

Silencing of Dissent

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The greater the authoritarian pressures in an organization and the greater the chronic stress, the greater the likelihood that strenuous attempts will be made to silence dissent. Empirical data shows that *organizational silence* emerges out of workers fear to speak up about issues or problems they encounter at work [1]. These underground topics become the “undiscussables” in an organization, covering a wide range of areas including decision-making, procedures, managerial incompetence, pay inequity, organizational inefficiencies, and poor organizational performance [2].

Dissent is even less welcome in environments characterized by chronic stress when dissent is seen as a threat to unified action. As a result the quality of problem analysis and decision making deteriorates further. If this cycle is not stopped and the organization allowed opportunity to recuperate, the result may be an organization that becomes as rigid, repetitious and ultimately destructive as do so many chronically stressed individuals [3]. Organizational alexithymia – the inability to give words to feelings – becomes a significant barrier to constructive change as the number of undiscussable topics accumulates. The silencing of dissent is dangerous to organizational and individual well-being because dissent serves as corrective feedback within an organization that can avert disaster if attended to in time.

Excerpt from Bloom, S. L. (2010). Trauma-organized systems and parallel process. In N. Tehrani (Ed.), *Managing Trauma in the Workplace* (pp. 139-153). London: Routledge.

For more see: Bloom and Farragher, *Destroying Sanctuary: The Crisis in Human Service Delivery Systems*

- [Link to Commitment to Open Communication](#)
- [Link to Organizational Alexithymia and Miscommunication](#)
- [Link to Collective Disturbance](#)
- [Link to Bloom: The Importance of Dissent](#)

References

1. Morrison, E.W. and F.J. Milliken, *Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world*. *The Academy of Management Review*, 2000. **25**(4): p. 706.
2. Ryan, K. and D. Oestreich, *Driving Fear out of the Workplace: Creating the High Trust, High Performance Organization*. 1998, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
3. Bloom, S.L., *Neither liberty nor safety: The impact of trauma on individuals, institutions, and societies. Part I*. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 2004. **2**(2): p. 78-98.