Thesis abstract

Advancing knowledge on the antecedents and outcomes of team silence

Nate Zettna

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney

In this thesis, I investigate the phenomenon of team silence — when team members collectively withhold their thoughts, opinions and suggestions about important work-related matters. Although scholars have theorized about team silence as a shared behaviour among team members and how as a shared property of the team it can vary between teams, few empirical studies have examined the antecedents and outcomes of team silence. As a result, there is a dearth of knowledge on the precise nature of team silence as a collective phenomenon, what impacts it, and how it impacts team outcomes. In this thesis, I conducted three empirical studies which together aim to advance knowledge on the contextual factors (e.g., leadership) that shape the shared behaviours of silence within teams; the processes by which team silence leads to detrimental team outcomes; and how certain changes in the work context may impact changes in team silence. Specifically, the first paper explores the nature of team silence in student teams in terms of the extent to which silence is a shared behaviour among team members, its distinction from related constructs (e.g., individual silence, voice), and its relationship with team satisfaction and performance outcomes. The second paper examines in field teams the antecedents and outcomes of team silence in a large commercial bank using a multi-wave, multi-source team study. In this second paper, I investigate how leaders who value the input of their teams can influence team silence and how these effects flow on to impact objective team performance outcomes. The last paper uses a quasi-experimental field study to investigate how team leader succession (i.e., a change in team leadership) influences team silence towards team leaders over time. This thesis advances much needed theoretical and practical knowledge about how team silence can undermine team effectiveness by preventing the surfacing of important problems within teams and the important role of leadership in creating team environments that can prevent and reduce team silence. Without a better understanding of silence within teams, organizations risk the loss of vital information that is crucial for teams to succeed. (Dr Zettina was a winner of the John C Harsanyi Graduate Medal.)

Dr Nate Zettna
The University of Sydney Business School, Discipline of Work and Organisational Studies

E-mail: nate.zettna@sydney.edu.au

URL: https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/24266