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TEACHER SILENCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

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2013

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family. To my wife and best friend Amy who encouraged me, supported me, and endured with me throughout this process. To my children, Brooke, Wylie, Jamieson, and others yet to come, I am so proud of you. May this work serve as an example that a person can accomplish anything through persistence and hard work.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my father David Crockett who has always been my example of drive and to John and Linda Brooke, who raised an amazing daughter and continuously encouraged me to complete this undertaking.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my mother Debbie Crockett who dedicated her life to raise two respectful, honest, and hardworking boys. Her lifelong example of overcoming hardship and adversity paved the way for this accomplishment.

ABSTRACT

This quantitative study of South Carolina public school teachers investigated how comfortable educators are raising problems or concerns to their administration. Five variables, including years of experience, trust in administration, mobility aspirations, relationship with principal, and content of message were examined to see their influence on teachers' comfort levels when voicing such problems or concerns. In addition, teachers were asked to identify the reasons for being hesitant about raising organizational concerns. The study concluded by determining if comfort level varied in different public school settings (elementary, middle, and high).

The sample consisted of 595 South Carolina public school teachers and data were collected by using an electronic survey instrument. The findings showed over 67% of teachers indicated a time when they purposefully chose not to voice a problem or concern with their administration. Three predictor variables, including trust in administration, content of message, and relationship with principal were found to be statistically significant predictors of teachers' comfort. Further, analysis showed 52.3% of teachers suggested their hesitation in voicing concerns resulted from a belief that speaking up would not make a difference in how their schools operated.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Decision making is an important component of school leadership. With evidence showing collaborative decision making is a strong predictor of student achievement (Rosenholtz, 1989), principals are more frequently seeking input from teachers and other stakeholders when deciding important courses of action. Business research indicates over 85% of employees have experienced a time when they purposefully chose not to raise a problem or concern to their administration (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). Hence, it would appear advantageous for school administrators, who desire employee input during decision making to understand teachers' hesitations when communicating with administration. This paper focuses on the comfort level of South Carolina public school teachers when raising problems or concerns to their administration and the reasons teachers choose to withhold communication about such problems or concerns.

1.1 PURPOSE

Incorporating teacher input in school decisions is becoming a more prevalent practice in educational leadership (Conley, 1991). Communicating with teachers allows administrators to receive critical information closest to the source of many organizational problems. Teachers who feel actively involved in the decision making process demonstrate greater commitment to decisions and a heightened motivation to

carry the decisions out (Smylie, 1992). Glauser (1984) supports this claim suggesting employees demonstrate increased job satisfaction and become more industrious when they identify an open and inviting communication channel.

Purposefully withholding ideas, questions, concerns, information, or opinions by employees about issues relating to the organizations in which they work is commonly referred as *employee silence* (Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Employee silence is a protective behavior (Athanassiades, 1973) and differs from silence associated with mindlessness or simply having nothing to say (Van Dyne, 2003). Reluctance to vocalize one's perceptions has the potential to undermine organizational decision making and have negative effects on employee trust and morale (Argyris & Schon, 1986; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Morrison & Milliken, 2003). This lack of constructive criticism becomes detrimental to organizations, preventing managerial access to critical information (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Organizational improvement requires identifying and addressing areas of weakness. Employee silence often prevents management from becoming aware of specific areas of weakness and hinders innovation in the workplace (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Research reveals multiple reasons that employees purposefully withhold workplace concerns. Employee silence may become a valued option for employees who fear managers in their organization may react negatively to upward communication of concerns (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). Further, employee silence frequently occurs when individuals confront issues such as coworker conflict, have disagreement with organizational decisions, and perceive their input is not valued by the group (Morrision

& Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Consequently, research indicates individuals who perceive threatening work environments are more likely to overestimate the likelihood of negative outcomes should they decide to vocalize their concerns (MacLeod, 1999).

The perceived status of a supervisor can also influence employees' decision to communicate with their supervisors. Open communication and criticism is seldom observed when a high status supervisor in the organization is present (Janis, 1972; Turner & Pratkanis, 1998). O'Reily (1974) suggests the information employees share with their administration is often distorted or presented in a way which benefits the messenger's advancement opportunities. Ultimately, employees may become more cautious and give more credence to the costs rather than to the advantages of speaking up while working in teams with perceived high status supervisors (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). When biased or close-minded leadership is perceived, employees cannot be assured organizational authorities will behave in an ethical, consistent, and bias-free manner. Therefore, it may benefit school administrators, who are seeking teacher input in decision making, to evaluate the authenticity of teacher input and create a culture where teachers feel comfortable openly expressing their thoughts, problems, or concerns.

Current educational literature does not reveal how frequently teachers withdraw from sharing problems or concerns with their administrators. The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent of employee silence across South Carolina schools, the

comfort level of teachers when voicing organizational concerns, and the factors teachers consider when making a decision to speak up or to remain silent.

1.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the reasons for South Carolina public school teachers' reluctance in sharing concerns with their administrators is essential in increasing the effectiveness of South Carolina schools. Principals frequently make decisions regarding instructional and organizational practices based upon the information communicated to them by classroom teachers. Therefore, when teachers identify potential problems, yet purposely withhold them from their principal, the ability for the principal to make optimal decisions is hindered.

Appendix A depicts a conceptual model of how teachers decide whether to vocalize their concerns to their building level supervisor or whether to remain silent. Initially, the decision making process begins once a teacher becomes aware of a problem or concern in the workplace. Teachers are then influenced by multiple variables and evaluate potential costs and benefits for communicating to administration. Eventually, a decision is made whether to remain silent or to communicate their problem or concern with administration. Ultimately, individuals will be less likely to engage in verbal communication as the likelihood of negative outcomes associated with that option increase (Vroom, 1964).

A teacher's decision to vocalize concerns or problems is shaped by three influencing variables. First, individual and organizational factors, including work experience, mobility aspirations, organizational trust, and relationships with supervisor

contribute to teacher silence. Second, the probability for negative outcomes that may occur from communication of problems or concerns deters teachers from speaking up. These anticipated negative outcomes include the fear of being viewed negatively by peers, retaliation or punishment by management, or the possibility of creating a negative impact on others (Morrison and Milliken, 2003). The final variable impacting teachers' decisions to communicate with their administration is the perception of apathy. Employees may believe that voicing their concerns, problems, or opinions will have little significance and that their efforts will have little impact on organizational decisions. Teachers are more likely to communicate to their principals should they perceive their principals to be receptive and open to teachers' input when making organizational decisions.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is vital for school leadership to obtain accurate information in order to make effective decisions and evaluate current practices. Research indicates much of the information important for managerial decision making flows from lower organizational levels (Glauser, 1984). Despite considerable evidence suggesting employees often feel uncomfortable in sharing problems or concerns with their supervisor (Milliken & Morrison, 2003; Van Dyne, 2003; Brinsfield, 2009), little is known in education as to how frequently teachers choose to withhold information from administration and what influences their decision to do so.

The specific research questions addressed in this study are:

1. **How comfortable are South Carolina teachers when voicing work related problems or concerns to their principals?**

This question seeks to extend previously conducted research on employee silence. Previous samples have been drawn from an array of industries including consulting, financial services, media, pharmaceutical, advertising, and health sectors. This question, however, will focus on communication tendencies in the educational field and will seek to quantify the number of South Carolina teachers who report withholding problems or concerns from their administration and how comfortable they are raising such concerns.

2. **How do individual and organizational characteristics influence South Carolina teachers' comfort levels when voicing issues or problems to their administration?**

This research question shifts the focus to individual and organizational variables which influence teachers' comfort levels when voicing organizational problems or concerns to their principals. Research suggests individual and organizational variables, including work experience, mobility aspirations, organizational trust, relationship with supervisor, and content of message influence employees' upward communication behavior (Roberts & O'Reily, 1974; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Answers to this research question will not only reveal the most influential variables on teacher comfort levels but will also allow for comparisons to be made between business employee silence research and this study's findings of teacher silence across South Carolina schools.

3. **What reasons do South Carolina teachers give for not speaking to their principals about work related problems or concerns?**

While question two seeks to reveal individual and organizational characteristics impacting teachers' comfort levels when voicing concerns to administration, question three examines teachers' perceptions of negative consequences associated with upward communication. Research contends 70% of employees in the business sector hesitate to raise problems at work because of fear of repercussion from management or co-workers (Ryan & Oestreich, 1993). Further, employees who speak up and challenge the status quo are viewed as less competent, less dedicated to the organization, and more threatening compared to those who support the status quo. They are also rated as worse performers, and their ideas get less support (Mueller, 2009). The data collected from this question will provide educational leadership empirical evidence as to teachers' motivation for remaining silent about organizational concerns.

4. **Do South Carolina elementary, middle, and high school teachers differ in their comfort level when sharing concerns or problems with administration?**

The design of this question will allow the researcher to determine if the comfort levels differ in elementary, middle, or high schools regarding the sharing of concerns or problems with administration.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE

The role of school leadership is changing. Whereas the historically bureaucratic structure of schools and school systems is still evident (Eden, 1998), principals have shifted to a collaborative leadership approach for strategizing and confronting organizational deficiencies. Further, schools that are experiencing success seem to be typified by high levels of administrator/teacher collaboration in leadership (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998).

School administrators often depend on the upward communication from teachers to become aware of organizational problems and concerns. With accurate information, school leaders are able to make informed and effective decisions. Unfortunately, employees are often hesitant to communicate information to their supervisors, especially when conveying negative news (Milliken and Morrison, 2003). Therefore, this study will assist school administration by quantifying the prevalence of teacher silence in South Carolina public schools and specific reasons for its occurrence. Results gathered from this study will enlighten principals as to how comfortable teachers are voicing concerns and will assist leaders as they collect input for decision making.

1.5 DELIMITATIONS

Several delimitations exist in this study. First, the participants for this study are confined to the state of South Carolina; therefore, no indication of national trends can be made. Second, data will be gathered from certified teachers who worked in public school systems. Teachers who currently work in private schools or serve as public

school teachers assistants are likely to experience some degree of employee silence; however, they are not included in this study. Finally, despite the large range of variables influencing individuals' decisions to purposefully withdraw from a conversation, this study incorporates the most prominent and creditable variables located in business research: mobility aspirations, years of experience, organizational trust, relationship with supervisor, and content of message. Research indicates employees fear a variety of negative consequences should they voice concerns or problems to their administration. Incorporating every consequence indicated in literature is too extensive; therefore, this study embodies the most predominant and creditable consequences for voicing concerns (being viewed negatively by co-workers, damaging relationships, receiving apathetic administrative responses, retaliation, and creating negative repercussions for others).

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS

Little research has been conducted on teacher silence in American schools. The number of teachers remaining silent and their comfort levels when voicing concerns is unknown. This study is built upon the assumption that employee silence does exist in school organizations since it is widely acknowledged in the business sector. It is also assumed that variables which influence business employees' communication with their supervisor will have some transferability to the upward communication trends teachers experience with their administrators.

Assigning motives for silence is a daunting task. Although silence can be observed, it is impossible for an observer to be certain why an individual is silent.

Therefore, this study depends upon authentic responses to survey questions. Ironically, the researcher makes the assumption participants will be open and honest in their questionnaire responses regarding the issues they typically feel uncomfortable vocalizing to their supervisors.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The remainder of this study will be organized into four more chapters and includes a bibliography and appendices. Chapter two will provide an overview of literature and relevant research associated with organizational communication. Chapter three will provide the methodology used for data collection and analysis. Analysis of the data and a presentation of the results will be provided in chapter four. Finally, chapter five will offer interpretation and discussion of the researcher's findings along with recommendations for future research.

1.8 SUMMARY

School leaders are able to make better informed decisions when open channels of communication are established between teachers and administration. Nevertheless, research reveals employees often hesitate in communicating information containing a negative message to their supervisor (Tesser & Rosen, 1972). Even in situations in which employees feel obligated to report concerns about potential problems or wrongdoing, studies reveal their shared message is often distorted to reduce its negative effect (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974).

As the tendency for principals to involve teacher input in decision making continues to increase, it would be beneficial for school leaders to understand the degree

to which teachers participate in employee silence and the factors which influence their decision. This study investigates the organizational communication trends in education in hopes of assisting school leadership in making decisions and leading school reform.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

To fully gain insight into organizational communication tendencies, past studies involving both voice and silence must be reviewed. This literature review is comprehensive, encompassing motives for individuals who purposefully choose to remain silent, despite having opportunities to vocalize opinions which would benefit others in the organization. In this chapter, results from multiple organizational communication studies are compiled to show the potential for employee silence to exist in schools and how it can impact teachers' comfort levels when voicing problems or concerns.

This literature review has been divided into three major sections. First, the concept of employee silence is described to provide a theoretical basis for this study. Second, individual and organizational influences are examined in an attempt to discover possible antecedents and motivators for employee silence and how they influence the comfort level of employees voicing concerns or problems to administration. Finally, the impact of employee silence within the educational setting is addressed.

2.1 EMPLOYEE SILENCE

Employees are often hesitant in sharing information which can be viewed negatively by other members of the organization. Pinder and Harlos (2001), pioneers of employee silence research, define *employee silence* as an aversive, conscious state in

which individuals purposefully withhold concerns, information, or opinions about organizational issues, even if they are aware that strategies other than silence could improve the situation. More extensive than simply not being granted opportunities to express opinions, employee silence refers to the actual communicative choice to refrain from speaking (Van Dyne, 2003). Individuals are typically unwilling to commit to vocal participation because they fear speaking up will lead to unpleasant consequences (Greenberg, 2009). While withholding information may appeal to managers seeking to avoid information overload, reduce interpersonal conflict, and increase privacy of coworkers (Van Dyne, 2003), the negative implications resulting from employee silence is the overarching theme throughout most of the related literature.

Research indicates when employees remain silent about organizational problems or concerns, their silence is detrimental to the organization they serve. Workers who withhold vital information from their administration often prevent the organization from advancing and addressing manageable problems before they evolve into adverse circumstances (Tangiraia, 2008). During collaborative decision making, employees may withhold valid criticisms in attempt to maintain consensus (Janis, 1972). This suggests that the desire for unity can override the desire for improved results, ultimately causing the organization to underperform.

Individual motives for resorting to employee silence have only recently been examined and initial research reveals its complexity. Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin (2003) suggest employees are more likely to remain silent about issues concerning conflicts with co-workers, disagreements about organizational decisions, illegal or

dangerous behaviors, and individual grievances. Tangirala & Ramanujam (2008) emphasize the complexity of employee silence by stating:

> It can encompass different topics (e.g., issues of workgroup efficiency and productivity, individual grievances about how one is treated in the workplace, concerns about ethical misconduct), it might be engaged in by different actors (e.g., frontline employees, middle managers, top-level executives), and it might be directed toward different targets (e.g., coworkers, superiors, external regulatory agencies). In this context, it is conceivable that a focal actor's silence may differ based on the topic and target audience…Given this, the antecedents of silence may vary for different combinations of actors, topics, and target audiences. (p.41)

An individual's natural communication style and image of self can affect the likelihood of an employee suppressing concerns or problems. Pinder and Harlos (2001) examined the effects of self-esteem, communication apprehension, and locus of control on employee silence. Results from their research revealed a slightly significant relationship exists between individuals with low self-esteem and their participation in employee silence. Further, the natural communication of males and females differs as studies indicate females are more likely to withhold communication in the presence of males (Tannen, 1990).

Individuals typically participate in employee silence to exclude themselves from personal or professional hardship. The act of remaining silent may become apparent in certain situations in which the individual's input is expected. Such noticeable silence

leads observers to assign motives for the individual's actions (Jones & Davis 1965), potentially causing the silenced individual greater hardship than if he were to voice his beliefs initially.

2.2 INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS IMPACTING EMPLOYE SILENCE

The motivation of an individual in choosing to vocalize thoughts or participate in withdrawal is influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Adding complexity, the influence of such factors varies from employee to employee. For example, some individuals may remain silent to avoid confrontation. Other individuals, who frequently engage in confrontation, may remain silent if they perceive a possible promotion to be jeopardized should they vocalize an opinion that differs from that of management. Research from multiple theories is presented in this chapter to provide a more comprehensive rationale for an individual's participation in employee silence.

2.3 SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY

Research suggests individuals choose involvement in relationships based upon the perception of how profitable the relationship may become. Outlined in their social exchange theory, Thiabult and Kelley (1959) suggest relationships between individuals are formed through the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis. People strive to minimize costs and maximize rewards and then base the likeliness of developing a relationship with someone on the perceived possible outcomes. When a person perceives the costs of the relationship outweighing the perceived benefits, the person will predictably choose to leave the relationship (Williams, 1998).

Although not without its critics (Zafiroviski, 2005), social exchange theory emphasizes the free will of an individual to participate (or for the purpose of this study, vocally communicate) with others based upon a cost vs. benefit analysis. Should the perceived costs of communication outweigh potential benefits, it is likely an employee will participate in employee silence.

2.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL FIELD THEORY

The influence of internal and external variables on employee silence can be conceptualized through psychological field theory. Research conducted by Kurt Lewin (1951) concluded that an individual's behavior is determined by the totality of an individual's situation. This explanation of human behavior consists of *forces* (beliefs, expectations, cultural norms) in the *life space* of an individual. These forces can be positive, urging a person toward a behavior, or negative, propelling an individual away from a behavior (Brinsfield, 2009). Lewin, defining these terms as *drive* and *restraint*, recognized an individuals' intrinsic characteristics and their immediate social environment plays an influential role in their behavior.

Levin's psychological field theory outlines the complexity of human behavior. It can be implied from his research that an employee's choice to purposefully withhold information from his administration is a product of both the unique characteristics of the individual and his specific work environment.

2.5 EXIT, VOICE, AND LOYALITY

Individuals who are unsatisfied with their work environment deal with their discontent in a variety of ways. While some are able to cope with their dissatisfaction

by continuing to support the organization (loyalty), others react by speaking up to their employer (voice) or quitting (exit) (Hirschman, 1970). Defining the concept of employee voice, Hirschman (1970) writes,

> [Employee Voice is] any attempt at all to change rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinions. (p.30)

Hirschman's conclusion that silence was a sign of organizational loyalty seemed to contradict his earlier belief that loyal employees would exercise voice in an attempt to improve the organization (Brinsfield, 2009). Despite Hirschman's perceived confusion (Pinder & Harlos, 2001), Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982) sought to expand Hirschman's explanation by adding a fourth response to employee dissatisfaction called *neglect*. Individuals exhibiting a neglect response make no attempt to amend or rebuild relations with their supervisor after a dissatisfying experience (Withey & Cooper, 1987). Ultimately, Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn's introduction of neglect has revealed both the existence and rationale for some employees' purposeful withdrawal from their organization.

2.6 GROUPTHINK

Cohesiveness is a critical component of group decision making and because of its pervasiveness, it is one of the most multifaceted aspects of group dynamics (T'Hart,

1991). Serious repercussions occur when members' desire for unanimity overrides their motivation to address alternative courses of action (Janis, 1972). Irving Janis's (1972) theory of *Groupthink* suggests groups are susceptible to faulty decisions because group pressures lead to a deterioration of "mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment" (p.9). Previous studies conducted by Solomon Asch (1956) yielded similar conclusions regarding the hazards of social conformity in group decision making. Asch states, "Consensus to be productive requires that each individual contribute independently out of his experience and insight. When consensus comes under the dominance of conformity, the social process is polluted and the individuals, at the same time, surrender their powers." (p.3)

Janis' *Groupthink* theory is significant to the construct of employee silence. While *Groupthink* itself may not be a form of employee silence, it is unquestionably a cause for silence in organizations (Brinsfield, 2009). Dissenters often feel pressure from a group to conform. Group members who express arguments contrary to the majority are often viewed in a negative light and may become targets of verbal attacks. Fear associated with nonconformance is rampant in organizations particularly in situations of high social salience (Brinsfiled, 2009). The desire of individuals to circumvent verbal attacks or elude potential group isolation may lead some employees to suppress criticisms, potentially weakening the functionality of the organization. Finally, evidence suggests while conforming to group pressures, employees may find themselves participating in acts which are incongruent to their underlying attitudes or beliefs (Hogg

& Abrams, 1991). This contradiction between behavior and beliefs emphasizes the effect peer or group influence plays in employee behavior.

2.7 SPIRAL OF SILENCE

Individuals are more likely to speak up if they perceive their position in a group is similar to that of the majority and remain silent when they believe it is not (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). Noelle-Neumann's (1974) theory the *Spiral of Silence* expanded research regarding the existence of group pressures that threaten to isolate and prevent individuals from freely speaking their views. Individuals scan their environment to determine the dominant opinion and express the majority opinion more frequently than a minority one. Basically, the choice between voice and silence is largely determined by the climate of opinion in one's workgroups (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). The spiral of silence theory has been evaluated within multiple contexts and demonstrates how fear of isolation affects people's willingness to voice their opinions (Donsbach & Stevenson, 1984).

2.8 MUM EFFECT – CONTENT OF MESSAGE

The sensitivity of the message affects the willingness of employees to communicate. Rosen and Tesser (1970) proposed the notion that individuals are more reluctant to communicate information deemed as negative and are more likely to communicate positive information in its entirety. Results from the "MUM effect" (keeping Mum about Undesirable Messages) study suggests individuals become reluctant in sharing bad news simply because of the discomfort associated in revealing the message (Conlee & Tesser, 1973). Research indicates individuals suffer guilt from

such communication and believe negative messages will damage the relationship between messenger and receiver (Morran, Stockton, & Bond, 1991; Rosen & Tesser, 1970). Moreover, Heider (1958) concludes individuals become fearful of emotional distress from the recipient. As a result, the initial bad news repeatedly becomes reinterpreted with a lighter tone as it travels up the organizational ranks. Providing support for Rosen and Tesser's findings, Robert Sutton (2010) writes, "Bearers of bad news, even when they are not responsible for it in any sense, tend to be blamed and have negative feelings directed toward them" (p.1). When the message is potentially threatening for both the sender and receiver, a drive exists within both sides to save them from the perceived negative experience.

2.9 MOBILITY ASPIRATIONS

An employee's desire to ensure job security and professional opportunities often influences their professional behavior. If an individual has power over the advancement of persons of lower rank, those of the lower rank will omit critical comments in their communication with the person of higher rank (Kelly, 1959). Studies involving employee's drive for career advancement suggest mobility aspirations (i.e., desire for advancement and status seeking proclivity) and low trust in one's superior are negatively related to the accuracy of upward communication (Maier, Hoffman, & Read, 1963). In essence, employees with high mobility aspirations will tend leave out negative information and inflate positive information when talking to management (Roberts & O'Reilly; 1974).

Avery (2011) suggests employee behavior is influenced by a desire for control as she states:

> Employee reactions to and desire for control are based on the ratio between the amount of control desired and the amounts possessed. The lower the ratio, the more individuals will desire control and seeks ways to enhance it. Those with lower ratios will seek means to advance their role in the organization and be influenced more by voice opportunity. (p. 148)

2.10 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Recent findings regarding organizational dissent suggest years of experience influence an employee's decision to remain silent about workplace problems or concerns. Non-management positions and less desirable responsibilities are frequently held by individuals with the least amount of job experience. These employees are less likely to develop strong levels of organizational commitment (Kassing, 2004). Research indicates these less tenured employees are often unfamiliar with organizational norms on how to voice problems, concerns, or opinions and typically share their dissenting views with trusted individuals outside the organization (Sprague & Rudd, 1998).

2.11 TRUST

The degree to which organizations are effective in communicating is often dependent upon the establishment of trust. Strong levels of association exist between the trustworthiness of leadership and successful organizational outcomes (Cho, 2008; Covey, 2006). Furthermore, trustworthy managers are better suited to maintain or increase productivity when encountering external organizational challenges.

Kramer and Tyler (1996) point out employees' decisions to trust authority are influenced more by the perceived intentions of the leader than by judgments of the leader's competence. Carnevale (1995) concurs, and suggests employees will trust leaders only when their actions are perceived as fair, ethical, and nonthreatening.

The level of trust individuals have for their organization can be evaluated by the amount of risk they are willing to take (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Organizational trust empowers employees to take risks and not worry about motives of management. Low trust environments have stifled data flow causing groups to underperform and can be identified through grapevine behavior, ambiguity, and protective language (Gibb, 1964). Although research suggests high levels of trust are essential for organizations who seek success, data reveals how seldom it is found in today's workplace. Stephen Covey (2006) cites only 51% of employees have trust or confidence in their senior management. This lack of trust inhibits upward communication and increases suspicion of management's motives and decision making (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1973).

2.12 MANAGEMENT/ EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Influencing employee motivation at significant levels is employer/employee relations. Research conducted by Tangiraia (2008) suggests although employees may possess a great pride in their profession and maintain a high level of commitment to the organization, employee silence will continue to be prevalent unless these attributes were accompanied by a group-level perception that fairness is granted to all workers. He states, "If everyone in the workgroup feels that the supervisor is fair, employees

worry less about personal retaliation and about creating problems for their co-workers when relaying information about a problem to a supervisor." (p.2) Likewise, when employees perceive unjust treatment by management, unclear reporting structures, high centralization, poorly-conducted performance reviews, and erratic decisions are likely (Harlos, 2001).

2.13 PERCEPTION OF POTENTIAL NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES

An employee's influence and job performance is impacted by how others within the organization perceive him. A positive public image helps employees acquire sought-after social outcomes including approval, friendship, and power (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) while maintaining access to resources controlled by others (Ashford & Tsui, 1991). Employees are unlikely to participate in behaviors that could damage others' perception of them (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). The desire for employees to be viewed as loyal and valuable contributors to the organization provides the organization itself with considerable sanctioning power. "A wide range of techniques can be used to change the opinions and behaviors of a deviant member: from occasional remarks or jokes that alert the deviant to the group norm, to (threats of) rejection and expulsion" (T'Hart, 1991, p.253).

Morrison and Milliken (2003) illustrate the compounding effects when an employee, who speaks up about a problem, becomes negatively viewed by peers.

> One may, for example, be excluded from important discussions. As social ties weaken, one may also have difficulty getting others' cooperation and support for work-related projects. Without cooperation and support, it may be difficult to

> get one's job done effectively. And if a person cannot accomplish his or her job effectively, the person's organizational career is likely to suffer. (p. 1470)

Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) provide evidence that employees should be legitimately concerned about how others in their organization perceive them. They suggest assigned labels are communicated in organizations and that others simply assume the labels are valid. Further, labeling impacts social interactions, changes social identities, and establishes self-fulfilling prophecies that seemingly validate the labels. Employees, aware of the labeling process and the associated negative effects, evaluate the likelihood of gaining a negative image or label before speaking up about a problem or concern (Morrison & Milliken, 2003).

Research conducted by Chad Brinsfield (2009) indicates many employees fear speaking up will result in some form of material harm including loss of employment, career damage, or being assigned to less desirable work. Employees, who fail to convince administration of the validity of their problem or concern, run the risk of having administration view them as incompetent or even disloyal to the organization (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992). In extreme situations where individuals consider an attempt to blow the whistle to stop illicit activity, research suggests these individuals are likely to suffer retaliation by those who stand to benefit from the wrongdoing (Sumanth, 2011). Since organizational effectiveness is often generated through inter-personal relationships, cooperation, and creditability, employees fear a negative image like "troublemaker" will lead to organizational retaliation including social exclusion which negatively impacts their job performance (Morrison & Milliken, 2003).

Other forms of silence are motivated by concern for others, rather than by fear of negative personal consequences that might occur from speaking up (Van Dyne, 2003). Voicing organizational shortfalls may reveal a co-worker's inability to fulfill job requirements, resulting in the co-worker's termination or other disciplinary consequences. This potential is heightened when a closeness or unity among employees has been established.

2.14 IMPACT ON EDUCATION

School districts continue to seek ways to improve educational experiences for students. With heightened levels of reporting and accountability, school administrators must ensure optimal decisions are being made. The ability of administrators to gather accurate information is a critical component in preventing organizational problems. Teachers participating in employee silence prevent their administrators from becoming informed of important information and increase the likelihood for principals to make faulty decisions.

Impact of Message on School Communication

Yariv (2006) studied principals' actions when presenting teachers with negative feedback. Results suggest principals often ignore or soften criticism when communicating with underperforming teachers. Although submitting negative feedback is considered a "sensitive and anxious encounter" (Cardno, 2001), several factors have been identified to influence the tendency of the leader to communicate poor performance. Principals whose evaluations are based upon employee performance have been found to initiate critical communication and provide more

frequent and directive feedback, than administrators who are not as accountable for employee performance (Moss & Martinko, 1998). Further, when a message is perceived as potentially threatening, both sides (administrator and teacher) are inclined to save themselves from that experience (Yariv, 2006). This softening of negative information is consistent with the earlier mentioned "MUM effect" which emphasized the discomfort associated with communicating bad news.

Impact of Setting on Teacher Communication

In Sweden, an educational study investigated communication tendencies between teachers and their administrators. Survey results suggested the setting in which meetings are conducted is a determining factor in teachers voicing their opinions. Findings revealed teachers are more likely to remain quiet in school-wide meetings. In contrast, smaller group formats provided opportunities for teachers to be more open about their beliefs (Arlestig, 2007). The comfort level of teachers was also examined when communicating in the one-on-one setting with their principal. Results revealed, "More than half of the teachers felt they could go to the principal if they had problems" (p. 268).

Arlestig's claims support the effort of this study in investigating the prevalence of teachers participating in employee silence practices. Although he does not describe the types of messages teachers feel uncomfortable sharing, Arlestig does acknowledge the existence of teacher silence and the effect setting plays in teachers' deciding to voice their opinions or remain silent.

Impact of Administration's Listening on Teacher Communication

Teachers may not raise problems or concerns to their principals because they may believe their administration is uninterested in what they have to say. Principals who are ineffective in communicating, including their inability or unwillingness to listen to what others say, "Confound problem solving, reduce trust, and magnify feelings of isolation among administrators, teachers, and support personnel" (Blasé & Blasé, 2001, p. 25). Affirmation and feedback by principals are beneficial in demonstrating concern for individual teacher's needs and influencing the construction of the school's culture (Arlestig, 2007). Patterson (1993) noted when principals are open to teacher participation, diversity, conflict, reflection, and mistakes, a positive culture in the school can be established.

If principals desire to become fully informed of potential problems or identify areas of school improvement, they must first be willing to listen. It can be inferred that teachers participate in employee silence because of principals' unwillingness to listen to their concerns or value what they have to say.

Impact of School Climate on Teacher Communication

Research reveals climate to be an influencing factor in how teachers communicate. Hoy (2009) suggests principals and teachers who guard information provoke suspicion, not openness and trust. He claims schools that establish a culture of trust "provide a setting in which people are not afraid of breaking new ground, taking risks, and making errors." (p.237). Peterson (1999) stated schools with positive cultures consist of teachers who feel supported and are inspired to learn, grow, take risks, and

work together. Conversely, schools with negative cultures foster self-interest instead of teamwork and breed helplessness and despair.

Impact of Conflict on Teacher Communication

Teachers may feel uncomfortable participating in collaborative work for fear of conflict. Weiss (1992) suggests teachers and administrators are often uncomfortable with any level of conflict and prefer isolation to the tensions involved in joint decision making. Being responsible for classroom instruction, teachers may feel team planning may lead to a group decision which is contrary to their own personal preference. Therefore, in an effort not to jeopardize rapport with colleagues by debating proper instructional practices, teachers may prefer to withdraw from collaboration in an attempt to maintain their traditional pedagogy.

In summary, the majority of studies involving employee silence exist outside educational research. However, since organizational science research reveals employee silence to be rampant in industry, it can be assumed some degree of employee silence exists in schools. The focus of this study is to identify the comfort level of teachers when sharing problems or concerns with their principals and to determine how frequently teachers across South Carolina participate in employee silence. Conducting such research will decrease the literature gap currently existing in today's educational research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter three describes the organization and evaluation of the data collected in this study. Roberts (2004) suggests effective quantitative studies are divided into five sections: research design, sample selection and procedures, description of instrumentation, data collection procedures and analysis, and limitations. Chapter three follows this outline.

Effective leaders are effective decision makers. When principals are able to receive relevant and accurate information they are able to make decisions which can benefit their school. However, business researchers suggest employees are often reluctant in sharing problems or concerns with their administrators (Morrison & Milliken, 2003). Such reluctance can potentially jeopardize a leader's ability to make sound decisions.

The conceptual framework of this study suggests an employee's decision to voice organizational problems or concerns involves three phases. First, employees become aware of a problem, idea, or concern. Second, before an individual participates in upward communication, the employee acknowledges the impact of influencing variables, including individual or organizational characteristics, anticipated negative

consequences, or a belief that speaking up will not make a difference. Finally, after consideration of the influencing variables and the potential costs for speaking up, a decision is made by the individual to raise the problem or concern to the supervisor or to remain silent. The researcher investigated the extent of employee silence in public schools across South Carolina and identified influencing factors which impact teachers' comfort levels when voicing problems. For this study, employee silence is identified as the purposeful withholding of ideas, questions, concerns, information, or opinions by employees about issues relating to their jobs and the organizations in which they work (Morrison & Milliken, 2003).

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. How comfortable are South Carolina teachers when voicing their work related problems or concerns to their principals?
2. How do individual and organizational characteristics influence South Carolina teachers' comfort levels when voicing issues or problems to their administration?
3. What reasons do South Carolina teachers give for not speaking to their principals about work related problems or concerns?
4. Do South Carolina elementary, middle, and high school teachers differ in their comfort level when sharing concerns or problems with administration?

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A quantitative research approach was used to determine the comfort level of South Carolina teachers when expressing concerns or problems to their principals. Variables which influence teachers' likelihood to remain silent were also identified. The

study is exploratory as little research has been conducted on employee silence in education.

3.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population for this study involves active public school teachers in South Carolina who are executive members of the Palmetto State Teachers Association (PSTA). The PSTA executive membership consists of educators across all demographics who have indicated their interest in receiving electronic newsletters, association updates, and educational advocacy opportunities. To ensure appropriate participation, teachers identified in survey response question 3 as working in private, charter, virtual, or other school settings were not included in this study. Further, respondents who identified themselves as working outside the K-12 setting were also excluded from the study. Because many districts have research restraints and stringent permission procedures for conducting research, the researcher received endorsement of the Palmetto State Teacher's Association (PSTA) and was provided access to their executive membership. The President and Executive Director of the PSTA ensured the researcher their executive membership consisted of a diverse demographic and included over 3000 teachers from across the state. The Palmetto State Teacher's Association (PSTA) was established in 1976 and has a membership made up of 90% classroom teachers. PSTA is not affiliated with any national union and has become the fastest growing teaching association in South Carolina (palmettoteachers.org).

Effect sizes (small, medium, and large), alpha levels, and power were used to determine required sample sizes. Table 3.1 outlines the power analysis based on

multiple regression models with five predictors and illustrates the various sample sizes needed to detect small, medium, and large effect sizes ($\alpha = .05$). The researcher delivered 4205 surveys and the expected return rate was 20% (840 surveys).

Table 3.1
Power Analysis Findings

Effect Size f^2	α Err Probability	Power (1-β)	Total Sample Size
.02	.05	.80	647
.05	.05	.80	92
.08	.05	.80	43

An analysis of the sample took place after survey responses were compiled. Simple statistics for years of experience, current grade levels taught, mobility aspirations, content of message, and current relationship with administration are included in chapter four.

3.3 INSTRUMENTATION

Although multiple techniques could have been used to collect data for this study, Isaac & Michael (1997) suggest a survey would be most appropriate for studies such as the following:

> Survey research is used to answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems that have been posed or observed, to assess needs and set goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, to analyze trends across time, and generally, to describe what exists, in what amount, and in what context. (p. 136)

Developing the survey required a review of applicable literature to determine the specific variables needing to be examined. Previous research reveals variables which impact an employee's decision to communicate with his or her supervisor, including work experience, mobility aspirations, organizational trust, relationship with supervisor, fear of negative outcomes, and a belief that speaking up will not make a difference (O'Reilly, 1974 ; Morrison & Milliken, 2003; Van Dyne, 2003). These variables were the foundation for how the conceptual framework was developed.

The specific survey used in this study was derived from earlier work conducted by Morrison and Milliken (2003). Morrison and Milliken designed a qualitative study of 40 employees from various industry backgrounds. Their eight question interview guide was converted by the researcher into a 13 question survey, divided into sections A and B (see Appendix B). Section A gathered participant's background information including the following: years of experience, mobility aspirations, grade level taught, relationship status with principal, and comfort level when speaking with their principals regarding problems or concerns. These questions used a 5- point Likert scale as it allows respondents to choose a neutral response, preventing potential distortions in the data (Garland, 1991). Section B is composed of seven questions (items 8-13) and identified reasons teachers are uncomfortable sharing problems or concerns with their administration. Participants indicated their agreement to the survey statements by selecting responses ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Questions used in the survey are specifically designed to answer the study's four research questions and include variables which have been discussed in the literature review. Alignment of the

survey items to the study's research questions, conceptual framework, and variables can be found in Appendix C. Table 3.1 shows alignment between survey items, corresponding variables, and the research questions.

Table 3.2

Survey Item, Variable, and Research Question Alignment

Survey Question Number	**Variable (Code)**	**Research Question**
1. How many years of experience do you have as a classroom teacher?	Work Experience (EXPERIENCE)	2
2. Within what grade level do you teach?	Grade Level Taught (LEVEL)	4
3. Which of these options best describes the type of school in which you teach?	Type of School	* ensure sample
4. How likely will you seek a job promotion within the next five years?	Mobility Aspiration (MOBILITY)	2
5. How would you describe your working relationship with your principal?	Relationship with Principal (PRINCIPAL-REL)	2
6. How comfortable do you feel speaking to your principal about problems or issues that concern you at work?	Teacher Comfort (Comfort)	1, 2, 3, & 4
7. Have you ever felt you could not openly raise an issue of concern to your principal or others above you?	Ever Experienced Employee Silence	1
8. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because I do not want to be labeled by others as a complainer or trouble maker.	Fear of Being Labeled Negatively by Peers (LABEL)	3
9. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because raising such issues could jeopardize future evaluations and job opportunities.	Fear of Retaliation (RELTAL)	3
10. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns with my principal because I do not want someone to get in trouble.	Fear of Causing Negative Repercussions For Others (REPERCUSSIONS)	3
11. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because speaking up would not make a difference.	Perceived Apathy From Administration (APATHY)	3
12. A high level of trust between teachers and administration is established at my school.	Organizational Trust (TRUST)	2
13. The subject matter of my problem or concern influences my decision to communicate with my principal.	Content of Message (MESSAGE)	2

A pilot study was administered to a small group of local teachers to test for clarity of directions, ease of completion, time required for completion, and to identify areas for survey improvement. An initial email sent to potential pilot study participants requesting their participation provided a link to access the electronic survey. The participant pool consisted of 30 teachers (10 elementary, 10 middle, and 10 high school) and feedback was gathered through open-ended questions included at the end of the survey. Participants were administered an online survey to ensure the SurveyMonkey software worked correctly. The pilot study survey can be found in Appendix D. Participants indicated the pilot survey had clear directions and was user friendly. The average survey completion time was under five minutes and no issues were noted with the web-based data collection system.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The researcher submitted this proposal to the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board for approval and provided assurance that no participants could be harmed before proceeding with any data collection.

Data collected in this study were gathered through a web-based survey. Research conducted by Heppner & Heppner (2004) indicated that web-based surveys, in comparison to traditional paper-based surveys, provide multiple advantages including the following: 1) enhanced rate of return for participant responses, 2) efficiency of data collection, 3) elimination of manual data entry error, 4) access to larger samples, 5) more efficient data collection, 6) access to better cross-cultural samples, and 7) monetary savings.

The researcher purchased a membership from SurveyMonkey, a web-based data collection company. By entering survey questions into SurveyMonkey's secure website, the researcher sent a questionnaire to each participant via email. The Palmetto State Teachers Association provided the researcher access to its executive members' email addresses and sent members an email encouraging them to participate in the study. The initial email sent to the participants included a welcoming introduction, information about the researcher, the purpose of the study, directions on taking the survey, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix E). Once participants read the invitation and clicked on the URL address, they were directly linked to the survey instrument. Responses uploaded directly to SurveyMonkey's database once participants selected the "Submit" option at the end of the survey. Collected data were accessible only with a secure password created by the researcher, and access codes were assigned to each participant which allowed the software to track individual responses. To increase survey participation, a follow-up email was sent to nonparticipants exactly one week from the initial email, once again requesting their involvement in the study (see Appendix F).

Critics of web-based survey instruments point out the possibility of participants sending multiple submissions (Birnbaum, 2001). Such a practice would violate independence of the data. The SurveyMonkey software used in this study tracked participants' email addresses and eliminated the potential for multiple submissions. SurveyMonkey was programed to send a message stating, "This survey has already been completed" if a participant attempted to make a second submission.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The lack of research regarding teacher silence in schools required the researcher to first prove the existence of such behavior. Therefore, a descriptive statistical approach was appropriate for this study as it seeks to describe either the characteristics of a sample or the relationship among variables in a sample (Babbie, 2010). Inferential statistics were also used to identify the impact of specific variables upon the degree of teacher comfort when voicing problems or concerns to administration.

Data analysis began once the final survey submission deadline had passed. Data were saved as a Microsoft Office Excel 2007 file and were then exported into SAS v9.3 for the statistical analysis to be run.

The first research question provided insight into teacher participation in teacher silence. Survey item six asked individuals to report their comfort level when speaking to their principals about problems or issues they encountered at work. Participants' responses were analyzed and general tendencies in the data, frequencies, percentages, and spread of scores were calculated and are presented in chapter four. Survey item seven asked respondents if they had ever felt they could not openly express issues of concern to their administration. Comparisons were made between business and education research as to the prevalence of employee silence in their respective fields. Responses to survey item seven are presented through frequency tables since the question is categorical in nature.

The second research question targets the impact of individual and organizational variables on employee silence. As indicated in the literature review, business research

suggests employees' work experience, mobility aspirations, level of trust in their organization, content of message, and the relationship with their supervisor contribute to their communication behavior. An inferential statistical approach was used to examine the relationship of these independent variables, including work experience, mobility aspirations, level of organizational trust perceived, content of message, and relationship with supervisor with the dependent variable of the study (teachers' comfort level). Significant levels were calculated and a confidence level of 95% was used in the analysis of this question. Creswell (2005) supports this protocol and states the process of relating two or more variables or testing hypotheses about the differences in the relationship of variables suggests an inferential statistical approach. A multiple regression model was used to compare the multiple independent variables to the continuous dependent variable (comfort level when raising concerns).

The third research question identified reasons teachers hesitate to voice concern or problems to their administrators. Morrison and Milliken (2003) claim individuals remain silent for fear of negative peer perceptions including the following: the damaging of relationships, potential retaliation, and social isolation. Upward communication is also hindered when employees have little organizational trust (O'Reilly, 1974; Covey, 2006) and believe administration does not value their input. (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Morrision & Milliken, 2003) Participants indicated the likelihood of experiencing negative consequences should they voice organizational issues or problems that concern them at work. The data collected from survey items 8-13 were

interpreted using descriptive statistics which allowed the researcher to compare findings to past business research.

To answer the fourth research question, the researcher sorted data into three categories (elementary, middle, and high school) for analysis of variance to be conducted. This statistical test determined if the levels of comfort experienced by elementary, middle, and high school teachers were equal. A between group ANOVA analysis was used when answering this research question. Since the three groups did not have the same number of respondents, a Levene's test was used to assess the equality of variances among the groups.

3.6 LIMITATIONS

Studying an individual's silence or their lack of action is a daunting task. Much is known about the communication of oral messages – what people say, how they say it, and how accurately listeners perceive the speakers' underlying ideas (Greenburg, 2009). However, researchers know little about teachers' comfort level when sharing concerns or problems with their principals. The attempt to conduct such a study has several limitations.

One limitation is the determination of how truthful participants are when responding to the survey. A possibility exists that concerns which participants find too difficult to share with their administration will be just as uncomfortable to share with an unfamiliar researcher. Liad Uziel (2010) labels this behavior as s*ocial desirability* and acknowledges the difficulty in collecting truthful responses:

> Researchers and practitioners who rely on self-reports are often concerned that respondents tend not to answer honestly, but rather respond in accordance with predetermined response sets and styles. Social desirability represents a potential bias and refers to a tendency by respondents to portray an overly positive image of their true selves. (p. 243)

Patrick R. Miller (2010), from the Duke Initiative on Survey Methodology, suggests researchers are able to incorporate techniques into survey construction to make respondents feel comfortable telling the truth. These techniques include assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, proper placement of sensitive questions, and choosing the right mode in which to collect data. The researcher included these techniques when designing the survey instrument to limit the potential for social desirability.

A second limitation is the lack of available research on employee silence in education. Numerous studies have concluded employee silence is widely experienced in corporate organizations. From these studies, the researcher makes the assumption that it is likely some teachers experience employee silence in their schools. As a result, this study used variables derived from business research in the hope of finding similar conclusions in the education field.

Finally, a third limitation is being unable to gauge how participants interrupt the definition of trust. Often employees associate trust with job security. As mentioned in

the literature review, this study suggests employee trust occurs when a leader's actions/intentions are perceived as fair and ethical.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participation in this study was strictly voluntary. Subjects participated with the understanding that their responses to the survey were confidential and anonymous. Individuals were provided assurance that their responses would only be used for this specific research study.

The researcher understands the responsibility to protect the welfare and rights of subjects. Collecting and communicating data was done in an ethical manner, upholding the wellbeing and trust of all participants.

CHAPTER 4

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study investigates communication trends between South Carolina public school teachers and their administration, specifically the comfort level of teachers when voicing organizational issues or problems to their principal. Variables which impact teachers' decisions either to voice their concerns remain silent are also examined.

This chapter describes the collection and analysis of data by first presenting a detailed description of the sample which is then followed by the analysis of each research question. The research questions target 1) how comfortable South Carolina teachers are in voicing work related problems or concerns to their principals; 2) how individual and organizational characteristics influence the comfort level of South Carolina teachers when voicing problems or concerns; 3) the reasons South Carolina teachers give for not speaking to their principals about work related problems or concerns; and 4) how South Carolina elementary, middle, and high school teachers differ in comfort when voicing their problems or concerns to their administration.

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE

Participants of the study were selected after receiving endorsement from the Palmetto State Teachers Association Board of Directors. An initial meeting was held with the executive director and chairman of the board where a detailed overview of the

study was presented. The study was then approved by the Palmetto State Teachers Association Board of Directors and the researcher was granted permission to send the electronic survey to the organization's executive membership. Executive members are individuals of the organization who indicated their willingness to receive emails and other mailings upon their initial joining of the association.

A total of 4205 Palmetto State Teachers Association members were invited to participate in this study. Table 4.1 illustrates the survey's response rate. Of the 4205 invitations sent, 176 emails were undeliverable due to participants' security filters or invalid email addresses. Further, four members indicated their inability to complete the survey because of problems encountered when accessing the website, and five members stated the study did not apply to them because they held administrative positions. The final response rate of 18% was calculated after removing the undeliverable addresses and the nine predetermined non-responders from the initial member list.

TABLE 4.1

Survey Return Rate of Palmetto State Teachers Association Executive Membership

	Teachers Invited to Participate In Survey (Population)	Sample	Return Rate
Initial Contact List	4205	709	17%
Final Contact List	4020	709	18%

The Palmetto State Teachers Association does not limit membership to K-12 public school teachers. Administrators along with teachers from private, charter, and

virtual schools are also welcomed in their membership. Survey items two and three were designed to ensure participants in this study were restricted to K-12 public school teachers. Results from the population sample revealed 39 participants did not teach in a K-12 setting, and 24 participants indicated they taught outside the South Carolina public school system. These participants, along with 51 incomplete surveys, were removed from the data making the final sample size of 595. Surveys were considered incomplete if one or more questions were unanswered.

The teachers' demographic data were analyzed and summarized in table 4.2. The survey focused on characteristics including years of experience, grade level taught, mobility aspirations, relationship with principal, content of message, and the perceived level of trust between teachers and administration. Half of the respondents had over 16 years of experience with 34.1% having over 21 years of experience. Likewise, the majority of teachers identified themselves as teaching in a typical elementary school setting (grades kindergarten to fifth grade). A large percentage of teachers felt it was either *unlikely* or *very unlikely* that they would seek a job promotion during the next five years. Responses indicated few individuals had *very close* (12.9%) or *very distant* (6.4%) relationships with their principals, and only 35.0% agreed a high level of trust is established between teachers and the administration of their school.

There were no noticeable differences between the original sample and the analytic sample.

TABLE 4.2
Demographic Characteristics of Participating South Carolina Public School Teachers (n = 595)

Survey Question	Frequency (f)	Percentage of Sample
How many years of experience do you have as a classroom teacher?		
0-4 years	73	12.3%
5-10 years	116	19.5%
11-15 years	103	17.3%
16-20 years	100	16.8%
21+ years	203	34.1%
Within what grade level do you currently teach?		
Grades K-5	249	41.9%
Grades 6-8	172	28.9%
Grades 9-12	174	29.2%
How likely will you seek a job promotion within the next five years?		
Very Likely	87	14.6%
Likely	81	13.6%
Unsure	113	19.0%
Not Likely	188	31.6%
Very Unlikely	126	21.2%

How would you describe your working relationship with your principal?		
Very Close	77	12.9%
Close	149	25.0%
Somewhat Close	190	31.9%
Distant	141	23.7%
Very Distant	38	6.4%
A high level of trust is established between teachers and administration at my school.		
Strongly Agree	54	9.1%
Agree	154	25.9%
Neutral	136	22.9%
Disagree	163	27.4%
Strongly Disagree	88	14.8%
Subject Matter Influencing Communication		
Strongly Agree	129	21.7%
Agree	319	53.6%
Neutral	64	10.8%
Disagree	60	10.1%
Strongly Disagree	23	3.9%

4.2 ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What is the comfort level of South Carolina teachers when speaking to their administration about issues or problems that concern them at work?

Survey item number six asked participants to indicate how comfortable they felt speaking to their principal about problems or issues that concerned them at work. Participants selected a response from five options ranging from *completely comfortable* to *completely uncomfortable*. Table 4.3 summarizes the frequency counts and percentages of responses. Half of the participants felt mostly or completely comfortable communicating problems or concerns to their administrator whereas half of participants provided a neutral or uncomfortable response.

TABLE 4.3
South Carolina Teachers' Comfort When Communicating Issues or Problems to Administration (n=595)

How comfortable do you feel speaking to your principal about problems or issues that concern you at work?	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage of Sample**
Completely Comfortable	**136**	**22.9%**
Mostly Comfortable	**179**	**30.1%**
Neutral	**108**	**18.1%**
Mostly Uncomfortable	**122**	**20.5%**
Completely Uncomfortable	**50**	**8.4%**

Participants in the study were also asked if they ever experienced a time where they felt they could not openly raise an issue of concern to their administration. Table 4.4 summarizes the participants' responses and frequency counts for this survey item. Of the 595 responses, 403 (67%) stated they have experienced a time where they remained silent about an issue of concern rather than vocalized their problem.

TABLE 4.4
Teachers Who Ever Felt They Could Not Raise an Issue of Concern (n=595)

Have you ever felt you could not openly raise an issue of concern to your principal or others above you?	Frequency (f)	Percentage of Sample
Yes	400	67.2%
No	195	32.8%

2) How do individual and organizational characteristics influence South Carolina teachers' comfort levels in voicing issues or problems to their administration?

Multiple regression analysis was conducted with SAS v9.3 to examine the relationship between the comfort level that South Carolina teachers have voicing issues or problems that concern them at work (COMFORT) and potential predictors, including years of experience (EXP), mobility aspirations (MOBILITY), relationship with principal (PREL), trust between administration and teachers (TRUST), and the content of the message (MESSAGE). A summary of the descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for each variable is found in Table 4.5.

Participants were asked to indicate their comfort levels when voicing organizational problems or concerns to their administration. The mean for the variable COMFORT was 2.6 suggesting an overall *comfortable* to *neutral* response. This was calculated by assigning numerical codes to responses *very comfortable (*coded a value of 1), *comfortable* (coded 2), *neutral* (coded 3), *uncomfortable* (coded 4), and *very uncomfortable* (coded 5), summing the responses, then dividing by the total responses received (n = 595).

Data for participants' years of teaching experience were collected. Participants choose from responses including *0-4 years* (coded with a value of 1), *5-10 years* (coded with a value of 2), *11-15 years* (coded with a value of 3), *16-20* (coded with a value of 4), and *21+ years* (coded with a value of 5). The mean for the variable years of experience (EXP) was 3.41 indicating the average years of experience fell between 11-20 years.

The average rating for the variable mobility aspirations (MOBILITY) was 3.31. Respondents indicated their likelihood of seeking a job promotion within the next five years by selecting responses that included *very likely* (coded 1), likely (coded 2), *unsure* (coded 3), *unlikely* (coded 4), and *very unlikely* (coded 5). The average rating fell between responses of *unsure* and *unlikely.*

Participants were asked to provide details regarding their professional relationship with their principal (PREL). Responses were selected ranging from *very close* (coded 1) to *very distant* (coded 5). The mean 2.86 indicated most responses were clustered between the *somewhat close* and *close* responses.

The level of trust established between administration and teachers was examined to determine its influence on teachers' comfort levels when voicing organizational problems or concerns. Teachers selected responses ranging from *strongly agree* (coded 1) to *strongly disagree* (coded 5) when asked if a high level of trust was established between teachers and administration. The mean of responses was 3.13 suggesting an overall *neutral* response.

The final predictor variable, content of message (MESSAGE), was examined to determine if upward communication within schools was influenced by the type of

message teachers communicated. Participants selected responses ranging from *Strongly Agree* (coded 1) to *Strongly Disagree* (coded 5) which determined a mean of 2.21. This suggests an overall agreement to the statement, "The subject matter of my problem or concern influences my decision to communicate with my principal."

TABLE 4.5
Descriptive Statistics of Five Predictors of Comfort Level (n = 595)

Variable	Mean	Std	Sk	Ku
COMFORT	2.62	1.27	0.33	-1.04
EXP	3.41	1.43	-0.30	-1.31
MOBILITY	3.31	1.34	-0.42	-1.00
PREL	2.86	1.11	0.00	-0.77
TRUST	3.13	1.21	-0.06	-1.03
MESSAGE	2.21	1.02	1.04	0.67

The inclusion of the five predictors in the regression model yielded statistically significant results and accounted for 60% of the observed variance in teacher comfort (t=180.59, $p < .05$). Likewise, the regression equation for this study yielded a sizable average prediction error (Root MSE =.80).

All assumptions for OLS were examined. The normality assumption was examined for the OLS regression. All variables had significant results for the Shapiro-Wilk test of the residuals ($p < .05$); however, the residuals had a skewness of -0.14 and a kurtosis of 0.63. Given the large sample size, these data are robust to the normality assumption, without jeopardizing the study's Type I error rate. In addition, examination of the residual plot shows the errors to be linear and homoscedastic.

An essential step in multiple regression is to ensure no multi-collinearity is present (Ho Yu, 2008). Multi-collinearity refers to two or more predictor variables in a

multiple regression model being highly correlated. The data set was examined for the existence of multi-collinearity using Variance Inflation Factors and no value was above 1.85. Further, data indicated the tolerance between all predictor variables to comfort exceeded .20. Table 4.6 shows the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the variables of interest.

TABLE 4.6
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Comfort Level Regression

			Intercorrelations				
Variable	**M**	**SD**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
COMFORT	2.62	1.27					
EXPERIENCE	3.41	1.43	-.01				
MOBILITY	3.31	1.34	.05	.39*			
TRUST	3.12	1.21	.67*	.05	.02		
PREL	2.86	1.11	.74*	.04	.15*	.66*	
MESSAGE	2.21	1.02	-.20*	-.01	-.01	-.21*	-.15*

*Note. N=595. * $p < .05$*

Beta weights (standardized multiple regression coefficients) and uniqueness indices were subsequently reviewed to assess the relative importance of the five predicators of COMFORT. The uniqueness index for predictors is the percentage of variance in the criterion accounted for by that predictor, beyond the variance accounted for by the other predictor variables (O'Rourke, Hatcher& Stepanski, 2005). Beta weights and uniqueness indices are presented in Table 4.7. Significance was observed at the $p <$ .05 for the variables TRUST, PREL, and MESSAGE.

TABLE 4.7

Beta Weights and Uniqueness Indices Obtained in Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Teacher Comfort (n= 595)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	Uniqueness Index
EXPERIENCE	-.03	.02	-.04	-1.32	.0012
MOBILITY	-.02	.03	-.02	-.074	.0004
TRUST	.32	.04	.31	8.68*	.0504*
PREL	.61	.04	.53	15.13*	.1529*
MESSAGE	-.07	.03	-.06	-2.15*	.0031

Note. $R^2 = 0.60$, *Adj* $R^2 = 0.60$, *Root MSE = .81*

Trust between teachers and administration was identified as being a statistically significant factor in teachers' comfort level when voicing organization problems or concerns, (t=8.68, $p<.05$). Trust accounted for approximately 5% of the variance in employee comfort beyond the variance accounted for by the other four predictors. For every one standard deviation increase in teachers' perception of trust, teacher comfort increased .31 deviations.

Results indicated a teacher's professional relationship with her/his principal was also a significant factor in the comfort level of teachers when voicing their organization problems or concerns to their administration, (t= 15.10, $p < .05$). Relationship had the largest uniqueness index out of all variables (15%) beyond the variance accounted for by the other predictors. For every standard deviation increase in teachers' perceived closeness to their principal, teacher comfort increased half a standard deviation.

MESSAGE was determined to be a significant factor in teachers' comfort level when voicing organizational problems or concerns, (t= -2.15, $p < .05$); nevertheless, it had very small uniqueness index beyond the variance accounted for by the other four

predictors (< .01). Despite demonstrating significance, the small amount of uniqueness questions its usefulness as a predictor in teachers' comfort level. The regression revealed that for every standard deviation increase in the influence of subject matter on COMFORT, teacher comfort decreased .06 of a deviation.

In conclusion, three predictors had significant unique relationships with COMFORT (PREL, TRUST, and MESSAGE). It is important to note most of the variance explained in COMFORT was a result of the collective influences of all variables in the study as R^2 = 60%.

3) *What reasons do South Carolina teachers give for not speaking to administration about issues or problems that concern them at work?*

Survey questions 8-11 addressed reasons why teachers purposefully choose not to raise issues or problems to their administration. Participants were presented the four most prevalent reasons for employee silence as outlined in the literature review and were able to choose options ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree.* Descriptive statistics for these survey responses are summarized in Table 4.8.

The most identifiable reason participants gave for remaining silent about organizational problems or concerns was their perception that voicing their concern would not make a difference in how the school operates. The rating average for this survey item had a mean of 2.73 (SD = 1.28). In addition, participants indicated the possibility of another co-worker getting in trouble was the least identifiable reason to remain silent (rating average 3.11, SD = 1.12). Approximately 10% of participants selected the *strongly disagree* response implying potential negative outcomes for others

had no effect on these participants' decision to communicate problems to administration.

TABLE 4.8

Reasons South Carolina Public School Teachers Remain Silent About Organizational Problems or Concerns (n =595)

Potential Reason For Silence	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Rating Average	SD
If I voiced organizational issues or concerns with my principal I would be viewed negatively by my peers and damage relationships with my co-workers.	14.4% (86)	34.4% (205)	13.78% (82)	26.2% (156)	11.1% (66)	2.85	1.27
If I voiced organizational issues or concerns with my principal it could negatively affect future evaluations and job opportunities.	19.7% (117)	26.6% (158)	13.8% (82)	26.7% (159)	13.3% (79)	2.87	1.36
If I voiced organizational issues or concerns with my principal I would worry about getting someone in trouble.	6.0% (36)	30.1% (179)	20.7% (123)	33.4% (199)	9.8% (58)	3.11	1.12
If I voiced organizational issues or concerns with my principal it would not make a difference in how our school operates.	18.5% (110)	34.3% (204)	12.9% (77)	24.2% (144)	10.1% (60)	2.73	1.29

4.) Do South Carolina elementary, middle, and high school teachers differ in their comfort level when sharing concerns or problems with their administration?

Research question four focused on the educational setting and examined if teachers' comfort levels when voicing organizational problems to administration differed within the elementary, middle, and high school settings. Participants indicated the grade level they currently were teaching by selecting from the *Grades K-5, Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12,* and *other* survey responses. Survey item six requested teachers to indicate how comfortable they were sharing problems or concerns to their administration by choosing from options including *very comfortable, comfortable, neutral, uncomfortable*, and *very uncomfortable*. Table 4.9 presents the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for elementary, middle, and high school teachers' comfort levels when voicing problems or concerns to their principals.

TABLE 4.9
Descriptive Statistics for Comfort Levels at Elementary, Middle, and High Schools (n=595)

School Setting (LEVEL)	M	SD	Sk	Ku
Elementary (n=250)	2.59	1.28	.34	-1.07
Middle (n=174)	2.64	1.29	.30	-1.08
High (n=180)	2.60	1.24	.36	-.091

Results were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA, between-subject design. The analysis revealed no significant effect for LEVEL, $F(2, 601) = .07$, $p = .93$, $R^2 = <.0001$. The full ANOVA results are shown in Table 4.10. No follow-up tests were conducted after significance was not evident. Consequently, the results of the ANOVA present no evidence that the null hypothesis (LEVEL having no effect on COMFORT) is false.

Basically, the levels at which teachers teach are unlikely predictors of teachers' comfort levels when raising organizational problems or concerns to their administration.

TABLE 4.10
ANOVA Summary Table for the Relationship Between COMFORT and LEVEL Variables

Source	df	SS	MS	F	R^2
LEVEL	2	.32	.11	.1	<.0001
Within groups	592	956.55	1.62		
Total	594	956.86			

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents an overview of research findings, a discussion of results, recommendations for future research, and a summary.

5.1 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study investigated South Carolina public school teachers' communication tendencies when voicing organizational problems or concerns to their administration. Specifically, data was collected to investigate 1) the comfort level of South Carolina public school teachers when voicing work related problems or concerns to their principals; 2) the influence of individual and organizational characteristics impacting the comfort level of South Carolina teachers when voicing problems or concerns to their principals; 3) the reasons South Carolina teachers give for not speaking to their principals about work related problems or concerns; 4) the difference in employee silence experienced by elementary, middle, and high school teachers across South Carolina's public schools.

An online survey instrument was used to collect responses which produced an 18% response rate. Participants consisted of 595 South Carolina public school teachers of which 68.2% had taught for more than ten years while 34.1% had taught for more than 21 years. The majority of teachers were not seeking advancement in their

positions as evidenced by 71.8% of teachers reporting they were *unsure* or *unlikely* to seek a job promotion in the next five years. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, multiple regression, and ANOVA with a between-subject design. Findings are summarized and organized by research question.

1) *How comfortable are South Carolina teachers when voicing work related problems or concerns to their principals?*

Participants indicated how comfortable they were in sharing organizational problems or concerns to their administration by selecting responses ranging from *completely comfortable* to *completely uncomfortable*. Although 53% of respondents stated they were either *mostly comfortable* or *completely comfortable* raising problems or issues to their principal, 28.9% identified themselves as either *mostly uncomfortable* or *completely uncomfortable*.

Respondents were also asked if they had ever experienced a time when they felt they could not raise a problem or concern to their administration. An analysis of survey item seven revealed that of the 595 responses, 67.2% reported experiencing a time when they remained silent about an issue of concern rather than voice their problem to an administrator.

2) *How do individual and organizational characteristics influence South Carolina teachers' comfort levels when voicing issues or problems to their administration?*

This research question analyzed the influence of individual and organizational variables on teachers' comfort level when expressing problems or concerns to their administration. The five variables in this study included 1) years of experience, 2) mobility aspirations, 3) relationship with principal, 4) organizational trust, and 5) content of message.

A multiple regression approach was used to determine the significance and variance of the variables and their value to the overall model. The five predictors yielded statistically significant results and accounted for 60% of the observed variance in teacher comfort (t= 181.63, $p < .05$) while yielding a moderate prediction error (Root MSE =.80). The following section provides an analysis of results along with the significance and uniqueness indices of each variable to the overall model.

Years of Experience

Of the South Carolina public school teachers who responded to the survey, 34.1% of the participants stated they had over 21 years of teaching experience. The mean rating of the participants for the sample was 3.41 *(SD = 1.43*); therefore, it was clustered between the responses of *11-15 years* and *16-20 years.* Teachers who had *0-4 years* of experience made up the lowest subgroup at 12.3 %.

A multiple regression model was used to analyze results and revealed teachers' years of experience did not prove to be a statistical significant predictor of comfort level when raising organizational problems or concerns with their administration (t =1.38, p =

.19). Results from a Pearson Correlation procedure indicated experience had no correlation with employee silence (r < .01).

Mobility Aspirations

The majority of South Carolina teachers who participated in the study suggested they were not seeking advancement from their current position. Results revealed 28.2% of teachers responded they were *very likely* or *likely* to seek a job promotion in the next five years. The mean rating of the participants was 3.31 (*SD = 1.34)*; therefore, it was clustered between the responses of *unsure* and *unlikely*.

The regression procedure indicated individuals' mobility aspirations did not prove to be a statistically significant factor in how comfortable they felt raising organizational problems or concerns with their administration (t =-.74, *p* =.46). Results from a Pearson Correlation procedure suggested mobility aspirations had little to no correlation with employee silence (*r* = .05).

Trust

Of the 595 South Carolina teachers responding to the survey, 42.2% of respondents stated they *disagreed* when asked if a high level of trust is established between teachers and administration while 35.0% *agreed.* Responses yielded an average rating of 3.13 (*SD = 1.21)* indicating an overall n*eutral* response.

Trust in administration was identified as being a statistically significant factor in teachers' comfort level when voicing organizational problems or concerns, (t= 8.68, *p* <

.001). Trust accounted for approximately 5% of the variance in comfort level beyond the variance accounted for by the other four predictors. For every one standard deviation increase in teacher comfort, teachers' perception of trust increased .31 deviations.

Relationship With Principal

A significant percentage of South Carolina teachers identified themselves as having a *close* or *very close* relationship with their principal (38.0%). The mean rating for survey item five was 2.86 (*SD = 1.11)*; therefore, it was clustered between the responses of *close* and *somewhat close*. The least selected responses were from individuals who identified themselves as having a *very distant* or *very close* relationship with their principal at 6.3% and 12.8% respectfully.

Results from the multiple regression analysis indicated teachers' professional relationship with their principal was a significant factor in comfort level when voicing organizational problems or concerns ($t = 15.10$, $p < .001$). Relationship with principal had the largest uniqueness index of all variables (15%) beyond the variance accounted for by the other predictors. For every standard deviation increase in teacher comfort, teachers' perceived closeness to their principal increased half a standard deviation.

Content of Message

The majority of respondents indicated content of message played a factor when deciding to voice organizational problems or concerns to their administration. Of the

595 South Carolina teachers surveyed, 75.3% a*greed* or *strongly agreed* that subject matter of the concern influences their decision to communicate with their administration. The mean rating for the survey item was 2.21 (*SD = 1.02)* indicating an overall agreement. Only 3.6% of respondents *strongly disagreed* subject matter influenced their decision to communicate to their administration.

The multiple regression analysis indicated content of the message was a significant predictor in teachers' willingness to voice organizational problems or concerns (t= -2.15, *p* = .03); it had a very small uniqueness index beyond the variance accounted for by the other four predictors (< .01). Despite demonstrating significance, the small amount of unique variance questions its usefulness as a predictor in teachers' comfort levels. The regression revealed for every standard deviation increase in teacher comfort, the influence of subject matter on COMFORT decreased .06 of a deviation.

3) *What reasons do South Carolina teachers give for not speaking to their principals about work related problems or concerns?*

This research question examined the reasons teachers choose not to voice problems or concerns to their administration. As previously mentioned in the literature review, employees typically become hesitant when raising problems or concerns because they do not want to be labeled as a complainer or trouble maker, they fear voicing concerns may jeopardize future evaluations and job opportunities, they do not want to see another co-worker get in trouble, and/or they have a belief that speaking up would not make a difference (Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Morrision & Milliken, 2003;

Brinsfield, 2009). The following section includes a summary of teachers' reasons for remaining silent about organizational concerns or problems they encounter at school.

Fear of Being Labeled a Troublemaker or Complainer

Of the 595 South Carolina teachers surveyed, 48.8% of teachers responded that they either *strongly agreed* (14.4%) or *agreed* (34.4%) if they were to voice organizational issues or concerns with their principal, they would be viewed negatively by their peers and potentially damage relationships with co-workers. The mean rating of the survey item was 2.85 (*SD* = 1.27); therefore, responses were clustered between *agree* and *neutral*. Only 11.1% of teachers *strongly disagreed* voicing problems or concerns to their principal could cause them to be viewed negatively by their peers and potentially damage relationships with their co-workers.

Fear of Negative Repercussions

The survey revealed 46.3% of teachers *agreed or strongly agreed* they were hesitant in raising problems or concerns to administration because it could jeopardize future evaluations and job opportunities. Meanwhile, 40.0% of teachers indicated they felt no hesitation in voicing concerns for fear of administrator retaliation. The mean rating of the responses was 2.87 (SD = 1.36), indicating an overall neutral response.

Fear of Getting Someone in Trouble

The purpose of survey item ten was to determine if teachers were hesitant in communicating problems or concerns to their principals for fear of getting other

individuals in trouble. Data indicated 43.2% of teachers *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* that potential repercussions for other co-workers influenced their decision to raise concerns to administration. The mean rating of the participants was 3.11 (SD = 1.12), indicating an overall neutral response.

Speaking up Would Not Make a Difference

Results from the survey suggest many teachers had a sense of apathy towards their role in decision making. The majority of South Carolina public school teachers indicated hesitations in communicating organizational problems or concerns to their principal because communicating would not make a difference in how their school operated (52.8%). This survey item yielded the highest agreement having a mean rating of 2.73 (SD = 1.29). Responses were clustered between *agree* and *neutral* responses. Only 34.3% of participants indicated they *disagreed* (24.2%) or *strongly disagreed* (10.1%), suggesting they perceived their input to be valued and influential in school operations.

4.) D*o South Carolina elementary, middle, and high school teachers differ in their comfort level when sharing concerns or problems with their administration?*

A between-group ANOVA model was used to answer research question four. The LEVEL x COMFORT interaction was unable to show significant results that indicated the level at which a teacher taught (elementary, middle, or high) was a predictor for the amount of employee silence he/she perceived [$F(2, 608) = .07$, $p = 0.93$]. Basically, no

evidence was found to show the null hypothesis (LEVEL having no effect on COMFORT) is false.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The conceptual framework of this study was constructed using past business research involving employee/employer communication tendencies and reasons employees remain silent about organizational problems or concerns. As mentioned in chapter one, the conceptual framework suggests once teachers become aware of work related problems or concerns their decision to voice their problem to administration is influenced by 1) individual or organizational characteristics (work experience, mobility aspirations, organizational trust, and relationship with principal); 2)anticipated negative outcomes resulting from communicating the particular problem or concern (supervisor retaliation, viewed negatively by peers, and negative impact on others); and 3) a belief that speaking up will not make a difference. Gaps exist in educational research regarding the prevalence of employee silence in schools along with how comfortable teachers are in raising problems or concerns to administration. The purpose of this study is to fill these voids.

Findings suggest employee silence is present across South Carolina public schools, but it is less prevalent than what is reported in business literature. In a 2003 study by Morrison and Milliken, an *Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues That Employees Don't Communicate Upward and Why,* over 85% of employees reported they had experienced a time where they felt unable to raise a problem or concern to a

supervisor. Comparatively, this study involving teachers indicated 67.2% of South Carolina public school teachers have experienced a time when they chose not to communicate an issue of concern to their principal. The inconsistencies of these findings could be contributed to the differences in research methodologies. The frequently cited work of Morrison and Milliken (2003) used a qualitative interview approach incorporating a sample size of 40 employees from various business sectors. In contrast, this study integrated responses from 595 teachers across the state of South Carolina using a quantitative survey approach. This study was also able to quantify how comfortable teachers feel speaking to their principal regarding such issues or concerns. Findings suggest only 53% of teachers are comfortable voicing organizational concerns.

Factors Influencing Teacher Silence

Research suggests multiple factors influence an employee's decision to communicate to his administration, including mobility aspirations (Kelly, 1959; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974), years of experience (Sprague & Rudd, 1998), perceived trust in an organization (Gibb, 1964; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1973), relationship with supervisor (Tangiraia, 2008), and content of message (Yariv, 2006).

Results from this study indicate teachers' relationships with their principals, the level of trust they have in their school administration, and the subject matter of their problems are significant predictors of teachers' comfort levels when voicing problems or concerns. Tangiraia (2008) has found similar findings in business and suggests although employees may possess great pride in their profession and maintain a high level of

commitment to the organization, employee silence continues to be prevalent unless these attributes are accompanied by a professional relationship with their supervisor.

Data were unable to show an employee's years of experience to be a statistically significant predictor of teachers' comfort levels when voicing organizational issues. These findings differ from Sprague & Rudd's (1998) claims which suggest less experienced employees are more likely to share their concerns with individuals outside the organization rather than voicing them to their supervisor. South Carolina's Department of Education requires districts to provide mentors to beginning teachers. Mentors often introduce teachers to school procedures including proper communication channels. Although the purpose of this study did not measure the affect mentoring played on beginning teachers' communication tendencies, it could be a contributing factor to the lack of statistical significance years of experience has on teachers' comfort levels.

Results revealed teachers' mobility aspirations were not a significant predictor of comfort levels. These findings are contrary to Roberts & O'Reilly's (1974) research which suggested individuals with higher mobility aspirations will be less likely to voice concerns in order not to jeopardize future opportunities (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974). Nevertheless, data collected in this study did not substantiate this claim, and interestingly 28.2% of teachers indicated they were likely to pursue a job promotion in the next five years.

Reasons Teachers Refrain from Communicating with Administration

This study examined the reasons South Carolina teachers gave for choosing to remain silent about organizational issues or concerns. Results revealed 52.8% of South Carolina public school teachers felt raising a problem or concern to their principal would not make a difference in how their school operated. This sense of futility (Morrison & Milliken, 2003) can create mistrust in authority and provoke questions about the perceived intentions of the leader (i.e., motive and integrity).

Results indicate 48.9% of teachers *agree* or *strongly agree* the possibility of being negatively viewed by others as a troublemaker or complainer influences their decision to remain silent regarding organizational problems or issues. This would suggest teachers place value on protecting their image. These findings are supported by research which suggests a positive image often assists employees in acquiring sought-after social outcomes including approval, friendship, power, and access to resources controlled by others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Ashford & Tsui, 1991).

Chad Brinsfield (2009) suggests many employees fear speaking up will result in some form of material harm, including loss of employment, career damage, and being assigned to less desirable work. When South Carolina teachers were asked if they were hesitant to voice organizational issues for fear of negatively affecting future evaluations or job opportunities, 46.2% *agreed* it played a significant factor. It appears South Carolina teachers perceive retaliation or punishment from administration to be more

prevalent than do industry employees, of whom 22.5% cited it as a factor in remaining silent (Morrison & Milliken, 2003).

Results from this study indicate 36.1% of teachers *agreed* they were hesitant to raise organizational issues because they did not want to get another co-worker in trouble. The level of agreement with this survey item is higher than reported in business research. A recent educational trend is the incorporation of Professional Learning Communities. Professional Learning Communities involve teachers working together on collaborative teams that focus on improving student learning and refining instructional practices (Rentfro, 2007). Although these networking and team approaches appear to enhance student achievement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008), it is plausible under such conditions that the desire for unity and positive relationships may influence a teacher's decision to voice problems (which could include deficiencies of other co-workers) to administration.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study examined the comfort level of teachers when voicing organizational problems or concerns to their principals and provides the following recommendations for future research:

1. Additional research is needed to examine teacher silence through qualitative measures to provide a deeper analysis of teachers' communication tendencies.
2. Additional research is needed to understand what types of information teachers are less likely to communicate to their principal.

3. Additional research is needed to understand whether the results of this study apply to private and post-secondary schools.
4. Additional research is needed to investigate principals' awareness of employee silence in their respective schools.
5. Additional research is needed to investigate effective practices administrators can use to increase the comfort level of teachers when voicing problems or concerns.

5.4 SUMMARY

In an era of high stakes accountability, school administration must ensure effective decisions are being made. Whereas the historically bureaucratic structure of school systems is still evident (Eden, 1998), principals are more frequently adopting a collaborative leadership approach and involving teachers in decision making. The literature suggests teachers who feel actively involved in the decision making process demonstrate a greater commitment to decisions and heightened motivation to carry the decisions out (Smylie, 1992). Principals, however, must understand that teachers frequently choose not to communicate to administration for a variety of reasons. This withdrawal often prevents schools from making progress and addressing manageable problems before they evolve into adverse situations (Tangiraia, 2008). Although many school leaders face challenges getting teachers to voice their concerns, it appears building authentic relationships and establishing a culture of trust enhances the likelihood for meaningful conversations.

With an enormous amount of attention and resources being devoted to curriculum development, data analysis, and strategic planning, it appears that more sociological research in social interaction in today's schools is warranted.

This study has quantified several inadequacies in upward communication across South Carolina schools. Data indicate only 53.0% of teachers feel comfortable sharing problems or concerns to their administrators and 46.3% of teachers are hesitant in voicing organizational issues because they feel their future evaluations and opportunities could be negatively affected. This study has also revealed teachers' trust in their administrators, their relationships with their principals, and the subject matter of their concerns to be significant predictors of how comfortable teachers feel raising problems to their administrators. Evidence from this data provides administrators with information about reluctance for teachers to share ideas and information. Understanding the data may open channels for more prolific and productive communication.

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APPENDIX A: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

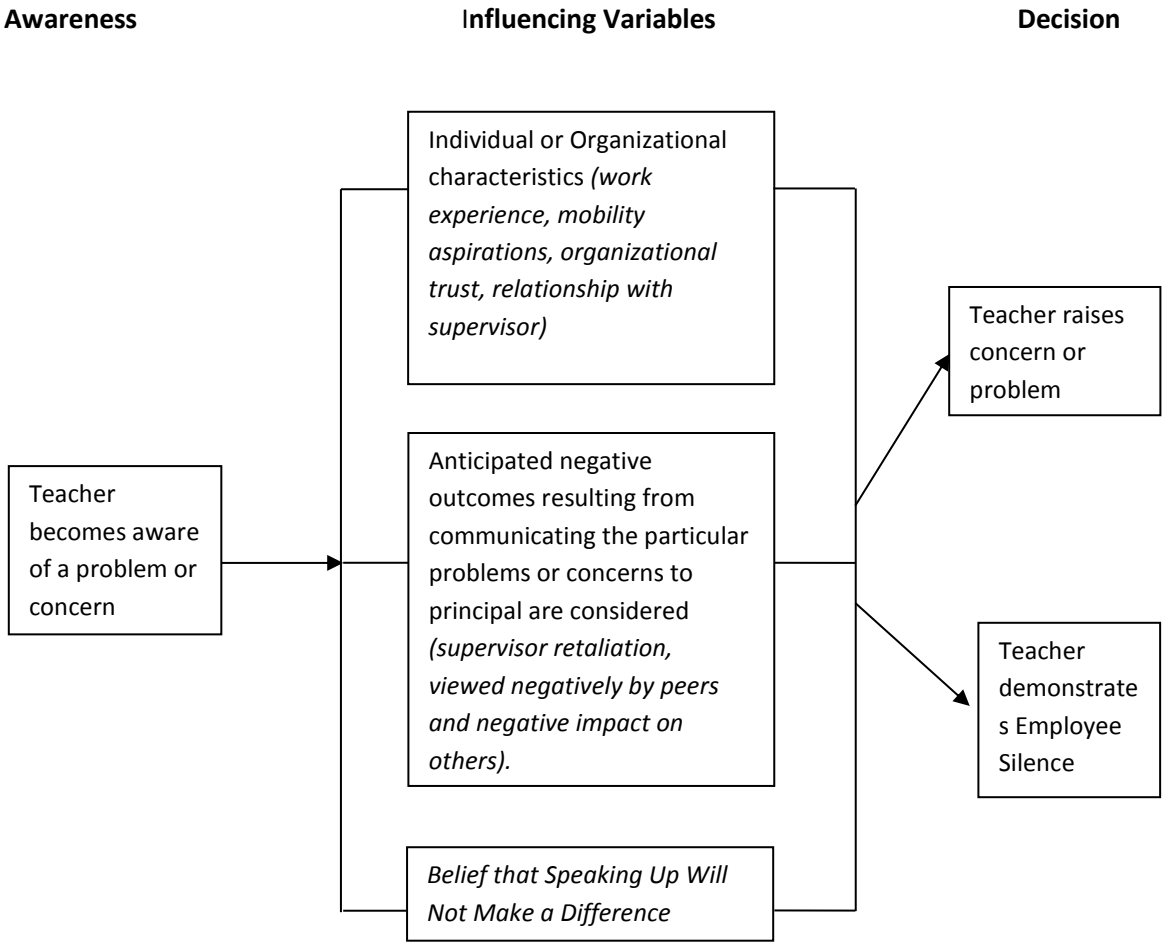

Figure A.1 Conceptual framework for an employee's decision to speak up or remain silent regarding organizational problems or concerns.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Teacher Perceptions of Employee Silence

Section A: Background Information

Please select one response for each of the items that follow.

1. How many years of experience do you have as a classroom teacher?

- 0-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21+ years

2. Within what grade level do you currently teach?

- Grades K - 5
- Grades 6-8
- Grades 9-12
- Other

3. Which of these options best describes the type of school in which you teach?

- Public
- Private
- Charter
- Virtual
- Other

4. How likely will you seek a job promotion within the next five years?

- Very Likely
- Likely
- Unsure
- Not Likely
- Very Unlikely

5. How would you describe your working relationship with your principal?

- Very Close
- Close
- Somewhat Close
- Distant
- Very Distant

The following questions deal with your comfort level when raising problems or concerns to your administration. I would like you to feel comfortable accurately expressing your opinions for your responses will remain anonymous at all times. Please review the following questions carefully and choose responses which most accurately describe your current work environment.

6. How comfortable do you feel speaking to your principal about problems or issues that concern you at work?

◯ Completely Comfortable ◯ Mostly Comfortable ◯ Neutral ◯ Mostly Uncomfortable ◯ Completely Uncomfortable

7. Have you ever felt you could not openly raise an issue of concern to your principal or others above you?

◯ Yes ◯ No

Teacher Perceptions of Employee Silence

Section B: Reasons for Employee Silence

Each of the following statements are reasons employees may give for not communicating issues or problems to their administration. Based upon your current position, please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

8. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because I do not want to be labeled by others as a complainer or trouble maker.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Neutral ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

9. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because raising such issues could jeopardize future evaluations and job opportunities.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Neutral ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

10. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns with my principal because I do not want someone to get in trouble.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Neutral ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

11. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because speaking up would not make a difference.

◯ Strongly Agree ◯ Agree ◯ Neutral ◯ Disagree ◯ Strongly Disagree

12. A high level of trust between teachers and administration is established at my school.

◯ Strongly Agree
◯ Agree
◯ Neutral
◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly Disagree

13. The subject matter of my problem or concern influences my decision to communicate with my principal.

◯ Strongly Agree
◯ Agree
◯ Neutral
◯ Disagree
◯ Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX C: THE ALIGNMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS, CONCEPTUAL RATIONALE, VARIABLES, SURVEY QUESTIONS, AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

TABLE C.1

Alignment of Research Questions, Conceptual Rationale, Variables, Survey Questions, and Data Analysis Procedures

Research Question	Conceptual Rationale	Variables	Survey Items(s)	Data Analysis Procedure
1. How comfortable are South Carolina teachers when voicing work related problems or concerns to their principal?	Business research suggests 85% of employees have felt at some point in their career they could not openly raise an issue of concern.	The frequency of teachers experiencing employee silence within their school.	6,7	Descriptive Statistics
2. How do individual and organizational characteristics influence the likelihood of South Carolina teachers voicing problems or concerns to their principals?	Employees are often hesitant to speak to administration regarding concerns about colleagues' competence, problems with organizational processes, concerns about pay or pay equity, disagreement with organizational policy, and conflicts with coworkers. (Morrison & Milliken, 2003)	Independent Variables: Work experience, mobility aspirations, organizational trust, relationship with supervisor, and content of message. Dependent Variable: The likelihood of a teacher participating in employee silence	1,3-6	Multiple Regression
3. What reasons do South Carolina teachers give for not speaking to their principals about work related problems or concerns	Teachers are fearful of being viewed negatively by coworkers and run the risk of damaging relationships and becoming retaliated against when they voice their concerns to administration. Some teachers develop a belief that speaking up will not make a difference.	Independent Variable: Perception of co-workers, fear of damaging relationships, perceived apathy of administration, fear of retaliation, and fear of creating negative repercussions for others.	8-14	Descriptive Statistics
4. How do South Carolina elementary, middle, and high school teachers differ in comfort when voicing problems or concerns to their principals at their respective schools?	This topic has not been researched in past educational studies. The author's purpose for this question is to fill the literature gap currently existing in educational research.	Independent Variable: Level of instruction (elementary, middle, and high school). Dependent Variable: The prevalence of employee silence observed.	2	Between Group ANOVA Analysis

APPENDIX D: PILOT STUDY

As you take this survey please note of the amount of time required to complete the survey, clarity of questions, any awkward working, and problems you encountered. The final question will ask you to provide feedback which you believe is necessary to improve this instrument. I sincerely thank you for your effort!

Instructions

Please fill in only one response for each of the items that follow.

Section A: Background information

1. How many years of experience do you have as a classroom teacher?
   - 0-4 years
   - 5-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 21+ years
2. Within what grade level do you currently teach?
   - Grades K-5
   - Grades 6-8
   - Grades 9-12
   - Other
3. Which of these options best describes the type of school in which you teach?
   - Public
   - Private
   - Charter
   - Virtual
   - Other
4. How likely will you seek a job promotion within the next five years?
   - Very Likely
   - Likely
   - Unsure
   - Not Likely
   - Very Unlikely

5. How would you describe your working relationship with your principal?
    - Very Close
    - Close
    - Somewhat Close
    - Distant
    - Very Distant
6. How comfortable do you feel speaking to your principal about problems or issues that concern you at work?
    - Completely Uncomfortable
    - Mostly Uncomfortable
    - Neutral
    - Mostly Comfortable
    - Completely Comfortable
7. Have you ever felt that you could not raise an issue of concern to your principal or others above you?
    - Yes
    - No

Section B: Reasons for Employee Silence

Each of the following statements are reasons people give for not speaking up about concerns or problems at work. Considering your experience in your current position, please indicate the extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

8. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because I do not want to be labeled by others as a complainer or trouble maker.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
9. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because raising such issues could jeopardize future evaluations and job opportunities.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

10. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns with my principal because I do not want someone to get in trouble.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
11. I am hesitant to raise problems or concerns to my principal because speaking up would not make a difference.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
12. A high level of trust is established in my school between teachers and administration.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree
13. The subject matter of my problem or concern influences my decision to communicate with my principal.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

Pilot Study Feedback

In the area below, please indicate suggestions you believe could improve this survey.

Sincerely,
Daniel Crockett

APPENDIX E: FIRST SURVEY INVITATION LETTER

Hello fellow educators!

My name is Daniel Crockett and I am proud to be a South Carolina educator and a member of our Palmetto State Teachers Association! To fulfill degree requirements as a doctoral candidate at the University of South Carolina, I am conducting a study focused on communication trends within our profession; specifically how comfortable South Carolina teachers are when sharing problems or concerns with their administration. I am collecting data through an online survey and I am requesting your participation in this study. This study has received endorsement from the Palmetto State Teachers Association and has been approved by the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board.

Your participation is completely voluntary and should take no longer than five minutes to complete the survey. Your responses will remain anonymous at all times and will not be shared with anyone. All results will be examined collectively; no individual responses will be reported or disseminated.

A common source of bias in surveys is social desirability. This refers to the tendency of respondents to over report socially favorable attitudes and behaviors on sensitive questions. To combat the influence of social desirability, I do ask you consider each response carefully and provide accurate depiction of your current work environment.

The survey will be available until February 12, 2013. To take the survey please click the following link:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx

When you click on the link above, the first statement will ask for your participation in the study. If you agree, click next and you will be presented with the survey questions. If you have any questions about this study please contact me at dcrockett@gwd51.org or (864)918-2162. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Joe Flora at FLORAJ@mailbox.sc.edu . Feel free to contact the University of South Carolina's Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-7095 should you have any questions about your rights as a research participant. If you would like an executive summary of

this research study, please email me separately at dcrockett@gwd51.org or respond to this email stating that you would like a copy of the this research study's executive summary.

Your time and opinions are truly appreciated!

Sincerely,

Daniel A. Crockett
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Carolina

Principal

APPENDIX F: SECOND SURVEY INVENTATION LETTER

Greeting Palmetto State Teachers Association Member!

On Monday you received an email requesting your participation in a study which seeks to uncover communication trends within South Carolina Schools. Specifically, the study focuses on reasons teachers feel hesitant voicing issues or concerns to their administration. I am pleased with the rate of response to the survey; however, I am still very interested in your perspective

The survey consists of thirteen questions and typically takes less than five minutes to complete. As a reminder, the survey will be available until February 12, 2013 and your answers will remain anonymous at all times. To participate in this survey please click the following link:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/aspx

As a South Carolina educator and Palmetto State Teachers Association member, I know you are busy and your time is valuable. I am committed to take your perspective and use it to extend current educational research and practices.

If you have any questions, please contact me at dcrockett@gwd51.org or (864) 918-2162. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Joe Flora at FLORAJ@mailbox.sc.edu .

If you would like an executive summary of this research study, please email me separately at dcrockett@gwd51.org and state that you would like to receive a copy.

Thanks for your partnership and perspective!

Daniel A. Crockett
Doctoral Candidate
University of South Carolina
Principal
Ware Shoals Primary School