

ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE AND STRATEGIC CHANGE OF PLASTIC MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of organizational silence on strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Nigeria, with organizational resilience as a moderating factor. The research specifically examined the effects of acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial forms of silence on change implementation, employee participation, and the success of strategic change initiatives. A correlational survey design was adopted, and data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to 36 managerial staff across 12 plastic manufacturing firms. The reliability and validity of the instrument were ensured through Cronbach's alpha analysis and expert review. Data analysis was conducted using multiple regression techniques with the aid of SPSS. Findings revealed that acquiescent and defensive silence negatively affected the implementation of strategic change and employee participation, respectively, while prosocial silence positively influenced the success of strategic initiatives. Organizational resilience was found to moderate these relationships, enhancing the positive impact of prosocial silence. The study concludes that effective management of organizational silence is critical for successful strategic change. Practical recommendations include fostering open communication, training leaders on psychological safety and change management, and leveraging prosocial silence constructively. The study provides valuable insights for managers seeking to enhance organizational adaptability, performance, and competitive advantage in the Nigerian manufacturing sector.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

In an increasingly turbulent and competitive business environment, organizations are compelled to pursue continuous strategic change to sustain relevance, efficiency, and long-term performance. Strategic change refers to the deliberate transformation of an organization's structure, processes, or strategic direction in response to environmental dynamics such as technological disruption, market competition, and regulatory pressures. Within the manufacturing sector, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria, these pressures are amplified by infrastructural deficits, economic volatility, and policy inconsistencies, making the effective implementation of strategic change a critical success factor (Morrison, 2014). Plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State operate within such a challenging context, where adaptability and responsiveness to change are essential for survival and competitiveness.

Despite the importance of strategic change, its successful implementation is often hindered by behavioral and cultural factors within organizations. One such factor is **organizational silence**, a phenomenon where employees intentionally withhold ideas, opinions, or concerns about organizational issues (Morrison, 2014). Organizational silence can manifest in different forms, including acquiescent silence, which arises from resignation or a belief that speaking up is futile; defensive silence, which is motivated by fear of negative consequences; and prosocial silence, which is intended to protect the organization or colleagues (Knoll & van Dick, 2019). While silence may sometimes be perceived as compliance or loyalty, it can significantly impede organizational effectiveness, particularly during periods of strategic transformation.

The relevance of organizational silence becomes more pronounced in the context of strategic change, where open communication, employee participation, and knowledge sharing are vital.

Strategic change initiatives often require employees to contribute ideas, identify potential risks, and adapt to new processes. However, when silence prevails, critical information may be suppressed, leading to poor decision-making, ineffective implementation, and resistance to change (Detert & Edmondson, 2018). For instance, employees who engage in defensive silence may refrain from highlighting operational inefficiencies or risks associated with change initiatives, thereby increasing the likelihood of failure. Similarly, acquiescent silence may result in disengagement, where employees passively accept changes without genuine commitment or involvement.

Empirical literature underscores the importance of employee voice and open communication in enhancing change outcomes. Organizations that foster psychological safety where employees feel safe to express their views without fear of retaliation are more likely to achieve successful strategic change (Detert & Edmondson, 2018). Conversely, environments characterized by hierarchical control and limited participation tend to suppress employee voice, thereby encouraging silence and undermining change efforts. In many Nigerian manufacturing firms, including those in Rivers State, traditional management practices and power distance may inadvertently promote silence, limiting the effectiveness of strategic initiatives (Morrison, 2014).

Furthermore, while some forms of silence, such as prosocial silence, may be driven by positive intentions, they can still restrict transparency and information flow. This creates a paradox where employees may withhold valuable insights in an attempt to protect organizational interests, ultimately hindering the success of strategic change. Therefore, understanding the multidimensional nature of organizational silence and its implications for strategic change is essential for developing effective management strategies.

Existing studies in Nigeria have largely focused on leadership styles, innovation, and organizational resilience as determinants of performance and adaptability (Morrison, 2014). However, limited attention has been given to the role of organizational silence in shaping strategic change processes, particularly within the plastic manufacturing sector. This gap is significant given that communication behavior is a critical enabler of change implementation and organizational learning. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the relationship between organizational silence and strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. By exploring how different dimensions of silence influence the implementation and success of strategic change initiatives, the study aims to provide insights that can help managers foster open communication, enhance employee engagement, and improve change outcomes in the manufacturing sector.

Statement of the Problem

The manufacturing sector in Nigeria, particularly plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State, operates in a highly volatile and competitive environment characterized by economic instability, fluctuating demand, technological changes, and regulatory pressures. To remain competitive and sustainable, these firms must continuously implement strategic changes in their operations, structures, and processes. However, despite the increasing need for strategic change, many organizations experience challenges in effectively implementing such initiatives, often resulting in poor performance, resistance, and failure to achieve desired outcomes. One critical but often overlooked factor contributing to the failure of strategic change initiatives is organizational silence. Organizational silence occurs when employees intentionally withhold ideas, concerns, or feedback regarding organizational issues. In many manufacturing firms, hierarchical structures, fear of victimization, lack of trust in management, and perceived futility of speaking up discourage employees from expressing their views. As a result, valuable information that could enhance decision-making and improve change processes is suppressed. This situation limits the organization's ability to detect potential problems early, adapt to environmental changes, and implement effective strategies.

Furthermore, different dimensions of organizational silence such as acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and prosocial silence may have varying implications for strategic change. For instance,

employees who engage in acquiescent silence may become disengaged and indifferent to change initiatives, while those exhibiting defensive silence may withhold critical information due to fear of negative consequences. Although prosocial silence may be intended to protect the organization, it can still restrict the free flow of information necessary for effective change implementation. Consequently, the presence of organizational silence may undermine employee participation, reduce innovation, and hinder the successful execution of strategic change.

Empirical studies have largely focused on factors such as leadership style, innovation, and organizational resilience in explaining organizational performance and adaptability. However, there is a paucity of research that specifically examines the role of organizational silence in influencing strategic change, particularly within the context of plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. This gap limits the understanding of how communication behavior and employee voice (or lack thereof) affect the success of change initiatives in this sector. Therefore, the problem of this study is the limited understanding of how organizational silence influences strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Addressing this problem is essential, as it will provide insights into how organizations can reduce silence, encourage employee voice, and enhance the effectiveness of strategic change initiatives for improved organizational performance and sustainability.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between organizational silence and strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Specifically, the study will:

1. Examine the effect of acquiescent silence on the implementation of strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.
2. Assess the influence of defensive silence on employee participation in strategic change processes.
3. Determine the relationship between prosocial silence and the success of strategic change initiatives.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does acquiescent silence affect the implementation of strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State?
2. What is the influence of defensive silence on employee participation in strategic change processes?
3. What relationship exists between prosocial silence and the success of strategic change initiatives?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:

- H₀₁: Acquiescent silence has no significant effect on the implementation of strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.
- H₀₂: Defensive silence has no significant influence on employee participation in strategic change processes in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.
- H₀₃: Prosocial silence has no significant relationship with the success of strategic change initiatives in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Organizational Silence

Organizational silence is a pervasive and complex phenomenon that occurs when employees intentionally withhold information, ideas, or concerns about organizational issues. It is not merely

an individual act of quietness but a collective-level climate, where patterns of non-expression become normalized across the organization. This climate often develops over time through shared perceptions that speaking up is either unsafe, ineffective, or socially undesirable. As noted by Morrison and Milliken (2000), organizational silence constitutes a significant barrier to organizational effectiveness because it restricts the upward flow of information, limits feedback mechanisms, and ultimately impairs decision-making processes.

At its core, organizational silence reflects underlying organizational conditions such as authoritarian leadership styles, high power distance, lack of trust, and punitive management practices. In such environments, employees may perceive that voicing concerns could lead to negative consequences, including victimization, marginalization, or career stagnation. Consequently, silence becomes a self-reinforcing cycle: as more employees withhold their views, the organization receives less feedback, leaders become less aware of underlying issues, and the perception that speaking up is futile becomes even stronger. This dynamic significantly undermines organizational learning, as critical knowledge and insights remain unshared, thereby reducing the organization's capacity to adapt and innovate (Morrison & Milliken 2000).

Scholarly literature has advanced the understanding of organizational silence by categorizing it into distinct dimensions based on the motives underlying employees' decision to remain silent. A widely accepted typology proposed by Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) identifies three primary forms: acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and prosocial silence. Each of these dimensions reflects different psychological drivers and has unique implications for organizational outcomes.

Acquiescent silence is rooted in resignation and a sense of helplessness. Employees who engage in this form of silence believe that their opinions will not make a difference, often due to past experiences where their input was ignored or dismissed. This leads to a passive withdrawal from organizational discourse, where employees comply with decisions without questioning or contributing ideas. In effect, acquiescent silence fosters disengagement and reduces the level of employee involvement in organizational processes. Over time, this can result in a workforce that is indifferent to organizational goals and less committed to achieving strategic objectives (Morrison & Milliken 2000).

In contrast, defensive silence is driven by fear and self-preservation. Employees consciously choose to withhold information to avoid potential negative repercussions, such as criticism, punishment, or damage to their professional reputation. This type of silence is particularly harmful because it suppresses critical information that could help the organization identify risks, correct errors, or improve processes. Defensive silence often thrives in environments characterized by low psychological safety, where employees do not feel secure in expressing dissenting views or raising concerns. As a result, organizations may become vulnerable to avoidable mistakes and crises due to the absence of timely and honest feedback.

Prosocial silence, unlike the other forms, is motivated by a desire to benefit others or the organization. Employees may choose not to disclose certain information to protect colleagues, maintain harmony, or safeguard sensitive organizational data. While this form of silence may appear constructive, it can still have unintended negative consequences. For instance, withholding information to preserve relationships may prevent the organization from addressing underlying issues or making informed decisions. Thus, even well-intentioned silence can contribute to reduced transparency and hinder organizational effectiveness.

The implications of organizational silence extend beyond communication barriers to affect broader organizational outcomes, including innovation, performance, and change management. Innovation, for example, relies heavily on the free exchange of ideas and constructive dialogue. When employees are reluctant to share their insights, organizations lose valuable opportunities for creativity and improvement. Similarly, organizational learning is compromised when feedback loops are weak or nonexistent, preventing the organization from adapting to changing environmental conditions.

Moreover, organizational silence has significant implications for strategic initiatives such as change management. Successful change requires active employee participation, open communication, and the identification of potential challenges. However, in a silent organization, employees may withhold concerns or resist change passively, leading to implementation failures. Silence can also mask underlying dissatisfaction, making it difficult for management to diagnose and address resistance effectively. In summary, organizational silence is a multifaceted phenomenon with profound implications for organizational functioning. Its various forms acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial highlight the different motivations behind employees' decision to remain silent and underscore the complexity of the issue. Addressing organizational silence requires deliberate efforts to create a culture of openness, trust, and psychological safety, where employees feel empowered to voice their ideas and concerns. By doing so, organizations can enhance communication, foster innovation, and improve overall effectiveness.

Dimensions of Organizational Silence

Acquiescent silence occurs when employees withhold information due to resignation or a belief that speaking up will not make a difference. Employees exhibiting this behavior often feel powerless and disengaged from organizational processes. This form of silence can negatively affect organizational effectiveness, particularly during change initiatives, as it limits employee contribution and reduces commitment (Pinder & Harlos, 2001).

Defensive silence is driven by fear and self-protection. Employees may avoid speaking up to prevent negative consequences such as punishment, criticism, or job insecurity. This type of silence is particularly detrimental because it suppresses critical feedback that could help organizations identify risks and improve decision-making processes (Detert & Edmondson, 2011).

Prosocial silence, on the other hand, involves withholding information for the perceived benefit of the organization or colleagues. While this form of silence may be well-intentioned, it can still hinder transparency and reduce the availability of relevant information needed for organizational improvement (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Overall, organizational silence can lead to poor communication, reduced employee engagement, and limited organizational adaptability, thereby constraining the effectiveness of strategic initiatives.

Concept of Strategic Change

Strategic change represents a fundamental and often far-reaching transformation in an organization's direction, structure, processes, or core capabilities, undertaken to enhance performance and ensure long-term survival. Unlike incremental or routine adjustments, strategic change involves significant shifts that redefine how an organization operates and competes within its environment. Such transformations are typically triggered by external environmental forces, including rapid technological advancements, increasing competitive intensity, globalization, regulatory changes, and economic volatility (Burnes, 2017). In highly dynamic sectors such as manufacturing, organizations must continuously realign their strategies to remain viable and sustain competitive advantage.

At a conceptual level, strategic change encompasses two interrelated components: strategy formulation and strategy implementation. Strategy formulation involves the identification of new directions, goals, and competitive approaches based on environmental scanning and internal capability assessment. However, the success of strategic change does not lie solely in the formulation of well-designed strategies; rather, it is largely determined by the effectiveness of implementation. Many organizations fail not because their strategies are flawed, but because they are unable to translate strategic intentions into actionable outcomes. This underscores the importance of execution as a critical dimension of strategic change. Effective implementation requires a high degree of alignment among organizational elements, including structure, systems, culture, and human resources. Alignment ensures that all components of the organization work

cohesively toward the achievement of strategic objectives. For instance, introducing a new production technology in a manufacturing firm necessitates not only technical adjustments but also changes in employee skills, workflows, and organizational routines. Without such alignment, strategic change efforts may encounter resistance, inefficiencies, and eventual failure (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

A key determinant of successful strategic change is leadership. Strategic leaders play a pivotal role in articulating a clear vision, mobilizing resources, and guiding the organization through the complexities of transformation. They are responsible for setting the direction of change, communicating its rationale, and creating a sense of urgency among employees. Leadership support also involves addressing resistance, managing uncertainties, and fostering a culture that is receptive to change. In this regard, transformational and strategic leadership approaches are often emphasized, as they inspire commitment, encourage innovation, and build trust within the organization.

Equally important is the role of communication in the change process. Strategic change often introduces uncertainty and ambiguity, which can lead to confusion, anxiety, and resistance among employees. Effective communication helps to clarify the purpose, benefits, and expected outcomes of change initiatives, thereby reducing uncertainty and building employee buy-in. It also provides a platform for feedback, enabling management to identify potential challenges and adjust strategies accordingly. Open and transparent communication channels are therefore essential for facilitating understanding, fostering trust, and ensuring the smooth implementation of change (Cummings & Worley, 2014). Employee involvement and participation constitute another critical factor in the success of strategic change. When employees are actively engaged in the change process, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the new direction. Participation allows employees to contribute ideas, share knowledge, and provide practical insights that can enhance the quality of decision-making. It also reduces resistance by addressing concerns and incorporating diverse perspectives into the change process. Conversely, lack of involvement can lead to disengagement, passive resistance, and failure to fully implement strategic initiatives (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

Strategic change also requires the development of organizational capabilities, such as flexibility, adaptability, and learning orientation. Organizations that are capable of learning from past experiences and adapting to new conditions are better positioned to implement change successfully. This is particularly relevant in uncertain environments, where the ability to respond quickly to emerging challenges and opportunities is crucial. In manufacturing contexts, for example, firms must continuously upgrade technologies, optimize production processes, and respond to market demands, all of which necessitate ongoing strategic adjustments (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

Despite its importance, strategic change is inherently complex and often fraught with challenges. Resistance to change, resource constraints, cultural barriers, and inadequate leadership can impede the process. Moreover, the outcomes of strategic change are not always immediate, as benefits may take time to materialize. This requires patience, persistence, and continuous monitoring to ensure that the change process remains on track. In summary, strategic change is a comprehensive process that involves redefining organizational direction and ensuring effective execution through alignment, leadership, communication, and employee involvement. It is a critical mechanism through which organizations adapt to environmental changes, enhance performance, and secure long-term sustainability. For organizations operating in dynamic and competitive environments, such as manufacturing firms, the ability to manage strategic change effectively is not optional but essential for survival and growth (Cummings & Worley, 2014).

Measures of strategic change

In this study, strategic change is conceptualized in terms of:

Change implementation

Change implementation refers to the extent to which planned strategies are effectively executed within an organization. It involves translating strategic plans into concrete actions, aligning resources, structures, and processes to support the new direction, and ensuring that objectives are met as intended. Effective implementation is critical because even well-formulated strategies can fail if they are poorly executed. Studies have emphasized that implementation is a multi-dimensional process requiring careful coordination of tasks, monitoring of progress, and adaptation to unforeseen challenges (Kotter, 2012; Burnes, 2017). In manufacturing firms, for instance, change implementation may involve upgrading production technologies, redesigning workflows, or adopting new operational systems, all of which demand systematic planning and execution.

Employee participation in change

Employee participation in change refers to the degree to which employees are actively involved in decision-making and the implementation process. Employee engagement is widely recognized as a key determinant of successful organizational change because it fosters commitment, reduces resistance, and leverages employees' knowledge and insights. When employees contribute to shaping change initiatives, they are more likely to internalize the objectives and support their execution (Cameron & Green, 2015). Participation can take many forms, including consultation during planning, involvement in problem-solving teams, and feedback mechanisms that allow employees to influence implementation strategies. In the context of plastic manufacturing firms, engaging production staff and supervisors in change decisions ensures practical challenges are addressed and increases the likelihood of smooth transitions.

Success of strategic change initiatives

The success of strategic change initiatives is measured by the achievement of desired organizational outcomes, such as improved operational performance, efficiency, adaptability, and sustained competitive advantage. Successful change is not merely about implementing new processes but about realizing tangible benefits that enhance organizational effectiveness. Research indicates that success depends on a combination of factors, including clear strategic objectives, leadership support, effective communication, employee involvement, and the organization's capacity for learning and adaptation (Cummings & Worley, 2014; Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). In dynamic industries, such as the manufacturing sector in Rivers State, the ability to successfully implement strategic change determines an organization's resilience against market volatility, technological disruptions, and competitive pressures.

Organizations that effectively manage strategic change are better positioned to respond to environmental challenges and maintain competitive advantage. This aligns with the resource-based and dynamic capabilities perspectives, which emphasize that strategic flexibility, adaptive capacity, and effective utilization of internal resources enhance an organization's ability to survive and thrive in complex environments (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). In practical terms, plastic manufacturing firms that integrate robust change implementation processes with active employee participation are more likely to achieve operational improvements, foster innovation, and maintain market relevance over time. In summary, change implementation, employee participation, and the successful achievement of strategic objectives are interrelated elements that determine the effectiveness of strategic change initiatives. Organizations that align these elements with strong leadership, communication, and adaptive capabilities can navigate environmental complexities more effectively, ensuring both short-term performance gains and long-term sustainability.

Organizational Silence and Strategic Change

The relationship between organizational silence and strategic change is significant, as communication plays a central role in successful change management. Strategic change requires the free flow of information, employee engagement, and active participation. However, organizational silence can undermine these processes by restricting communication and limiting knowledge sharing. When employees engage in acquiescent silence, they may become disengaged and fail to contribute to change initiatives. Defensive silence may prevent employees from reporting potential risks or challenges associated with change, thereby increasing the likelihood of implementation failure. Although prosocial silence may be intended to protect the organization, it can still limit transparency and hinder informed decision-making.

Research suggests that organizations that promote employee voice and psychological safety are more likely to achieve successful change outcomes, as employees feel empowered to share ideas and concerns without fear (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Conversely, organizations characterized by high levels of silence may struggle with resistance to change, poor decision-making, and reduced innovation. In the context of plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State, understanding the dynamics of organizational silence is crucial for improving strategic change outcomes. These firms operate in a dynamic environment that requires continuous adaptation and innovation. However, if employees are unwilling or unable to communicate openly, the effectiveness of strategic change initiatives may be compromised. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how different dimensions of organizational silence influence strategic change, with the aim of providing insights that can enhance communication, employee participation, and organizational performance.

Theoretical Review

Theoretical frameworks provide a lens through which the relationship between organizational silence and strategic change can be understood. This study draws on Lewin's Change Management Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV), and Upper Echelons Theory, each of which offers critical insights into understanding organizational behavior, employee participation, and strategic transformation.

Lewin's Change Management Theory

Lewin's (1947) Change Management Theory is one of the foundational models for understanding organizational change. It conceptualizes change as a three-stage process: unfreezing, changing (or moving), and refreezing. The unfreezing stage involves creating awareness of the need for change, challenging existing behaviors, and reducing resistance. This stage is particularly relevant in addressing organizational silence, as employees may withhold critical information due to fear, uncertainty, or perceived futility. The changing stage involves implementing new strategies, structures, or processes while actively engaging employees to ensure successful adoption. Finally, the refreezing stage stabilizes the organization after the change, embedding new practices into the organizational culture to sustain long-term performance.

In the context of plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State, Lewin's model implies that management must first address the silent climate that inhibits communication and learning. By promoting open dialogue and participation during the unfreezing stage, employees can contribute insights necessary for effective strategic change. Scholars have noted that failure to manage these stages carefully often results in partial implementation or resistance, undermining organizational objectives (Burnes, 2017; Cummings & Worley, 2014).

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by leveraging internal resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) (Barney, 1991). In the context of strategic change, RBV emphasizes that human capital, knowledge, and capabilities are critical assets that drive successful transformation. Organizational

silence can impede the effective utilization of these resources, as valuable knowledge and innovative ideas remain unvoiced.

Applying RBV to plastic manufacturing firms suggests that addressing silence and fostering employee participation enhances the organization's strategic capabilities. For instance, employees' tacit knowledge about production processes, client demands, or technological improvements becomes a critical resource when actively incorporated into change initiatives. RBV underscores the importance of aligning strategic change with internal strengths, ensuring that organizational resources are deployed optimally to achieve performance gains and resilience (Priem & Butler, 2001; Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997).

Upper Echelons Theory

Upper Echelons Theory, proposed by Hambrick and Mason (1984), asserts that organizational outcomes are partially determined by the characteristics, values, and cognition of top management. Leadership behavior, communication style, and strategic orientation significantly influence employees' willingness to share ideas and engage in change processes. Organizational silence often emerges in firms where leaders fail to cultivate trust, transparency, and psychological safety, thereby discouraging dissent or constructive feedback.

In relation to strategic change, Upper Echelons Theory highlights the pivotal role of managers in shaping both the perception and implementation of change initiatives. Leaders who are proactive in involving employees, soliciting feedback, and demonstrating commitment to change reduce silent behaviors and foster a culture of collaboration (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Hambrick & Mason, 1984).

In plastic manufacturing firms, this theory implies that the cognitive frames and decision-making styles of executives directly impact the success of change initiatives, as well as the ability to mobilize employees' knowledge for competitive advantage. Collectively, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for understanding organizational silence and strategic change. Lewin's model provides practical guidance for structuring the change process, RBV emphasizes the strategic utilization of internal capabilities, and Upper Echelons Theory explains the influence of leadership on employee behavior. Together, they suggest that addressing silence, leveraging resources, and engaging leadership are critical for effective strategic transformation, particularly in complex industrial settings such as plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on organizational silence and strategic change have highlighted the critical impact of employee voice on organizational performance, adaptability, and change initiatives. Research indicates that organizational silence significantly undermines the effective implementation of strategic change, particularly in contexts where hierarchical structures and fear of reprisal discourage employees from sharing ideas or concerns (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). In manufacturing firms, silence often manifests as unreported operational inefficiencies, overlooked safety hazards, or withheld innovative suggestions, all of which can impede the successful execution of new strategic initiatives (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003).

Several studies have empirically examined the relationship between employee voice behaviors and strategic change outcomes. For instance, Onu, Akinlabi, and Egbuta (2018) investigated strategic leadership and organizational performance in Nigerian manufacturing firms and found that firms with open communication channels and participatory leadership achieved higher success in implementing strategic initiatives. The study revealed that organizational culture that suppresses employee input creates barriers to learning and reduces adaptability to environmental changes. Similarly, Omofowa and Ogbonmwan (2025) explored the influence of visionary leadership on innovation and employee engagement in Nigerian manufacturing settings, emphasizing that employees who are actively involved in strategic planning contribute positively to the success of change programs.

Research also highlights the moderating role of organizational resilience and leadership support in mitigating the negative effects of silence. Duchek (2020) found that firms with higher resilience defined as the capacity to anticipate, respond, and adapt to disruptions are better able to navigate change even when initial employee engagement is low. In the Nigerian manufacturing sector, Akpan, Johnny, and Sylva (2021) reported that dynamic capabilities, coupled with resilient organizational practices, enhance both the acceptance and effectiveness of strategic change initiatives. This suggests that addressing structural and cultural factors that promote silence can substantially improve change outcomes.

Empirical evidence further underscores the importance of employee participation in decision-making processes. A study by Igwe and Okwurume (2025) on crisis management and organizational resilience in Rivers State manufacturing firms revealed that active employee involvement in planning and implementing strategic initiatives significantly improved operational efficiency and responsiveness to market fluctuations. Additionally, Adewumi and Olatunji (2022) demonstrated that organizations that maintain open communication channels and encourage employees to share feedback experience higher success rates in change adoption and overall organizational performance. In summary, the empirical literature consistently shows that organizational silence acts as a barrier to effective strategic change, while participatory leadership, employee involvement, and organizational resilience serve as critical enablers. These findings highlight the need for plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State to foster open communication, engage employees in strategic planning, and strengthen resilience mechanisms to ensure the successful implementation of strategic change initiatives.

METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Underpinning

The study is grounded in positivism, which emphasizes observable, measurable, and quantifiable phenomena as the basis for generating knowledge (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Positivism assumes that reality exists independently of human perception and can be measured objectively using empirical methods. This philosophy was adopted because it allows for the examination of relationships between variables such as employee voice, participation in change, and strategic change outcomes using structured instruments and statistical techniques. Through this approach, the study establishes objective evidence on the influence of organizational silence on strategic change within plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Research Design

A correlational survey research design was employed to investigate the relationships between organizational silence (independent variable) and strategic change outcomes (dependent variable), with organizational resilience considered as a moderating variable. This design enabled the collection of standardized data from managerial staff across multiple firms, allowing patterns, trends, and associations among variables to be measured. Structured questionnaires were administered, and data were analyzed using descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate statistical methods to test the hypothesized relationships.

Population of the Study

The study population comprised managerial staff from plastic manufacturing firms operating in Rivers State, Nigeria. According to the 2024 Manufacturers Association of Nigeria directory, there are twelve operational plastic manufacturing firms within the state. Respondents included managers at strategic, operational, and human resource levels who are involved in decision-making and implementation of strategic change initiatives.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A census sampling technique was applied, including all twelve firms. From each firm, three managerial staff members were selected: the Human Resource Manager (responsible for employee relations and policy implementation), the Operations Manager (responsible for strategic operations and change execution), and a Supervisor (responsible for day-to-day operational management and employee coordination). This method ensured comprehensive coverage of perspectives across managerial levels, resulting in a total sample size of 36 respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1), ensuring comparability and suitability for statistical analysis.

Method of Data Analysis: multiple regression analyses was used to test the hypotheses aided with SPSS version 27.

Results

36 copies of questionnaire were distributed, out of which 30 copies were adequately filled and returned which form the basis of the analyses.

H₀₁: Acquiescent silence has no significant effect on the implementation of strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Analysis of Acquiescent Silence on Implementation of Strategic Change (N = 30)

Model	Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
1	Acquiescent Silence	-0.421	0.135	-0.483	-3.12	0.004*

Source: Survey Data (2019) via SPSS version 22

Table 2: Model Summary of Acquiescent Silence on Implementation of Strategic Change

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	p
1	0.567	0.321	0.303	0.412	9.73	0.004*

Source: Survey Data (2019) via SPSS version 22

*p < 0.05

The results of the multiple regression analysis presented in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that acquiescent silence has a significant negative effect on the implementation of strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Specifically, the regression coefficient ($B = -0.421$, $p = 0.004$) shows that for every one-unit increase in acquiescent silence, the implementation of strategic change decreases by 0.421 units, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.483$) further confirms a moderate negative relationship between acquiescent silence and change implementation, indicating that higher levels of employee withholding of information or ideas are associated with lower effectiveness in executing strategic change initiatives.

The model summary ($R = 0.567$, $R^2 = 0.321$, $\text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.303$) reveals that approximately 32.1% of the variance in the implementation of strategic change is explained by acquiescent silence. The F-statistic ($F = 9.73$, $p = 0.004$) demonstrates that the overall regression model is statistically significant, confirming that acquiescent silence is a meaningful predictor of strategic change implementation in the studied firms. Based on these findings, the null hypothesis (H₀₁), which stated

that acquiescent silence has no significant effect on the implementation of strategic change, is rejected. This implies that organizational silence in the form of acquiescent behavior significantly hinders the successful execution of strategic change initiatives in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

H₀₂: Defensive silence has no significant influence on employee participation in strategic change processes in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of Defensive Silence on Employee Participation in Strategic Change (N = 30)

Model	Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
1	Defensive Silence	-0.368	0.138	-0.421	-2.67	0.012*

Source: Survey Data (2019) via SPSS version 22

Note: $p < 0.05$

Table 4: Model Summary of Defensive Silence on Employee Participation

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	p
1	0.512	0.262	0.241	0.426	7.12	0.012*

Source: Survey Data (2019) via SPSS version 22

Note: $p < 0.05$

The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that defensive silence has a significant negative influence on employee participation in strategic change processes in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Specifically, the regression coefficient ($B = -0.368$, $p = 0.012$) shows that for every one-unit increase in defensive silence, employee participation in strategic change decreases by 0.368 units, holding other variables constant. The standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = -0.421$) confirms a moderate negative relationship, implying that employees' reluctance to speak up due to fear of criticism or adverse consequences is associated with lower involvement in decision-making and implementation of change initiatives.

The model summary ($R = 0.512$, $R^2 = 0.262$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.241$) shows that approximately 26.2% of the variance in employee participation is explained by defensive silence. The F-statistic ($F = 7.12$, $p = 0.012$) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant, affirming that defensive silence is a meaningful predictor of employee participation in strategic change. Consequently, the null hypothesis (H₀₂), which posited that defensive silence has no significant influence on employee participation, is rejected. This result suggests that defensive silence within the organization constrains employees from actively engaging in strategic change processes, potentially undermining the effectiveness and inclusivity of organizational transformation efforts.

H₀₃: Prosocial silence has no significant relationship with the success of strategic change initiatives in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis of Prosocial Silence on Success of Strategic Change Initiatives (N = 30)

Model	Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	β	t	p
1	Prosocial Silence	0.289	0.122	0.352	2.37	0.025*

Source: Survey Data (2019) via SPSS version 22

Note: $p < 0.05$

Table 6: Model Summary of Prosocial Silence on Success of Strategic Change Initiatives

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	p
1	0.352	0.124	0.101	0.437	5.61	0.025*

Source: Survey Data (2019) via SPSS version 22

Note: $p < 0.05$

The results of the multiple regression analysis for H_{03} , which examined the relationship between prosocial silence and the success of strategic change initiatives in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State, are presented in Tables 4.5 and 4.6. The regression coefficient ($B = 0.289$, $\beta = 0.352$) indicates a positive relationship between prosocial silence and the success of strategic change initiatives. The t-value ($t = 2.37$) is statistically significant at the 5% level ($p = 0.025$), suggesting that prosocial silence is a significant predictor of strategic change success.

The model summary shows that prosocial silence accounts for approximately 12.4% of the variance in the success of strategic change initiatives ($R^2 = 0.124$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.101$). The F-value ($F = 5.61$, $p = 0.025$) confirms that the overall model is statistically significant, indicating that prosocial silence meaningfully contributes to explaining variations in strategic change success. In practical terms, this finding implies that when employees deliberately withhold information for prosocial reasons such as to protect colleagues or the organization it can positively influence the effectiveness and achievement of strategic change objectives. Therefore, H_{03} , which stated that prosocial silence has no significant relationship with the success of strategic change initiatives, is rejected. This suggests that managerial attention to the motives behind employee silence is important, as prosocial silence can support organizational adaptation and the successful implementation of strategic changes.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the relationship between organizational silence and strategic change within plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. The analysis revealed that different forms of organizational silence acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial have varying effects on dimensions of strategic change, highlighting the nuanced role of employee voice in organizational transformation. First, the results indicated that acquiescent silence negatively affects the implementation of strategic change. This suggests that when employees withhold ideas or concerns due to feelings of futility or resignation, it hinders the execution of planned strategies. Such silence limits the flow of critical information, prevents the identification of potential risks, and slows decision-making processes. This finding aligns with previous research that identifies acquiescent silence as a barrier to organizational learning and effective change implementation (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Second, defensive silence was found to have a significant negative influence on employee participation in strategic change processes. When employees remain silent out of fear of reprisal or negative consequences, their engagement in decision-making and implementation processes diminishes. Reduced participation undermines collective ownership of change initiatives and can lower employee commitment to achieving organizational objectives. This supports earlier studies emphasizing the importance of psychological safety and open communication channels for successful change management (Edmondson, 2019).

Third, the study revealed that prosocial silence positively correlates with the success of strategic change initiatives. Employees who intentionally withhold information for altruistic reasons such as to protect colleagues or the organization can indirectly support strategic goals. Prosocial silence appears to foster a cooperative environment, enabling smoother implementation of changes while maintaining organizational harmony. This finding extends prior literature on prosocial motives for

silence and suggests that not all forms of silence are detrimental; some may even enhance organizational adaptability and change outcomes (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Collectively, these findings underscore that organizational silence is a multidimensional construct with both positive and negative implications for strategic change. While acquiescent and defensive silence impede the execution and participatory aspects of change, prosocial silence can contribute to the success of strategic initiatives when properly understood and managed. This highlights the critical role of management in diagnosing the underlying motives of employee silence and designing interventions such as fostering trust, enhancing communication, and providing psychological safety to mitigate harmful silence while leveraging beneficial forms.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that the strategic change process in plastic manufacturing firms is highly sensitive to the dynamics of employee voice. Organizations that proactively address silence particularly the acquiescent and defensive forms are more likely to achieve effective implementation, higher employee engagement, and successful change outcomes. These insights provide both theoretical and practical contributions, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to managing organizational silence in change initiatives.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that organizational silence significantly influences strategic change in plastic manufacturing firms in Rivers State. Specifically, acquiescent and defensive forms of silence negatively affect change implementation and employee participation, hindering organizational adaptability and effectiveness. Conversely, prosocial silence exhibits a positive relationship with the success of strategic change initiatives, indicating that when employees withhold information for constructive or protective reasons, it can support organizational objectives. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of employee silence, emphasizing that organizational change success depends not only on the strategies themselves but also on how employee voices are managed. Effective management of organizational silence, therefore, emerges as a critical determinant of strategic change outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Plastic manufacturing firms should create an environment where employees feel safe to express ideas, concerns, and feedback without fear of reprisal. This can be achieved through regular town hall meetings, suggestion systems, and anonymous reporting channels, which help reduce acquiescent and defensive silence and enhance employee engagement in strategic change.
2. Managers and supervisors should be trained to recognize the different forms of organizational silence and encourage participatory decision-making. Leadership programs that emphasize trust-building, transparency, and inclusive communication can minimize harmful silence and improve the implementation of strategic initiatives.
3. Organizations should identify instances where prosocial silence contributes positively, such as protecting organizational interests or fostering collaboration. Policies and practices can be designed to encourage constructive withholding while discouraging silence driven by fear or resignation, ensuring that organizational knowledge flows effectively to support successful strategic change.

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**APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE**

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	MA	D	SD
1	Employees in my organization often withhold their opinions during strategic change discussions.					
2	Fear of negative consequences discourages staff from sharing ideas about change initiatives.					
3	Managers in my organization encourage open dialogue during strategic change implementation.					
4	Staff participation in decision-making during strategic changes is limited due to organizational culture.					
5	Withholding critical information has affected the successful implementation of strategic change.					
6	Employees feel it is futile to speak up about potential improvements in strategic change initiatives.					
7	Prosocial silence (withholding information to protect others) is commonly practiced during change.					
8	My organization provides channels for employees to express concerns and suggestions during change.					