a free and conscious being (Marx, 2013).

The fear that Christopher and other managers have of questioning their supervisors goes beyond the mere perceptions that speaking up is dangerous – and because this, their silence is also resistance, since upper management imposes its agenda of that which it wants to hear and creates the means to silence points that diverge from those considered important. The silence, on the one hand is resistance, on the other hand, is imposition. To co-opt the managers into behaving as is expected of them, managers' careers are modified and remuneration is tied to undertaking new tasks as demanded, maintaining harmony in the company and respecting the almost sacred nature of the hierarchy (Tragtenberg, 2006). We should not be surprised at these attempts

to co-opt managers since the development of the modern management practice was to reunite employers and employees in order to raise the firm performance by promoting harmony and cooperation (Kaufman, 2014).

In capital's order of social metabolic reproduction, the essential labor relation – that is, the relation of the worker with production – is separated and alienated. The subjection of natural science as a simple means to alien ends is by no means accidental, but is necessarily connected with its fragmented, autonomous character and, evidently, with the structure of the alienated productive activity in general (Mészáros, 2006). In managerial logic, it appears that the more convinced a manager is of his or her duties, the more obstacles there are to becoming aware of the process of exploitation, and the more silencing appears due to his or her frustrations with the inability to have his or her capacity for work even more depleted. In this angst, managers and other workers end up subjecting themselves to the designs of capital in terms of the productivity expected from them and the participation they are offered.

References

Alves, G. (2000). *O novo (e precário) mundo do trabalho*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial.

Antunes, R. (2006). *Os sentidos do trabalho: Ensaio sobre a afirmação e a negação do trabalho*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial.

Antunes, R., & Alves, G. (2004). As mutações no trabalho na era da mundialização do capital. *Educação & Sociedade*, *25*(87), 335-351. doi:10.1590/S0101-73302004000200003

Barry, M., & Wilkinson, A. (2016). Pro-social or pro-management? A critique of the conception of employee voice as a pro-social behaviour within organizational behaviour. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, *54*(2), 261-284. doi:10.1111/bjir.12114

Behr, R. R., & Nascimento, S. P. (2008). A gestão do conhecimento como técnica de controle: Uma abordagem crítica da conversão de conhecimento tácito em explícito. *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, *6*(1), 1-11. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2UZveM3

Bessi, V. G., Zimmer, M. V., & Grisci, C. L. I. (2007). O panóptico digital nas organizações: Espaço-temporalidade e controle no mundo do trabalho contemporâneo. *Organizações & Sociedade*, *14*(42), 83-96. doi:10.1590/S1984-92302007000300005

Brown, A. D., & Coupland, C. (2005). Sounds of silence: Graduate trainees, hegemony and resistance. *Organization Studies*, *26*(7), 1049-1069. doi:10.1177/0170840605053540

Chou, S. Y., & Chang, T. (2017). Employee silence and silence antecedents: A theoretical classification. *International Journal of Business Communication*. doi:10.1177/2329488417703301

Cullinane, N., & Donaghey, J. (2014). Employee silence. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 398-409). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Detert, J. R., & Edmondson, A. C. (2011). Implicit voice theories: Taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(3), 461-488. doi:10.5465/amj.2011.61967925

Donaghey, J., Cullinane, N., Dundon, T., & Wilkinson, A. (2011). Reconceptualising employee silence: Problems and prognosis. *Work, Employment and Society*, *25*(1), 51-67. doi:10.1177/0950017010389239

Faria, J. H. (2009). *Gestão participativa: Relações de poder e de trabalho nas organizações*. São Paulo, SP: Editora Atlas.

Faria, J. H. (2011). *Economia política do poder: Uma crítica da teoria geral da administração* (2a ed.). Curitiba, PR: Juruá Editora.

Ferraz, D. L. S., Biasotto, L. D., & Tonon, L. (2010). A centralidade do trabalho no processo de construção da identidade: Um estudo com membros do Movimento dos Trabalhadores Desempregados. In D. H. Helal, F. C. Garcia, & L. C. Honório (Coords.), *Relações de poder e trabalho no Brasil contemporâneo* (pp. 109-131). Curitiba, PR: Juruá Editora.

Fletcher, D., & Watson, T. (2007). Voice, silence and the business of construction: Loud and quiet voices in the construction of personal, organizational and social realities. *Organization*, *14*(2), 155-174. doi:10.1177/1350508407074221

Gaulejac, V. (2007). *Gestão como doença social: Ideologia, poder gerencialista e fragmentação social*. São Paulo, SP: Ed. Ideias & Letras.

Gollan, P. J., & Xu, Y. (2015). Re-engagement with the employee participation debate: Beyond the case of contested and captured terrain. *Work, Employment and Society*, *29*(2), 1-13. doi:10.1177/0950017014522722

Grisci, C. L. I., & Bessi, V. G. (2004). Modos de ser e de trabalhar na indústria bancária. *Sociologias*, *6*(12), 160-200. doi:10.1590/S1517-45222004000200007

Gurgel, C., & Justen, A. (2015). Teorias organizacionais e o materialismo histórico. *Organizações & Sociedade*, *22*(73), 199-221. doi:10.1590/1984-9230731

Harvey, D. (2013). *Condição pós-moderna* (24a ed.). São Paulo, SP: Ediçoes Loyola.

Hirschman, A. (1973). *Saída, voz e lealdade: Reações ao declínio de firmas, organizações e Estados*. São Paulo, SP: Editora Perspectiva.

Kaufman, B. E. (2014). Employee voice before Hirschman: Its early history, conceptualization, and practice. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 17-35). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Knoll, M., & van Dick, R. (2013). Do I hear the whistle…? A first attempt to measure four forms of employee silence and their correlates. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *113*(2), 349-362. doi:10.1007/s10551-012-1308-4

Lukács, G. (1966). *Estética: La peculiaridad de lo estético*. Ciudad de México: Grijalbo.

Marx, K. (1975). Letter from Marx to Pavel Vasilyevich Annenkov. In K. Marx & F. Engels, *Marx & Engels collected works: Letters 1844-51* (Vol. 38). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2OS2C3a

Marx, K. (2008). *Manuscritos econômico-filosóficos*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial.

Marx, K. (2011). *Grundrisse: Manuscritos econômicos de 1857–1858: Esboços da crítica da economia política*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial.

Marx, K. (2013). *O capital: Crítica da economia política: livro I*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial.

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2007). *A ideologia alemã*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial.

Mészáros, I. (2006). *A teoria da alienação em Marx*. São Paulo, SP: Boitempo Editorial.

Milliken, F. J., Morrison, E. W., & Hewlin, P. F. (2003). An exploratory study of employee silence: Issues that employees don't communicate upward and why. *Journal of Management Studies*, *40*(6), 1453-1476. doi:10.1111/1467-6486.00387

Minini, R. M., & Ferraz, D. L. S. (2015). A identidade de enfermeiros e supervisores em um hospital público de Belo Horizonte. *Revista Gestão & Conexões*, *4*(1), 165-186. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/31Q0RJf

Misoczky, M. C., Flores, R. K., & Goulart, S. (2015). An anti-management statement in dialogue with critical Brazilian authors. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, 55(2), 130-138. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2SHcr55

Morrison, E. W. (2014). Employee voice and silence. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *1*, 173-197. doi:10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091328

Morrison, E. W., & Milliken, F. J. (2000). Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world. *The Academy of Management Review*, *25*(4), 706-725. doi:10.2307/259200

Moura-Paula, M. J., & Ferraz, D. L. S. (2015). Silêncio organizacional: Introdução e crítica. *Cadernos EBAPE. BR*, *13*(3), 516-529. doi:10.1590/1679-395114581

Pasqualini, J. C., & Martins, L. M. (2015). Dialética singular-particular-universal: Implicações do método materialista dialético para a psicologia. *Psicologia & Sociedade*, *27*(2), 362-371. doi:10.1590/1807-03102015v27n2p362

Pinder, C. C., & Harlos, K. P. (2001). Employee silence: Quiescence and acquiescence as responses to perceived injustice. *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management*, *20*, 331-369. doi:10.1016/S0742-7301(01)20007-3

Pirie, W. J. (2016). Key determinants of organisational silence for non-standard workers. *Management Decision*, *54*(6), 1522-1538. doi:10.1108/MD-11-2015-0490

Rafferty, A. E., & Restubog, S. L. D. (2011). The influence of abusive supervisors on followers' organizational citizenship behaviours: The hidden costs of abusive supervision. *British Journal of Management*, *22*(2), 270-285. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8551.2010.00732.x

Sève, L. (1975). Psicanálise e materialismo histórico. In B. C. Clément, P. Bruno, & L. Sève (Eds.), *Para uma crítica marxista da teoria da personalidade* (pp. 204-265). Lisboa: Editorial Estampa.

Timming, A. R., & Johnstone, S. (2015). Employee silence and the authoritarian personality: A political psychology of workplace democracy. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *23*(1), 154-171. doi:10.1108/IJOA-06-2013-0685

Tragtenberg, M. (2006). *Burocracia e ideologia* (2a ed.). São Paulo, SP: Editora Unesp.

Van Dyne, L., Ang, S., & Botero, I. C. (2003). Conceptualizing employee silence and employee voice as multidimensional constructs. *Journal of Management Studies*, *40*(6), 1359-1392. doi:10.1111/1467-6486.00384

Van Dyne, L., & LePine, J. A. (1998). Helping and voice extra-role behavior: Evidence of construct and predictive validity. *The Academy of Management Journal*, *41*(1), 108-119. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2uM7iRt

Wang, Y.-D., & Hsieh, H.-H. (2013). Organizational ethical climate, perceived organizational support, and employee silence: A cross-level investigation. *Human Relations*, *66*(6), 783-802. doi:10.1177/0018726712460706

Acknowledgement

About the Authors

Marcos Júnior de Moura-Paula

Master's degree in administration by the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Professor of business and management at the Instituto Federal de Brasília. E-mail: marcos.moura@ifb.edu.br. ORCID: 0000-0002-0021-3167

Patricia Aparecida Abreu Moreira

Master's degree in administration by Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). Specialist in both service operation management and project manager, researcher of Núcleo de Estudos Críticos Trabalho e Marxologia at the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração of UFMG. E-mail: abreu.patricia@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-7252-0951

Deise Luiza da Silva Ferraz

Doctoral degree in administration by the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Professor at the Departamento de Ciências Administrativas and a full professor at the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Scholarship researcher from Minas Gerais (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de Minas Gerais), tutor of the Programa de Educação Tutorial, coordinator of Núcleo de Estudos Críticos Trabalho e Marxologia. Author of texts published in books, journals, national and international meetings, and editor of books, such as *Crítica Marxista da Administração* and *Marx e Engels: Notas introdutórias para além d'O capital*. E-mail: deiseluiza@face.ufmg.br. ORCID: 0000-0002-4267-8261