



Financial Crisis, Organizational Behavior and Organizational Silence in the Public Sector: A Case Study for Greece

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Abstract

The present article presents the empirical findings of a questionnaire survey carried out in Greece, exploring the effects of the recent financial crisis on organizational behavior in the country's public sector. The study focuses on the impact of the financial crisis on organizational management and more specifically on the evolution of "organizational silence", taking into account public servants' hierarchical position, gender, education and skills. Based on the evidence provided, it is concluded that organizational silence is likely to have negative long-run repercussions for public sector productivity.

JEL Classification: M100, M210, M540

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Organizational Silence, Organizational Behavior, Financial Crisis, Gender Issues

1. Introduction

The human factor, its manner of operating within a team or organization, and the management of that human resource component is essential to the proper functioning of a group, business or organization. By extension, the degree of participation of employees, their contributions, views, positions, ideas and proposals on issues or potential problems related to the workplace in combination constitute a key component of the productivity of any company or organization, and this applies as much so in the private sector as it does in the public one.

The aim of this paper is to examine to what extent the productive behavior of public sector employees in Greece has been affected as a result of the measures and policies implemented in order to deal with the recent economic crisis in the country. With this in mind, the findings of a recently conducted empirical study shall be presented, a study that focuses on the investigation of labor relationships and working environments that prevailed in the public as a consequence of the crisis of 2008.

Specifically, it focuses on the emergence of "organizational silence" and how it relates to rank, gender, and education.

The structure used for the paper is outlined below:

- A brief literature review of the matter is presented.
- The methodological approach used for the empirical study is described, and the key findings of the study are discussed.
- Finally, the main conclusions are summarized, thoughts are laid out as to what changes the findings suggest could lead to better outcomes.

2. Theory

The ultimate goal of human resource management is the achievement of business objectives. According to Papalexandri & Bourantas (2003), the objectives of human resource management can all fall under one of the following four categories:

- Increased Competitiveness
- Improving Quality and Productivity
- Compliance with Legal and Social Obligations
- Employee Satisfaction and Employee Development

To that end, in order for businesses/organizations to ensure the greatest chance of survival, growth, and development, it is necessary to recognize the rapid changes in their environment and adapt to them by investing in their human capital.

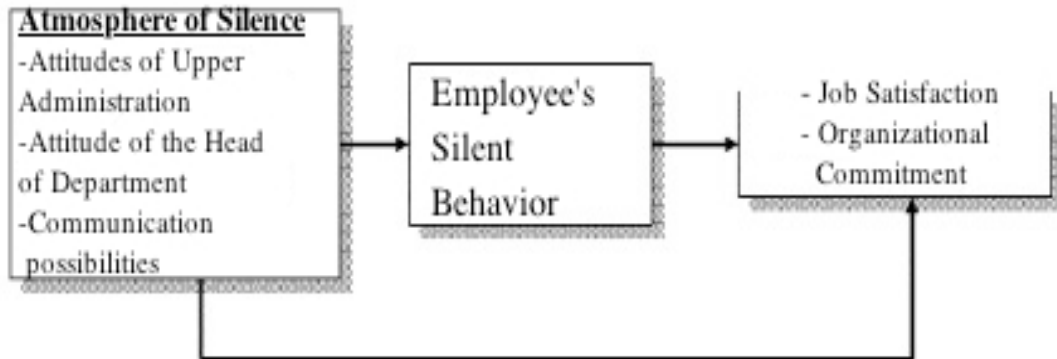
Given that during this study Greece finds itself amidst an extended period of crisis, and constant changes are taking place in all areas of the socio-economic environment of the public sector, the identification of elements that differentiate labor relations developed in the public sector is of critical importance with regards to maintaining and improving that sector's productivity.

According to Morrison & Milliken (2000), organizational silence refers to employees choosing to suppress information or their real opinions, ideas, or feelings about potential problems or issues related to their workplace.

Vakolas & Bourantas (2005), investigated the relationship of a workplace environment that promotes silence with the 'behavior-of-silence' of the employees, and this is displayed in Figure 1. They linked these factors to certain personnel metrics, specifically job satisfaction and organizational commitment/loyalty. Their study revealed a positive relationship between variables related to the stance upper management takes on organizational silence and the 'behavior-of-silence' of employees. Also, a negative correlation was found between the potential for communication and the presence of a 'behavior-of-silence' amongst employees.

Figure 1

Organizational Silence Model



Source: Vakolas& Bourantas (2005)

Although the concept of organizational silence is by no means new, empirical studies on the matter are all recent and they are few in number. From these studies arise the main issues that usually result in organizational silence within businesses and organizations:

- a) performance and competence skills of superiors, subordinates, and colleagues: these issues seem to cause friction between the parties and therefore appear as 'off-limits' when it comes to discussion.
- b) the policies and procedures of the company or organization (Milliken et al., 2003): The employees are reluctant to openly discuss issues such as pay, future trends, intra-corporate conflicts, and organizational problems.
- c) equal opportunities in the workplace and their implications: such matters relating to compensation, potential for advancement, and the extent of workplace differentiation (such as it relates to gender, education, race, and culture as it pertains to nationality)

All studies, whether they have been foreign (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) or Greek (Nikolaou, Vakola & Bourantas, 2008) seem to agree on the causes of the organizational silence phenomenon, a phenomenon which is very negative and the handling of which is great strategic importance for businesses. Those causes are as follows:

- a) **organizational characteristics such as culture and structure** (Vakola & Bourantas, 2005): An organizational culture that does not support communication can emerge because a company feels it does not benefit from the expression of opinions on any negative aspects of the firm. It will therefore not allow the creation of communication channels for the purpose of voicing such concerns about potential problems within the firm, thereby creating a climate of informal and unwritten rules of conduct that reinforce organizational silence. Decision-making procedures limited to a handful of individuals combined with a lack of communication channels favor the development of organizational silence. Employees are convinced that even if they voice their views then those views

will not be taken seriously or acted upon, and therefore these employees are unwilling to bring them up in the first place.

- b) **managers' fear of negative feedback from employees** (Morrison & Milliken, 2000): Specifically, these researchers argue that managers do not want to receive negative feedback from anyone, especially from their subordinates because those managers may feel threatened. Furthermore, if the feedback relates personally to the manager or the manager's behaviors/actions in any way, then those managers will do their utmost to avoid it. When they are unsuccessful at preventing such feedback from reaching them, managers may ignore the negative feedback, disregard it as unfounded, or attack the credibility of the person from which the feedback came. In addition, these authors argue that managers believe that employees residing lower on the organizational hierarchy do not understand the intricacies and operations of the enterprise as well as the managers themselves. These beliefs are rooted in a theory posed by Mc Gregor D., who claims that the sole goal of an employee is to protect her or his own interests. The self-interest theory in combination with the assessment of some managers that "the administration always knows best" leads to the creation of conditions conducive to the development of organizational silence.
- c) **the fear of consequences**: Employees fear they will disrupt their working relationships and that this will have an impact on their daily lives and work performance (Pinter, Harlos, 2001) and Vakola & Bourandas, 2005). For example, if an employee chooses to talk about a lack of cooperation with the intent of improving the situation, it may be misunderstood by that person's supervisor and characterized as a direct attack on the supervisor's management style or performance. Moreover, employees fear the stigma of potentially being labeled as grumpy, problematic, or troublemaking; and this may have an effect on their development and their integration into the department or in larger teams of employees. In some extreme cases, the fear extends to the possibility of losing their position within the company (Morrison & Milliken, 2000, Milliken & Morrison, 2003).
- d) **the mum effect**: People generally show a reluctance to be the messengers of bad news, thus avoiding the awkward position that a person may be found in when said person relays negative information (Rosen & Tesser, 1970). This effect is so strong that many researchers assert the notion that some employees alter the information which they transmit to their superiors so as to reduce the level of negativity.

The presence of organizational silence yields the following:

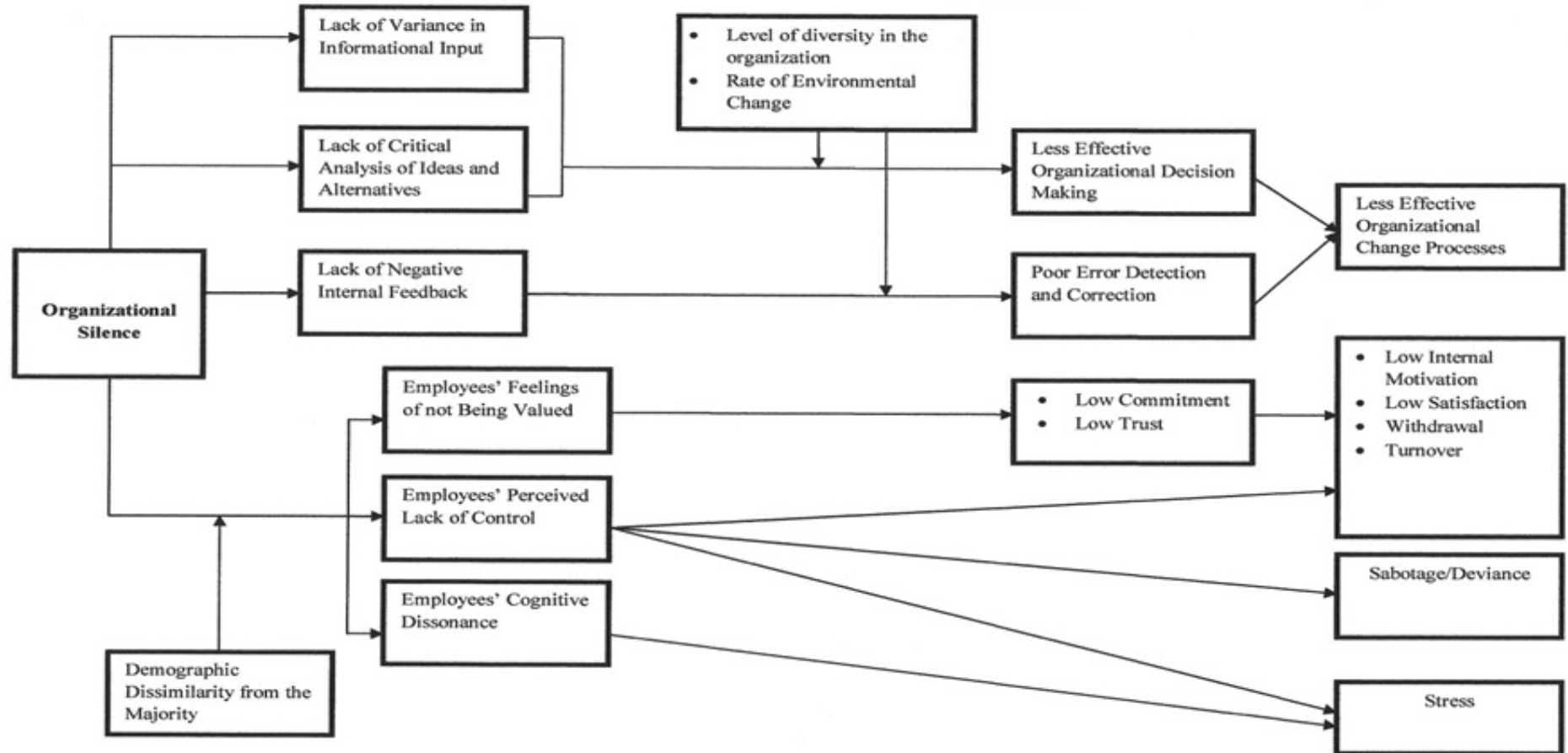
- The prevention of continuous improvement, continuous learning, continuous adaptation to changes, and the introduction of innovations: The existence of organizational silence does not support changes, and as a result does not facilitate developments in the company/organization and employees do not benefit from any potential improvements nor will they seize opportunity, especially during times of major organizational changes such as mergers and acquisitions (Nikolaou et al 2008).

- The reinforcement of less effective decision-making, a lack of consensus, and limited inclination towards implementing changes arising from those decisions: Also, the fact that truth cannot be expressed in the workplace results in the administration having a false view of the situation, and therefore is unable to respond appropriately to the actual state of the organization.
- The decline in confidence of employees in the company's executives: Organizational silence produces cognitive dissonance in employees and this affects their job satisfaction and commitment to the organization.
- A reduction of the sense of satisfaction experienced by employees, a reduced willingness to perform to a high standard, and a reduction in employee motivation and willingness to remain with the business: organizational silence has a direct impact on employee performance, incentive to quit, incentives to perform at a high level, and job satisfaction (Vakola & Bourandas , 2005). An employee who cannot speak to the bad points of the company and work environment, or who feels he or she cannot offer suggestions for improvements, may feel that this contributes to job dissatisfaction.
- Consequences to psychological welfare: A work environment characterized by organizational silence is a source of anxiety and creates negative emotions, such as cynicism and aggression, which ultimately lead to a lack of commitment to the firm (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Figure 2 demonstrates the effects of having organizational silence in the workplace (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

Figure 2

‘Organizational Silence’ Consequences



Source: Morrison, E. W. and F. J. Milliken (2000). Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world. *Academy of Management Review*, 25, pp. 718.

3. Method

For the purposes of this study, a special questionnaire was developed that was founded upon, and serves as a continuation of, previous studies by Nikolaou, Vakola & Bourantas (2008) and Le Pine & Van Dyne (1998), the formation of which can be summarized as follows:

- The first section provides multiple-choice questions concerning the demographic characteristics of respondents including gender, age, years of service, education level, public sector working domicile, hierarchical rank and the recruitment method. This section is concluded with two questions related to the type of command and control process in the company, and two questions about the size of the working group of the respondent and the total number of people employed at the respondent's working domicile.
- The following section provides questions for which respondents are asked to answer on a Likert scale. Specifically, there are 7 Questions concerning the frequency and ease of expressing disagreements, 6 questions concerning organizational silence issues in the working group and the method of communication used within that group, 2 questions regarding the overall self-esteem of the respondent, and finally 11 questions concerning the relationships of employees and how the economic situation has impacted those relationships.

The stratified sampling method was used and the questionnaire was distributed digitally during the first half of 2013. The demographic distribution of respondents is presented in **Figure 3** below:

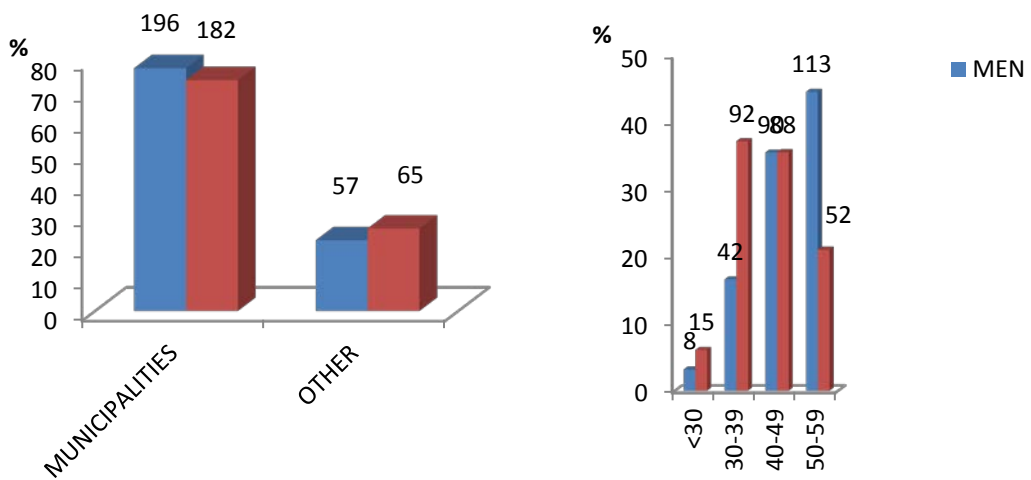
- a) The sample consists of 500 people employed across the spectrum of public sector activities (such as Municipalities, High Schools, Primary Schools, Public Hospitals, County Court, National Insurance etc.). The entire sample was selected from within suburbs and less-urbanized areas of Greece, as the aim is to study the impact of the economic crisis outside major urban centers that consist primarily of employees who occupy roles in local public sector positions.
- b) The respondents' age range is 22-59 years, therefore covering the main spectrum of productive-age employees. In the sample under consideration, almost 7 out of 10 public officials are older than 40 and less than 5% is made up of people under 30. It is notable from the survey that public workforce gender composition (as indicated by gender distribution of respondents based on age) will shift from a male-dominated workforce to a female-dominated one. In the age range 30-39, the proportion of all females represented in this age group is 17% and the equivalent statistic for males is 37%, while in the age range 50-59 the corresponding percentages are 45% and 21% respectively. Unless for some reason women drop out of the public workforce early, this suggests in coming years women will be the majority in the public sector.
- c) Almost half of respondents (47.6%) are secondary school graduates. The smallest percentage of the sample is comprised of Technical College graduates, while university graduates represent almost 40% of respondents. The older public employees are not as well educated when compared to younger public

employees. Also, women in the public sector are typically of lower level educational backgrounds than men.

- d) The majority of respondents (65.2%) are employees and the proportion of managers and department heads are very similar at 16.2% and 18.6% respectively. The men are disproportionately highly represented in upper-level positions in the hierarchy; the vast majority of the sample respondents that are female respondents are employees at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy.
- e) The sample is almost equally distributed between males and females: it consists of 253 men (50.6%) and 247 women (49.4%), for comparison purposes.

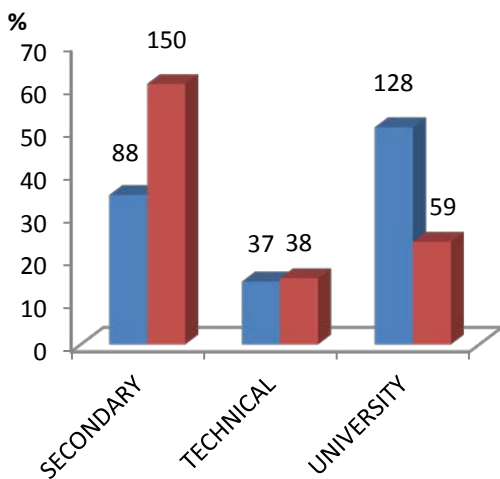
Figure 3

Sample Characteristics

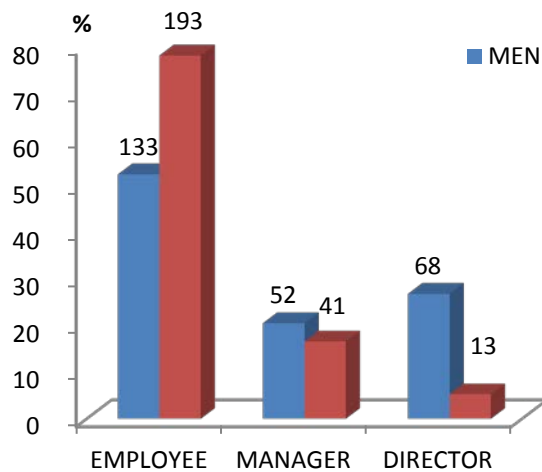


a) Distribution according to the working domicile

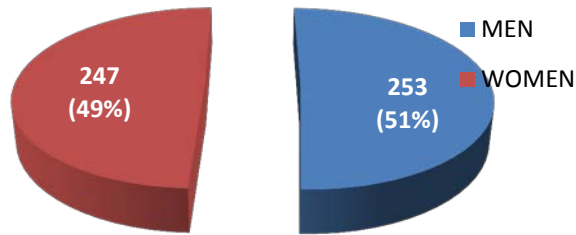
b) Age distribution



c) Distribution according to educational level



d) Distribution according to hierarchical rank



e) Gender distribution

4. Results and Discussion

From the statistical analysis of the questionnaire, it was revealed that gender is an important differentiator of research results. Thus, the following are the main findings by category, and analysis of the role of gender is given in each. In addition, education-level, occupational roles, and hierarchy levels are all discussed in part where the questionnaire presented results that are deemed to be of interest.

The results are classified into the following categories:

1. Employee-supervisor relationships
2. Organizational silence
3. Employee self-esteem
4. Impact of the economic crisis on labor relations

4.1 Employee-Supervisor Relationships

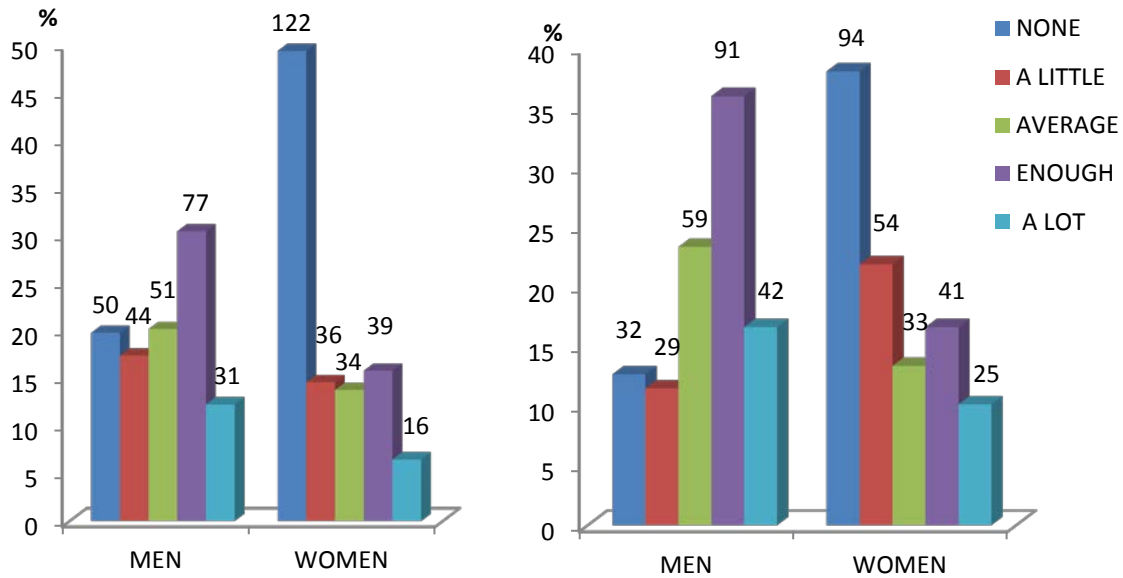
Figure 4 shows the *frequency with which dissenting opinions are expressed to superiors* based on gender, and it reveals the following:

- a) ***For issues related to the employee's specific public service working domicile:*** 1 in 2 employees either do not express any disagreement to supervisors on matters relating to the service or express very few disagreements. Merely 9.4% will disagree with superiors to a large extent, while 23.2% of respondents claimed that they express disagreements often enough on issues related to the service to their supervisors.
- b) ***For issues related to the employee's own department:*** 1 in 4 does not express any disagreement, while 4 in 10 say they express several such disagreements to people above themselves on the organizational hierarchy.
- c) ***For issues related to their own work:*** 67.2% did not respond positively to this question, which meant that their vocalized disagreements with those above them on the hierarchy were infrequent. Only approximately 1 in 5 chooses to disagree frequently with superiors.

- d) **For issues related to job satisfaction and working conditions (such as salary, working conditions, etc.):** they are brought up with about the same frequency to superiors as disagreements regarding a respondent's own work. This is especially noteworthy because salary, which is strongly related to job satisfaction and overall compensation, has decreased significantly in recent years as a result of the economic crisis.
- e) **In relation to gender:** in all cases women express a dissenting voice less often than men do to their superiors. Also both genders express frequent disagreements on issues related to their own specific work rather than the department in which they work, and will even less frequently comment on issues pertaining to their overall workplace.

Figure 4

Frequency with which dissenting opinions are expressed to superiors based on gender



a) issues related to the employee's specific public service working domicile

b) issues related to the employee's own department

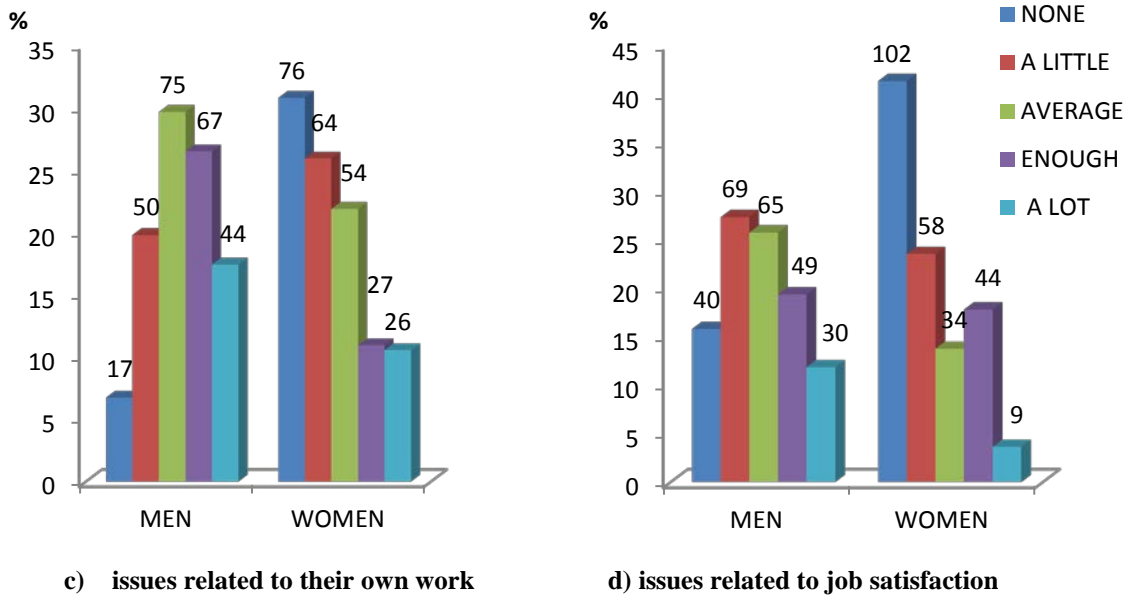
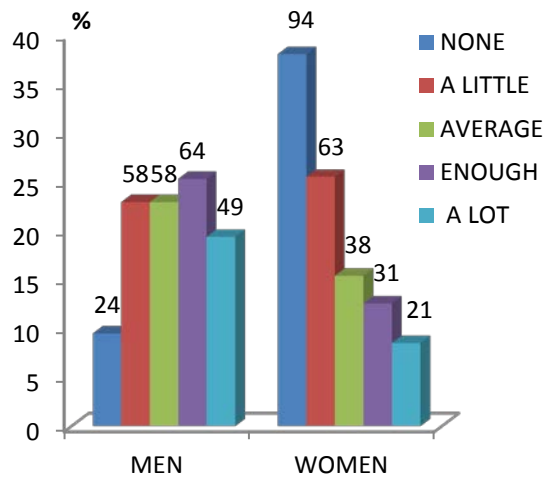
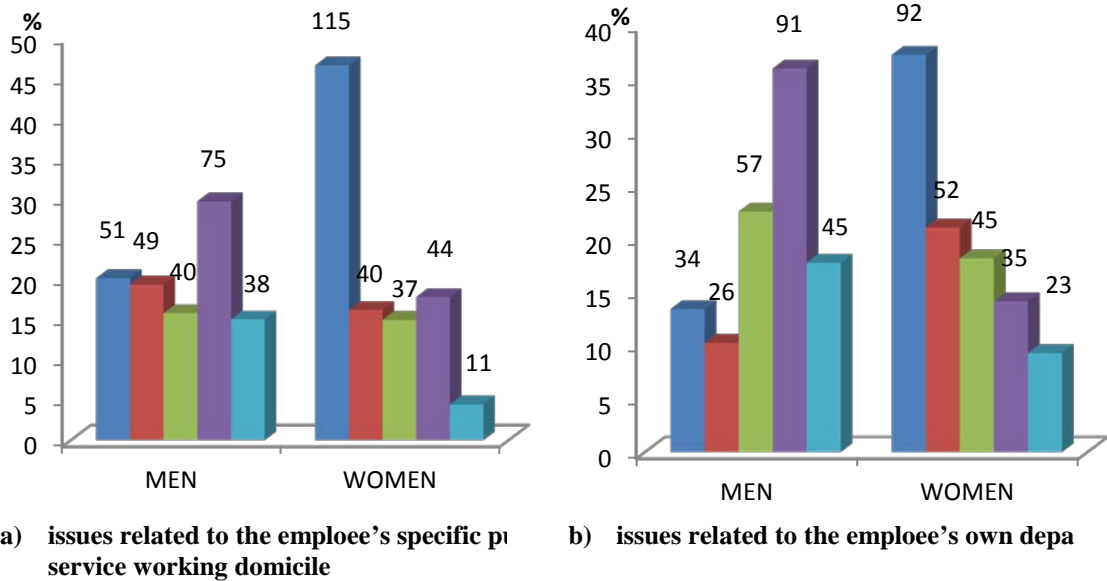


Figure 5 depicts the *ease with which disagreements are expressed to superiors* based on gender, and it makes the following apparent:

- For issues related to the employee's specific public service working domicile:** it is observed that the results to this question do not differ from the corresponding questions relating to frequency (as opposed to ease); and approximately 1 in 2 feel they cannot easily voice disagreements about the service as a whole to a supervisor, while only 1 in 10 employees state that it is easy to voice disagreements to an employee's direct superior.
- For issues pertaining to the employee's own department:** it is observed that there is a marginally better ease of expression from employees, as 4 in 10 do not easily express dissention in general with supervisors. With regard to expressing department-related disagreements to superiors, approximately 6 in 10 find it hard to bring these up with their supervisors.
- For issues related to an employee's own work:** 1 to 2 does not disagree with his superiors about his/her work, while just over 1 in 3 will bring up disagreements regarding his/her work to supervisors with reasonable ease.
- Gender differences:** in all cases men express dissention more easily than women

Figure 5

Ease with which disagreements are expressed to superiors based on gender



4.2 Organizational Silence

Figure 6 depicts the spectrum of behaviors of employees on issues relating to their department, according to gender, age, education level, and hierarchical rank; the following phenomena can be observed from the chart:

- a) **With respect to formulating new proposals for the employee's department:** 35.6% of respondents will not make suggestions or recommendations, or will only make minor suggestions and recommendations, on issues concerning the department in which they work. To consider this further in terms of how it differs based on a respondent's *gender*, it is found that men put forward more

suggestions and recommendations than women. This could possibly be because women have come into the workforce later than men, and the female-demographic in the public workplace has a lower age median than the male-demographic. Furthermore, it is found that the number of suggestions increases with the **age group** an employee occupies. This finding was consistent across the genders, so age was universally a predictor of how likely someone was to make suggestions. Additionally, as it was anticipated, the empirical findings suggested that employees' higher **educational level** and **hierarchical rank** lead towards increased suggestions.

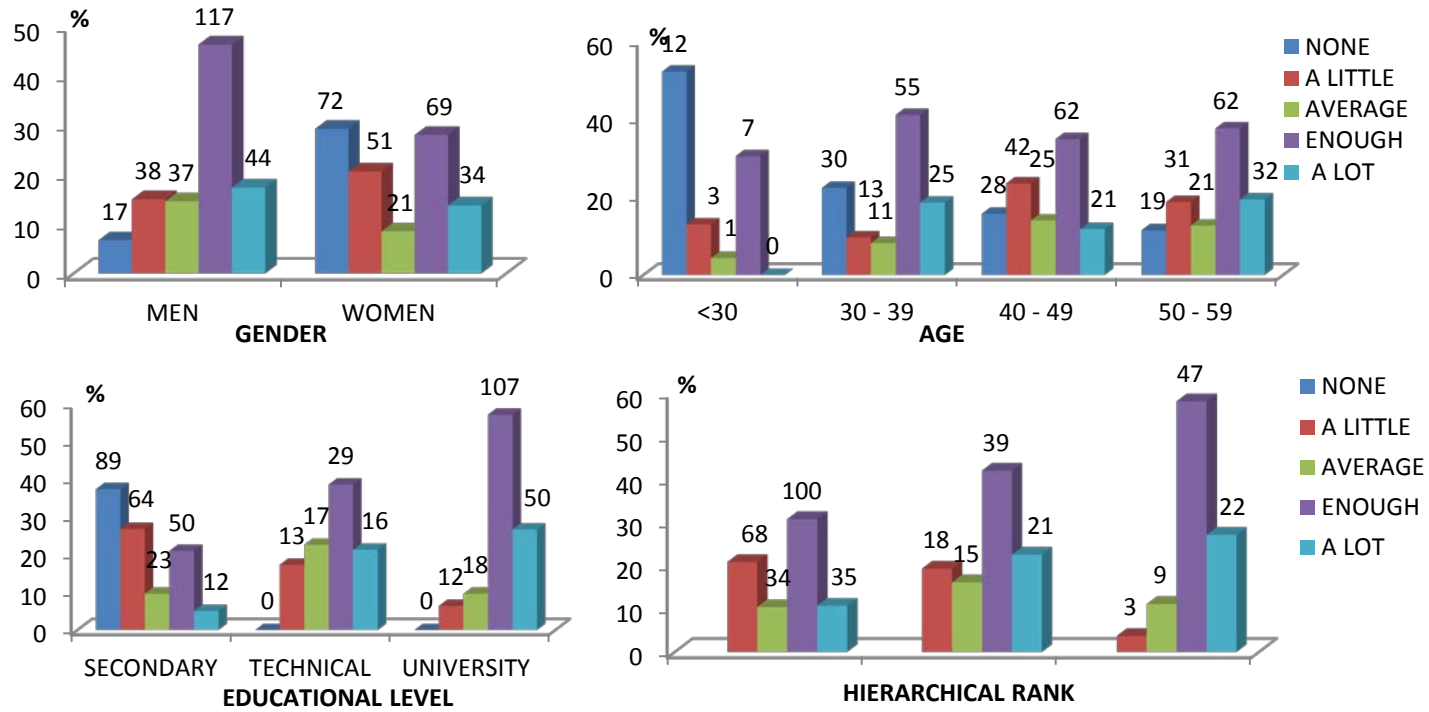
- b) ***With respect to encouraging others in their department to address issues that affect the operation of said department:*** approximately 35% of respondents do not bring up and do not encourage others in their department to address issues that affect the operation of the department. When conducting further analysis of this issue using **gender** as a comparison point, it is found that men in a substantially larger proportion than women will display the aforementioned behavior of encouragement. Once again, this difference can largely be explained by the age distribution of women in the public workforce compared to the age distribution of men. As expected, **age** and **educational level** (University-level education being a very strong indicator) are positively correlated with the probability that one will take the initiative to encourage colleagues to participate in conversations, and make recommendations, pertaining to the running of the department.
- c) ***Regarding the communication of their views on labor issues to their colleagues, even if those views differ and conflict with the views of their colleagues:*** more than half say they speak up even if most of their colleagues hold a conflicting view. The findings of the study on this matter, as far as differences between **genders** are concerned, are consistent with most of the other findings, with men being more expressive of these types of opinions than women in the public sector workplace. Similar consistency can be seen with how **educational level** boosts expressiveness, particularly at the university level. Organizational silence in this context (labor issues being shared with others in the department) is certainly most intense at the lowest level of the **hierarchy**, and becomes less prevalent as one climbs the hierarchy. To clarify further, based upon the rank of the respondents within their respective organizations, it was found that 1 in every 2 low-level employees states that he or she will not communicate a dissenting opinion, confirming the organizational silence that was referred to above. Conversely, in excess of 60% of managers and supervisors communicate their views even if those views are not liked by the team as a whole. Subsequent analysis of this question, based on the amount of experience the respondents have, revealed that with more years of work experience one finds it easier to express opinions, even if those opinions are not fully accepted by the team within which that person functions. However, it is worth mentioning the fact that from a certain point and onwards the years of prior work experience correlates negatively with the communication of views that are contrary to those of the team's majority. In particular we observe that people with less than 10 years' experience are "silent", contrasting starkly with people with 10 to 29 years of experience, who communicate each and every opinion that they have (whether or not those views run contrary to those of

colleagues). From that point onwards, meaning people with work experience of 30 or more years (those who are approaching retirement), employees fall “silent” once more. The reasons for each of the two age groups remaining silent are almost certainly different; a possible explanation could be that members of the younger group fear their professional development could be threatened, while the members of the older group have given up on getting involved in such affairs and simply await retirement.

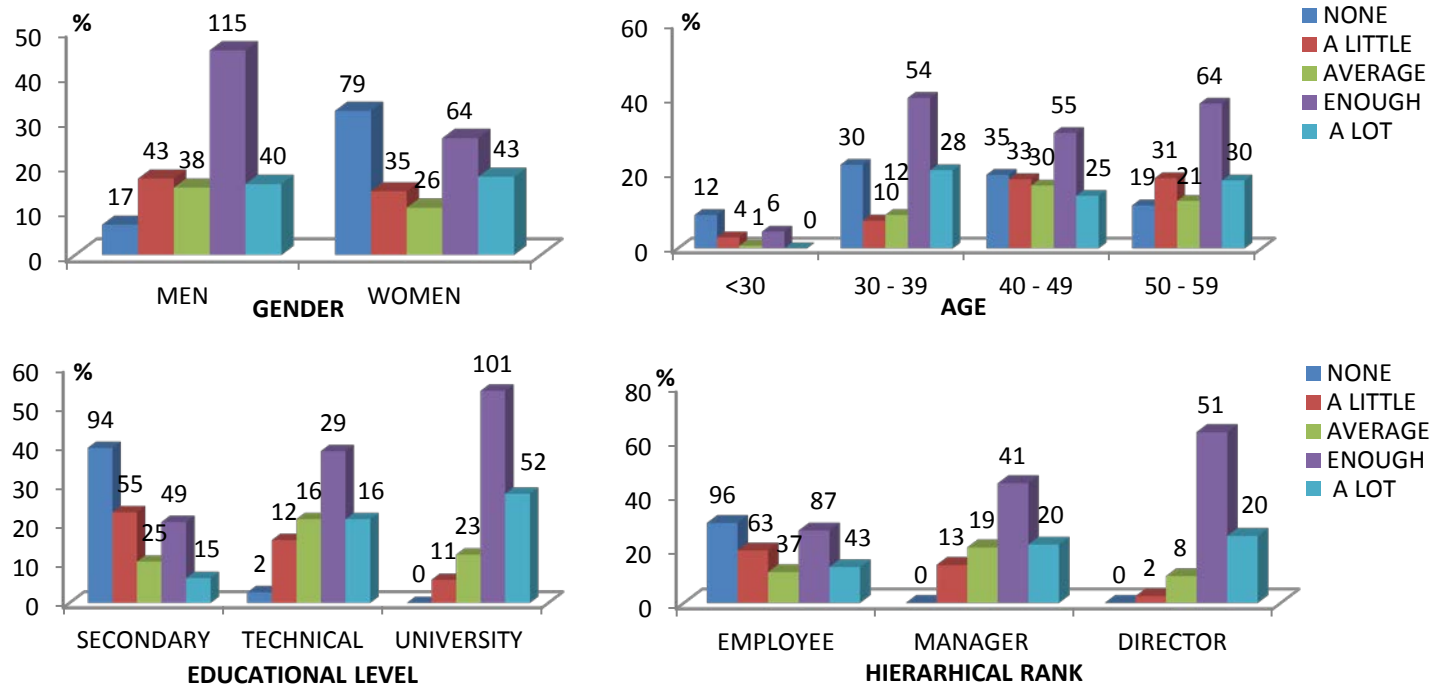
- d) ***Having the feeling of being adequately informed on issues to the extent that one can say with confidence that his or her opinion could be beneficial to the department:*** Almost 6 in 10 (57.8%) state that they are sufficiently informed, and a percentage of 25.8% (1 in 4) say they are not informed at all. In accordance with answers to other related questions on the survey, a difference between how each ***gender*** answered on average was observed: a larger percentage of men feel they could offer opinions that would be beneficial to the department in which they work. ***Age*** and ***education*** are positively correlated with the belief that one holds opinions that are useful to the department, as would be expected.
- e) ***Getting involved with issues affecting the quality of working life in the employee’s department:*** 3 of 10 do not get involved with such issues, but there is a significant proportion (55.6%) of respondents that will get involved with issues relating to the working group in order to make the quality of life within the group better, which is an encouragingly large percentage. In accordance with answers to other related questions on the survey, a difference between how each ***gender*** answered on average was observed: a larger percentage of men feel they could offer opinions that would be beneficial to the department in which they work. ***Age*** and ***education*** are positively correlated with the belief that one holds opinions that are useful to the department, as would be expected. More specifically, based upon the organizational rank of the respondents, the survey reveals that the vast majority of lower-level employees say they do not insinuate themselves into discussions of improving working-life quality, which contrasts with managers and supervisors who do tend to concern themselves with these matters.
- f) ***Suggestions and ideas for innovations or changes in procedures:*** 54.8% say that they express ideas for innovations or changes in procedures. A proportion of approximately 36.6% did not express any view, while approximately 9% took a passive stance. The same patterns that held for the answers for other related questions with reference to ***gender, age, educational level*** and ***hierarchical rank*** were observed for the tendency to make these types of suggestions. Detailed analysis, based upon on the hierarchical position of the respondents, reveals the same phenomena that the study has shown frequently. That is to say, there is still organizational silence on the part of employees, while managers and supervisors will suggest things related to the working group with greater ease and frequency.

Figure 6

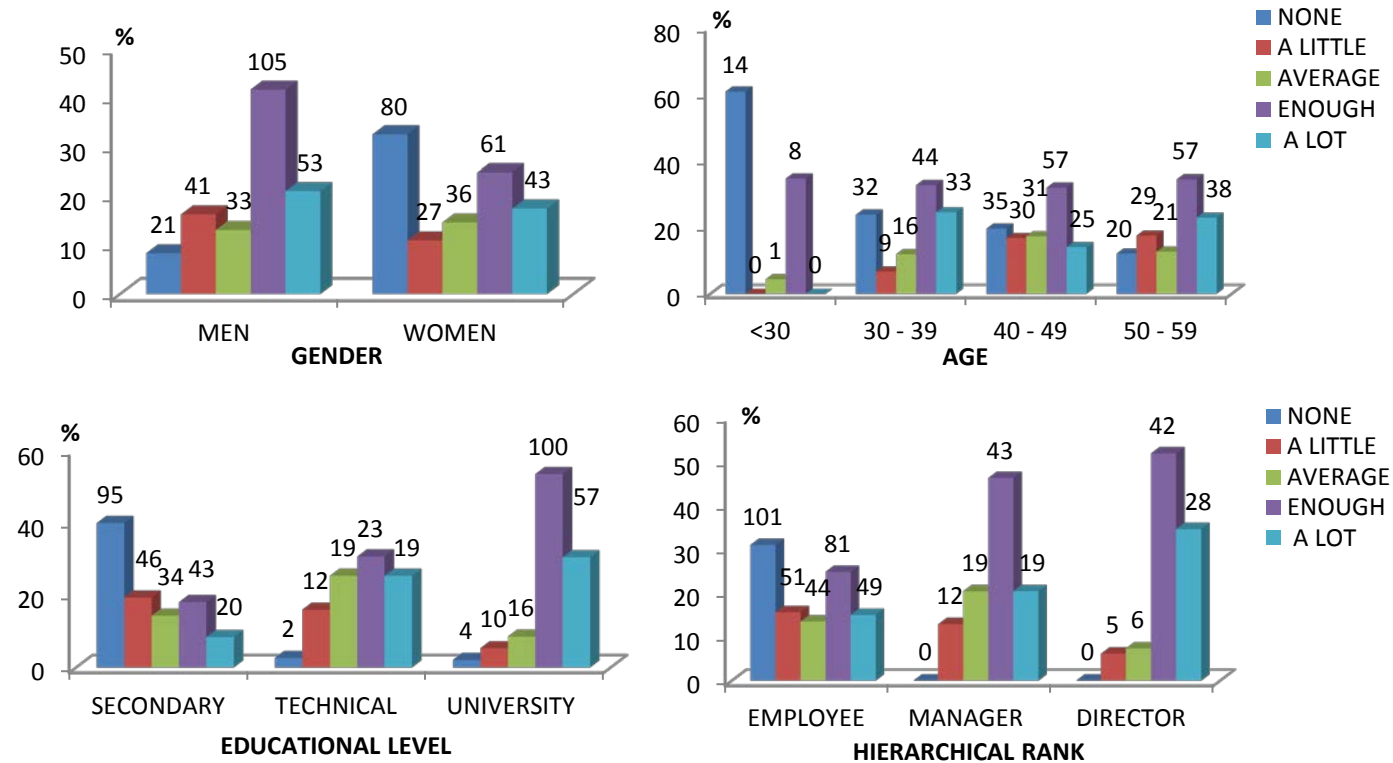
Behaviors of employees (organizational silence) on issues relating to their department, according to gender, age, education level, and hierarchical rank



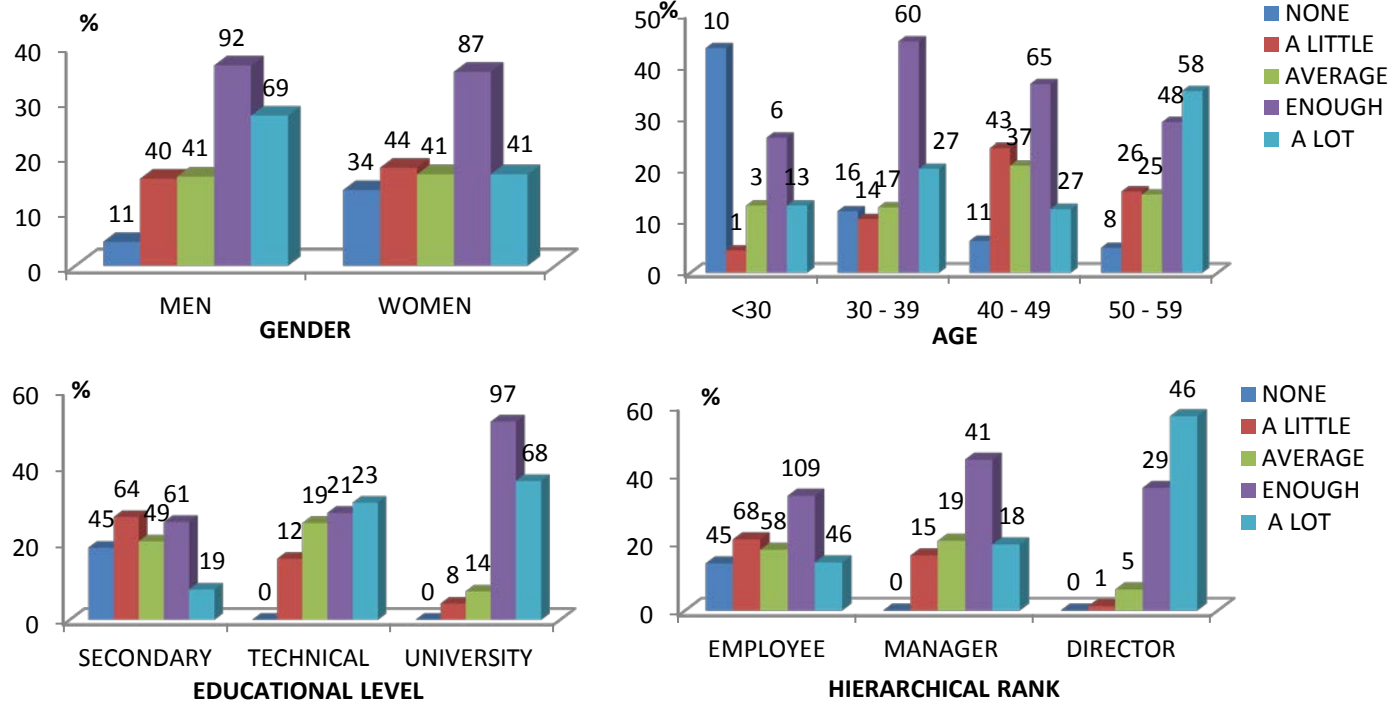
a) With respect to formulating new proposals for the employee's department



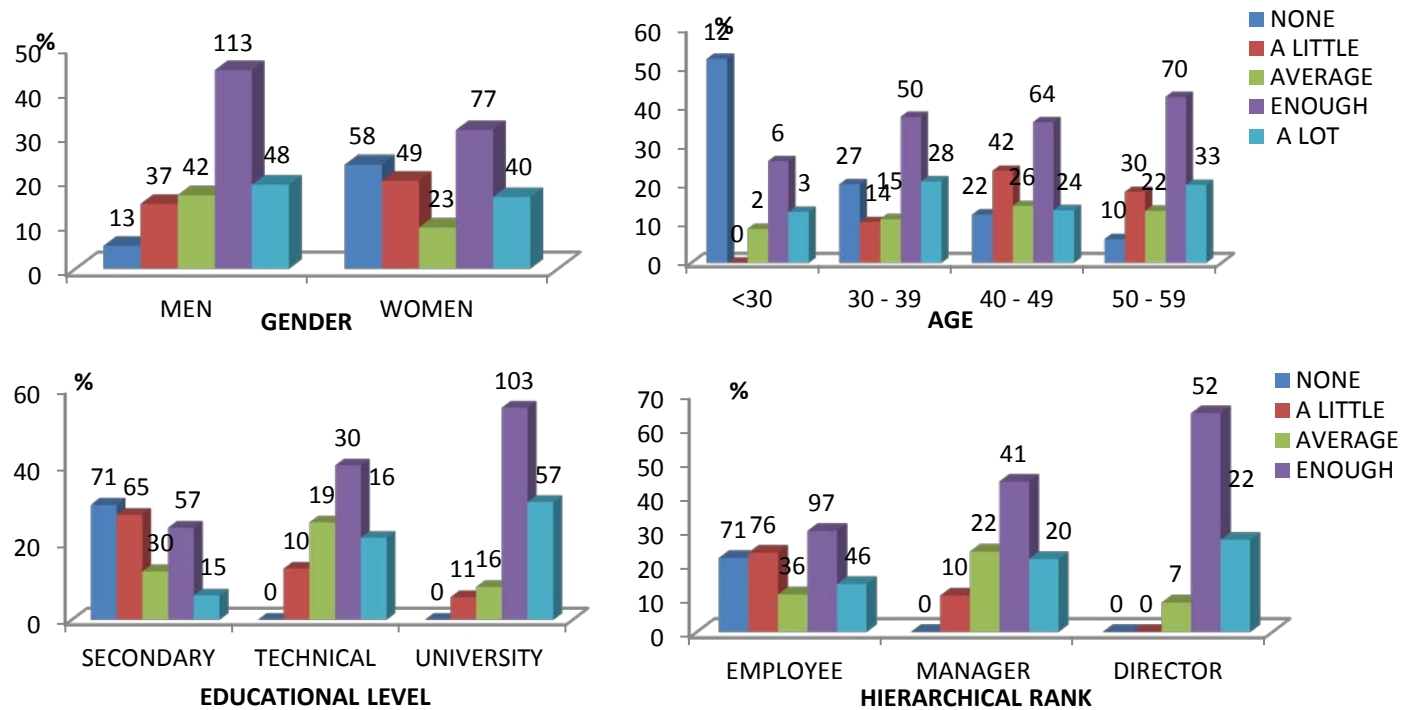
b) With respect to encouraging other employees to address issues of their department



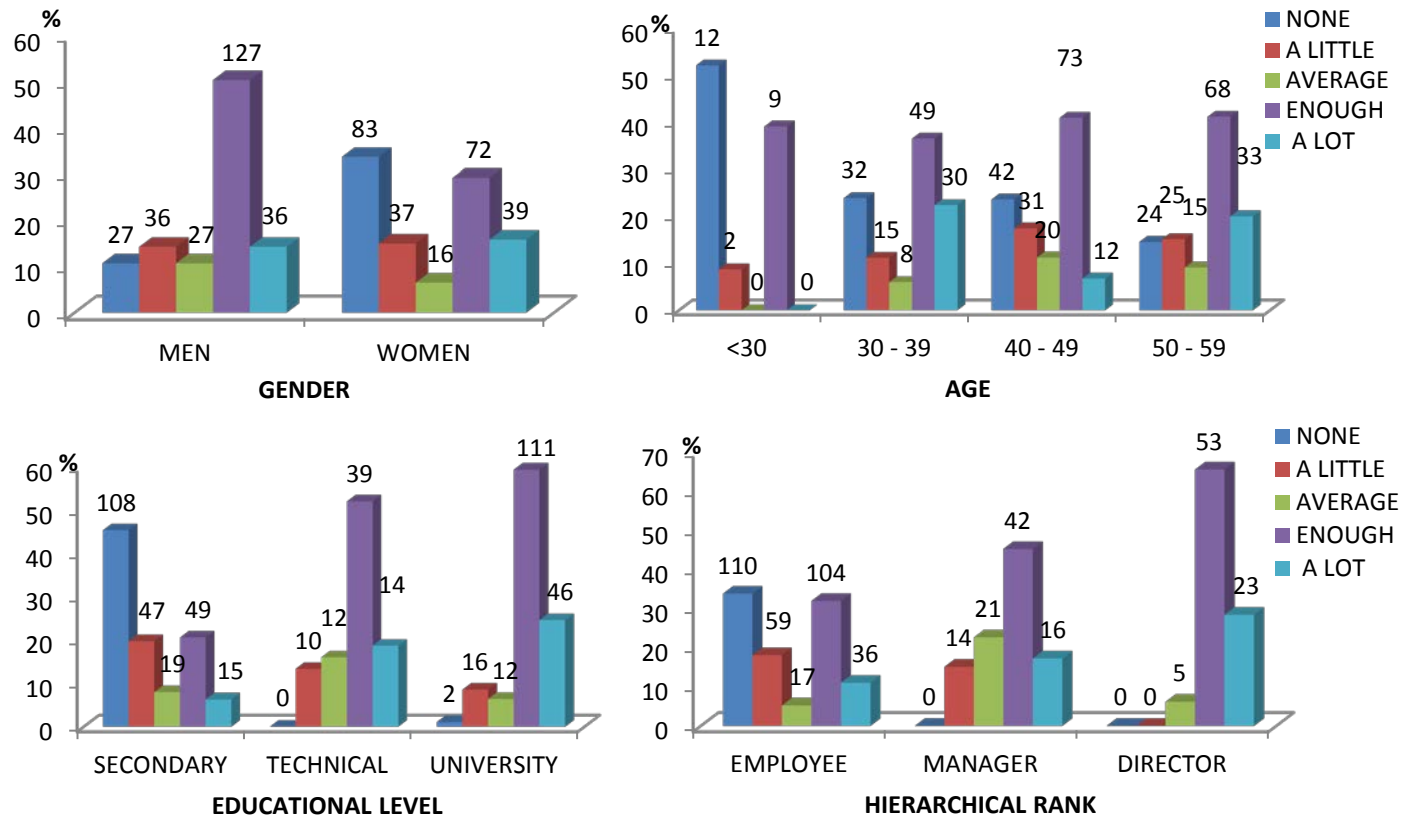
c) Regarding the communication of their views on labor issues to their colleagues, even if those views differ and conflict with the views of their colleagues



d) Having the feeling of being adequately informed on issues to the extent that one can say with confidence that his or her opinion could be beneficial to the department



e) Getting involved with issues affecting the quality of working life in the employee's department



f) Suggestions and ideas for innovations or changes in procedures

4.3 Employee's self-esteem

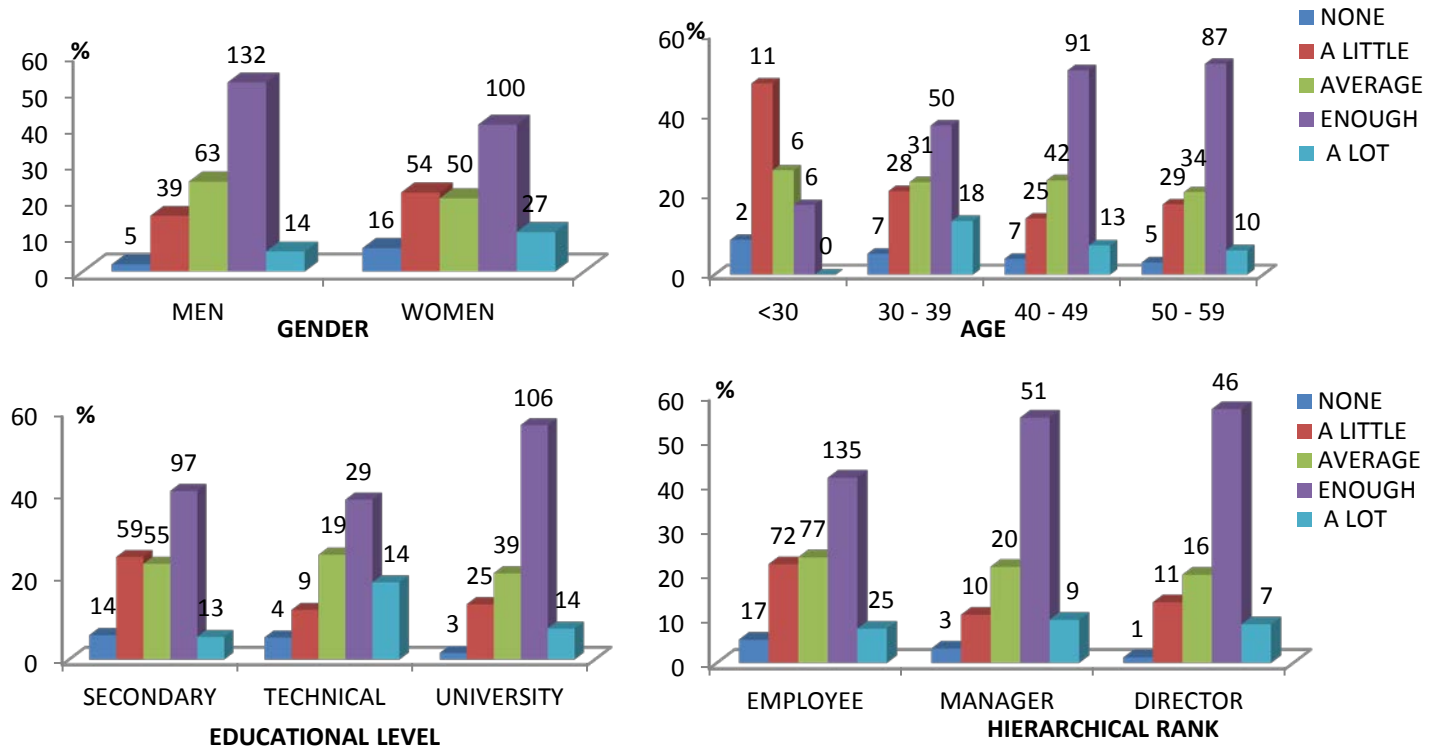
Figure 7 shows the proportion of certain categories of respondents that fall into each of 5 levels of self-esteem. The groups are categorized by gender, age, education level, and hierarchical ranking, and the following deductions arise from these analyses:

- a) **Evaluation of the frequency of correct handling of personnel at social settings:** approximately 55% of all respondents declare that they often, almost always, or always handle themselves correctly when interacting socially. There is a significant difference between *genders* when it comes to personal evaluation of self-esteem. In self-evaluation, the men register much higher self-esteem than women, which is consistent with many of the other aforementioned findings. With regard to *age*, the data gathered through the survey revealed that self-esteem appears to increase with age, reaches its peak in the 40-49 age-range group, and plateaus after that with the 50-59 age-range group. Lastly, self-esteem also correlates positively with *educational level* and *hierarchical rank*, as one would probably expect. It is indeed the case that on average individuals appear to make it higher up the organizational ladder when they have higher self-esteem. The reason for the deduction that self-esteem determines eventual hierarchy position, rather than the opposite cause-and-effect deduction that could be made, is that shifting to a position further up the hierarchy only accounts for a very marginal increase in self-esteem.
- b) **Evaluation of the frequency of opportunities to confront issues in the correct manner:** As with the answers pertaining to social skills, the majority of employees seem to be reasonably confident in their ability to deal with all issues. Specifically, 60% of respondents often, if not always, do more or less everything correctly. According to the *gender* of the respondent, further analysis shows that men are more confident in themselves and feel they can achieve more, when the men's responses are compared to the responses of women.

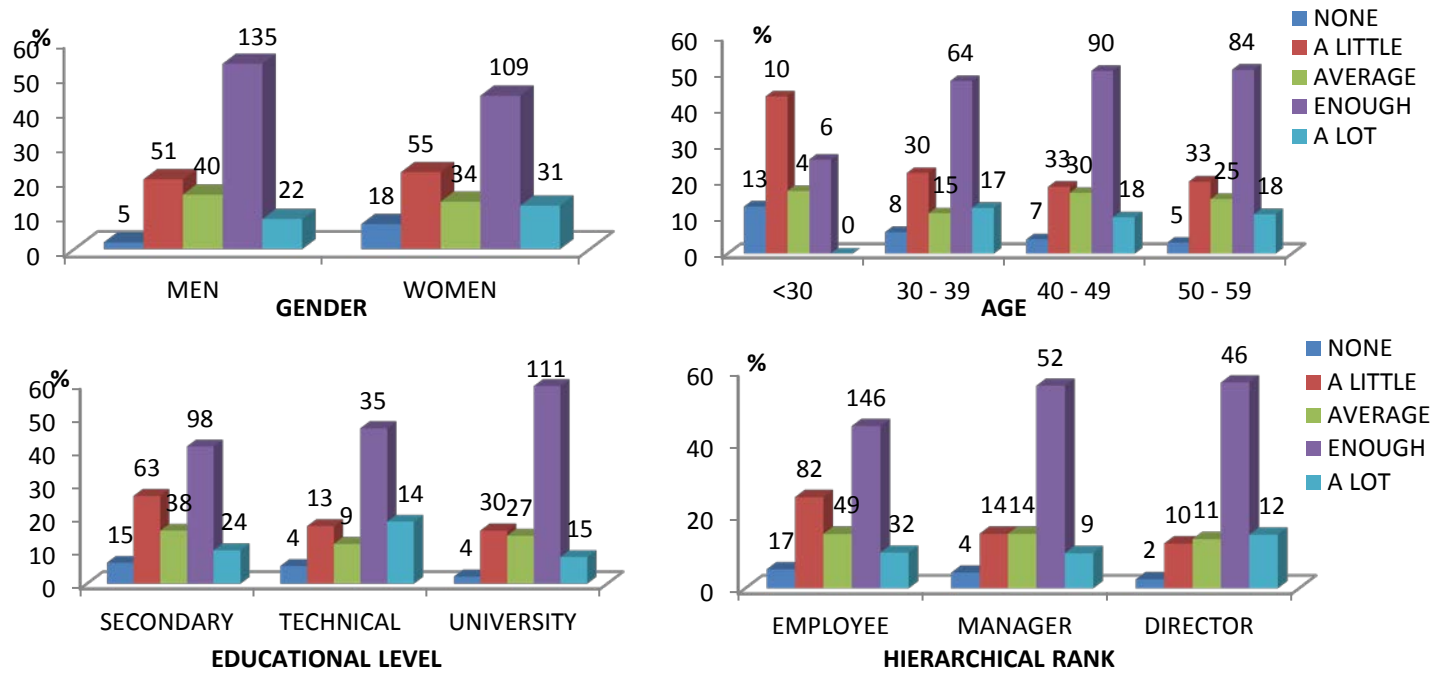
According to respondents' *ranking on the organizational hierarchy*, it has been found that the higher someone is on the hierarchy, the easier and more frequently that person participates, and encourages others on the team to do likewise, in discussions of issues that pertain to the functioning of that team. The survey indicates that 8 out of 10 employees disagree completely with the suggestion that they encourage others within their team or department. The research suggests that the encouragement role falls upon the managers, supervisors, and department heads. Again, the vast majority of employees state they do not deal with these types of issues, while managers and department heads do.

Figure 7

Employee's self-esteem according to gender, age, education level, and hierarchical ranking



a) Evaluation of the frequency of correct handling of personnel at social settings



b) Evaluation of the frequency of opportunities to confront issues in the correct manner

4.4 Impacts of the economic crisis on labor relations

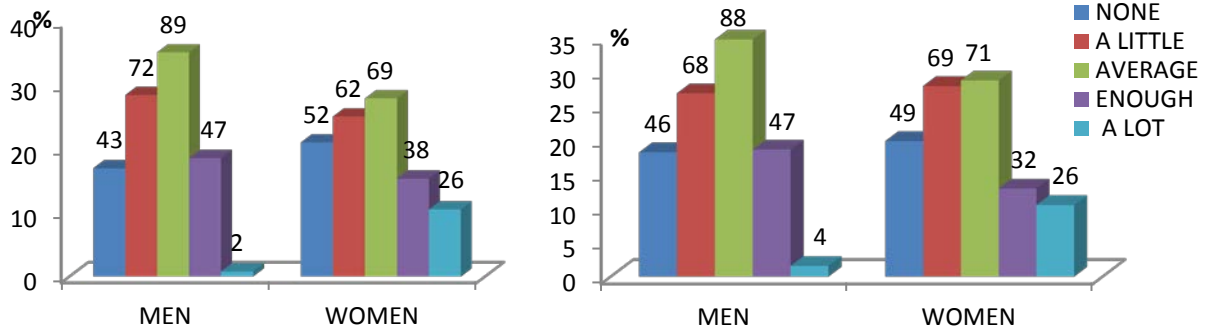
Figure 8 depicts the estimation of the *impact that the economic crisis had on employee-supervisor relationships (from the perspective of employees)* in general and based on gender, and the following can be noted from the charts:

- a) ***Regarding issues pertaining to the employee's public sector working domicile in general:*** A third of respondents believe there has been a modest effect on the employee-supervisor relationship as a consequence of the economic crisis, while 22.6% consider that the aforementioned relationship has been significantly affected.
- b) ***Regarding issues pertaining to each employee's department:*** the answers do not differ much from those given regarding the service office in general. Specifically, a third of the respondents believe that there has been a modest effect on employee-supervisor relationships, while 22% state that those relationships have been significantly impacted due to the economic crisis.
- c) ***Regarding issues related to a respondent's own work:*** Not unlike the answers given in parts a and b directly above, slightly more than 1 in 4 respondents believe the economic crisis has had a notable effect, or a large effect, on that individual's relationship with his or her supervisor.
- d) ***Regarding issues related to job satisfaction (i.e. salary, working conditions, etc.):*** 1 in 3 assert that relationships regarding satisfaction have been affected only slightly or not at all. An equal portion of respondents feel that those relationships have been affected moderately. The remaining third of respondents feel the economic crisis has affected these relationships substantially and, on occasions, very substantially.

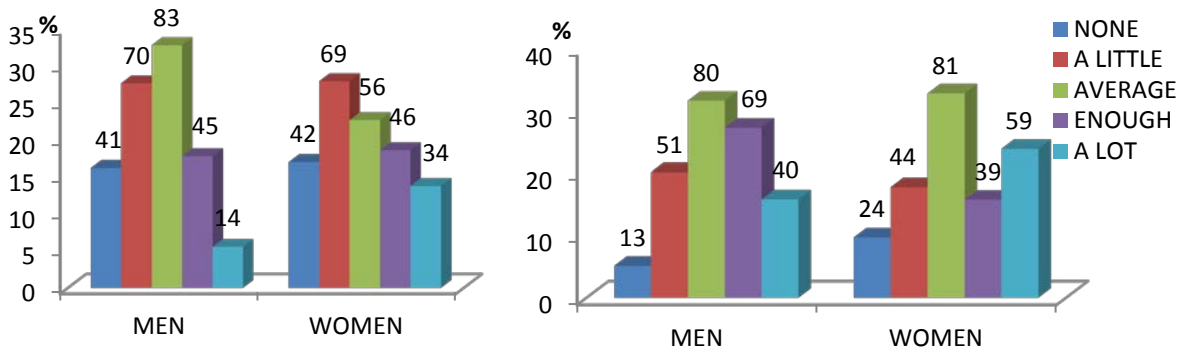
Regarding differences of views on the employee-supervisor relationship based on the ***gender*** of respondents: in every case women feel that employee-supervisor relationships have been affected to a greater extent than men do.

Figure 8

Impact of the economic crisis on employee-supervisor relationships (from the perspective of employees) in general and based on gender



a) issues pertaining to the employee's public sector working domicile b) issues pertaining to each employee's department



c) issues related to a respondent's own work d) issues related to job satisfaction

Figure 9 illustrates the evaluation of relationships between employees and supervisors (from the supervisor perspective); the following can be noted from the charts:

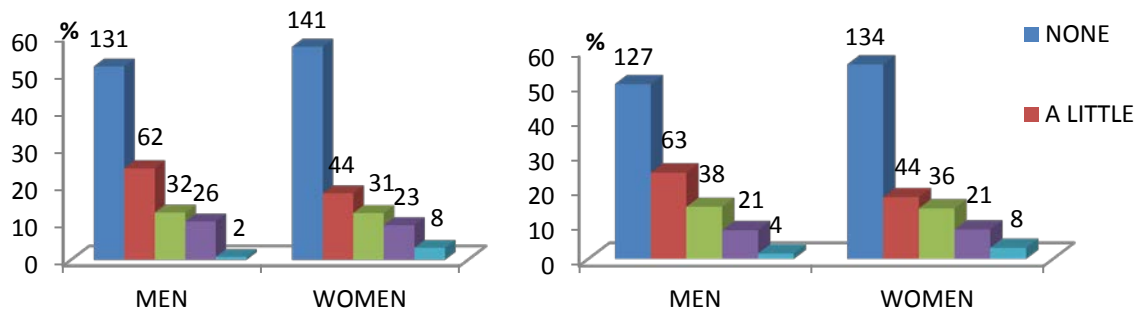
- Regarding issues related to the employee's public sector working domicile in general:** 75.6% of supervisor respondents claim that there has been no change to their relationships with their employees, as a result of the economic crisis.
- Regarding matters pertaining to a respondent's department:** Approximately 9 in 10 assert that supervisor-employee relationships have remained unaffected by the economic crisis. It is noteworthy that answers to this question had the largest percentage of positive responses from supervisors regarding the crisis' effect on the supervisor-employee relationship and dynamic.
- Regarding issues related to the supervisor's own work:** Not unlike the responses to previous questions, 86.4% of supervisors feel the economic crisis has either not affected the relationship at all, or at most has affected it minimally.

- d) **Regarding issues related to job satisfaction (i.e. salary, working conditions, etc.):** 8 out of 10 state that their relationships with the people under their command have been unaffected. However, the remaining 2 out of 10 claim that the economic crisis has affected supervisor-employee relationships with regard to the satisfaction they receive from their work.

With regards to **gender**, when it came to issues related to work in general and the supervisor’s department, the answers from men did not differ significantly from those of women. Conversely, as far as issues related to their own specific work, female supervisors claim the crisis has had a greater impact on their relationships with employees than male supervisors do. Lastly, 80% of women (compared to 65% of men) assert that their relationships with those under their command as they pertain to job satisfaction have remained completely unaffected, but oddly there is a higher proportion of women at the other end of the spectrum (when compared to proportion of men) who believe those relationships in the context of job satisfaction have been very affected by the crisis.

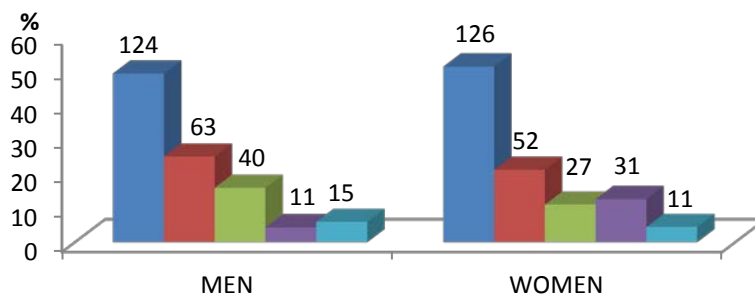
Figure 9

The evaluation of relationships between employees and supervisors (from the supervisor perspective)



- a) issues pertaining to the employee’s public sector working domicile

- b) issues pertaining to each employee’s department



- c) issues related to a respondent’s own work

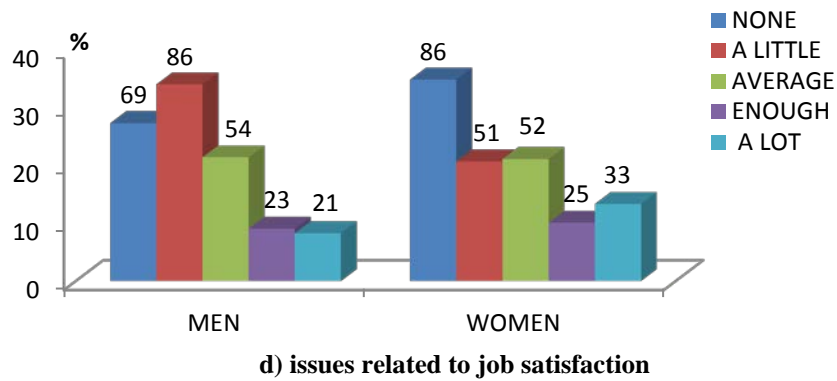


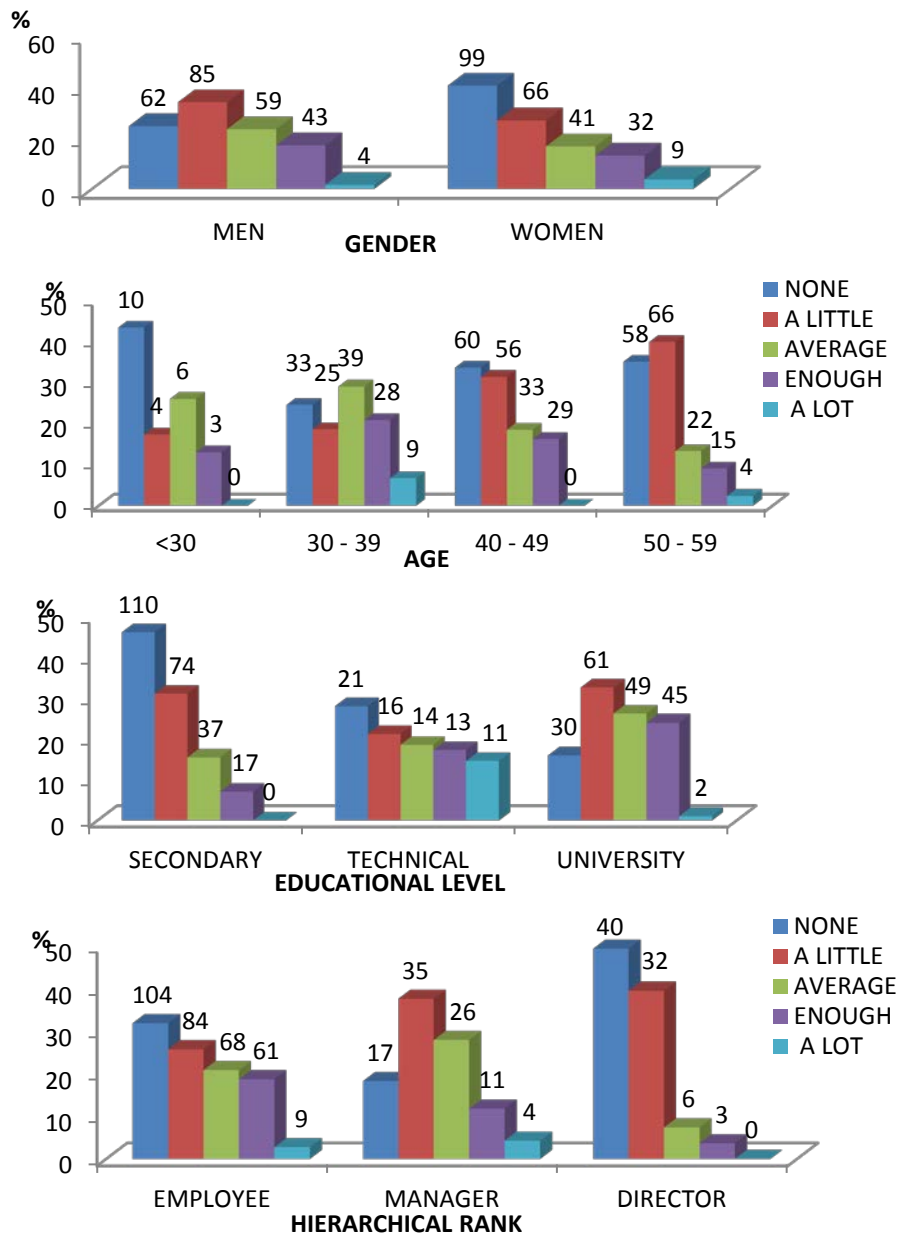
Figure 10 illustrates the estimates of the consequences of the economic crisis on relationships between colleagues. Sub-groups of respondents based on gender, age, educational background, and rank within the organization have also been evaluated, and the results are as follows:

- a) **Relative to the extent to which people claimed relationships with colleagues were reinforced and bolstered (in terms of solidarity, mutual understanding, cooperation, etc.):** 82.4% of respondents do not believe the economic crisis brought them closer to their colleagues. There is a portion of respondents, 15% to be specific, that believes that the economic crisis had a notable effect on the levels of cooperation and solidarity. The remaining 2.6% believe that the effect was both substantial and large. Furthermore, with reference to the respondents' **gender**, it was found that a greater proportion of women (as opposed to men) believe that working relationships have worsened. With reference to **age** groups, those under 30 years of age had a much more negative assessment of the effect that the economic crisis had on colleague relationships, which may be attributable to the lowered expectations they have of their futures. Similarly those in the 50-59 range, who are of course approaching retirement, also produced a sizeable percentage that noted significant or higher negative impacts to working relationships. The reason for this may be the changes in retirement age, terms, and pension expectations that have already (or are expected to) come to pass. Very negative assessments as to how these relationships had been affected came from those of the lowest **educational level**, and the better educated respondents were, the less likely they were to state a negative impact on inter-colleague relationships. Finally, those at the lowest levels of the organizational **hierarchy** reported particularly harsh negative effects on colleague relationships.
- c) **Regarding the assessment as to whether the workplace has become a place to vent ones problems that stem from the presence of long-standing economic downturn:** 1 in 4 believes that due to the economic crisis, the workplace has become an outlet for problems that evolved from the crisis. Considering employees' **gender**, it has been found that 1 out of 10 women (21% approximately) estimate that under no circumstances should the workplace be a place to vent one's problems; and the proportion of men holding that belief is only slightly over 5% (1 out of 20). 1 out of 4 women consider that the workplace makes up a problem-venting area to a significant extent, while 1 out of 3 men share that view. With regards to **age**, younger

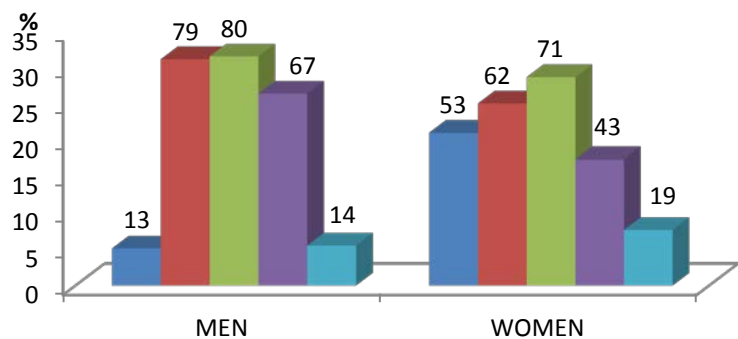
employees (those under 30) display the highest proportion of members who believe the workplace is not a place to vent problems. Considering *educational level*, university graduates are less likely to see the workplace as a problem-venting zone. As expected, *managers* are also less likely to see the workplace in such a fashion.

Figure 10

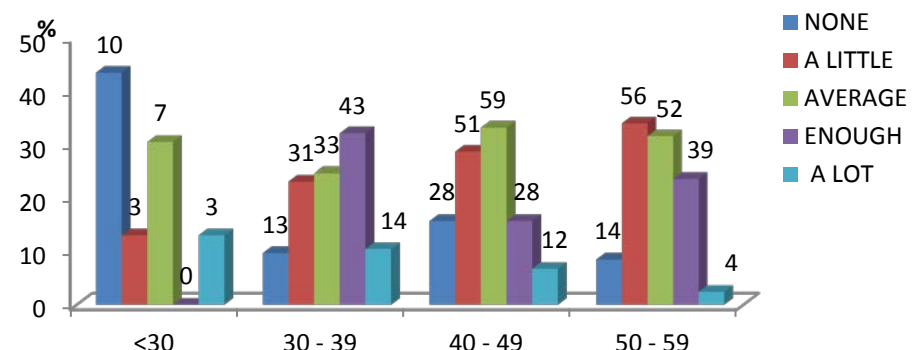
Consequences of the economic crisis on relationships between colleagues according to gender, age, educational background and hierarchical rank



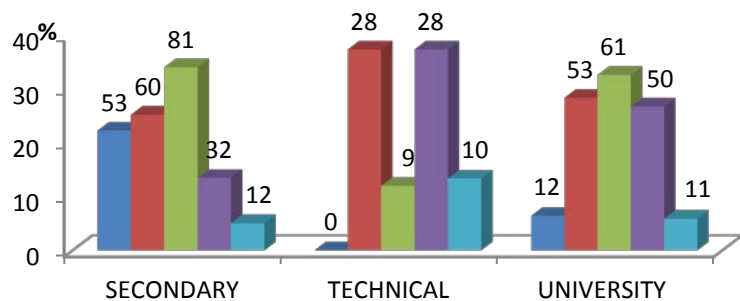
a) Relative to the extent to which people claimed relationships with colleagues were reinforced and bolstered (in terms of solidarity, mutual understanding, cooperation, etc.)



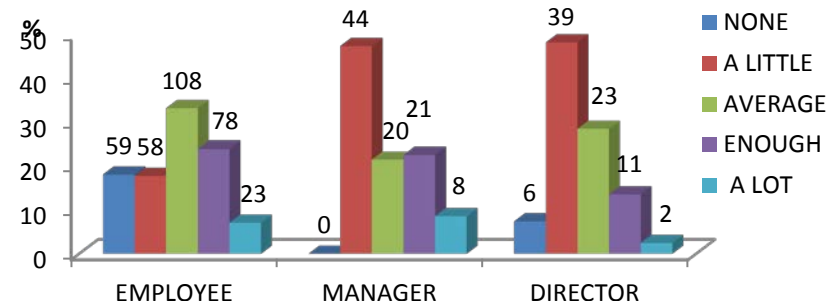
GENDER



AGE



EDUCATIONAL LEVEL



HIERARCHICAL RANK

b) whether the workplace has become a place to vent ones problems

In **Table 1** that follows, the *coefficients of correlation* that were derived from the study were compared based on gender to identify statistically significant differences between men's and women's answers (using the Pearson Chi-Square test). The results confirm all of the gender-related empirical findings discussed up to this point.

Table 1

Coefficients of correlation based to gender (Chi-square Test)

| GENDER RELATED COEFFICIENTS | Chi-Square test |
|---|-----------------|
| EMPLOYEE-SUPERVISOR RELATIONSHIPS | |
| <i>Frequency with which dissenting opinions are expressed to supervisors</i> | |
| - for issues related to the employee's specific public service working domicile | 51.510 |
| - for issues related to the employee's own department | 68.577 |
| - for issues related to their own work | 64.155 |
| - for issues related to job satisfaction and working conditions (such as salary, working conditions, etc.) | 49.242 |
| <i>Ease with which disagreements are expressed to superiors</i> | |
| - for issues related to the employee's specific public service working domicile | 48.590 |
| - for issues related to the employee's own department | 68.721 |
| - for issues related to their own work | 68.500 |
| ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE | |
| <i>With respect to formulating new proposals for the employee's department</i> | 92.410 |
| <i>With respect to encouraging others in their department to address issues that affect the operation of said department</i> | 119.586 |
| <i>Regarding the communication of their views on labor issues to their colleagues, even if those views differ and conflict with the views of their colleagues</i> | 129.888 |
| <i>Having the feeling of being adequately informed on issues to the extent that one can say with confidence that his or her opinion could be beneficial to the department</i> | 106.423 |
| <i>Getting involved with issues affecting the quality of working life in the employee's department</i> | 139.779 |
| EMPLOYEE'S SELF-ESTEEM | |
| <i>Evaluation of the frequency of correct handling of personnel at social settings</i> | 13.114 |
| IMPACTS OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON LABOR RELATIONS | |
| <i>On employee-supervisor relationships (from the perspective of employees)</i> | |
| - for issues related to the employee's specific public service working domicile | 25.587 |
| - for issues related to the employee's own department | 20.832 |
| - for issues related to their own work | 13.538 |
| <i>On employee-supervisor relationships (from the supervisor perspective)</i> | |
| - for issues related to the employee's specific public service working domicile | 7.153 |
| - for issues related to the employee's own department | 5.147 |
| - for issues related to their own work | 13.660 |
| <i>On reinforcing and bolstering relationships between colleagues (in terms of solidarity, mutual understanding, cooperation, etc.)</i> | 17.601 |
| <i>Assessment as to whether the workplace has become a place to vent ones problems that stem from the presence of long-standing economic downturn</i> | 31.913 |

5. Conclusions

Throughout the duration of the current economic crisis, a series of structural changes came to pass in Greece. As a result of all of those changes, including the ones directly related to the content of this paper (such as the conditions and rules related to work and the workplace) and including changes in the socio-economic environment as a whole, the behavior of employees in the workplace has been directly, and predominantly negatively, impacted. This paper focuses on the study of how employee relationships have changed and developed in the public sector as a result of the aforementioned crisis. This paper also seeks to identify the critical areas to be targeted for improvement in order to alter these relationships in a way that would produce a more efficient and effective public sector.

From the aforementioned analysis that was conducted, the following basic conclusions can be drawn:

- A significant portion of employees (1 out of every 2, or 1 out of 3 in the case of all questions related to “organizational silence”), despite the fact that they appreciate that they have the ability to do the right thing (in terms of benefiting the organization) and carry themselves well in social settings, will simply choose to remain silent and not express their opinion on matters pertaining to their public service office or department.
- An important difference is notable with regard to the way that men and women approach their relationships with their supervisors: women are more inclined to withhold their opinions from supervisors than men are.
- The difference between genders is important, in so far as it pertains to self-esteem in the workplace, with men having more self-esteem. This may be attributable to the fact that women have entered the workforce relatively recently, when compared to men. This could be of critical importance to workplace dynamics in the future, as with the passage of time the currently male-dominated higher age group will retire, and women will be majority and occupy positions of high importance and responsibility.
- There is considerable difference in the extent to which employees actively participate in discussions pertaining to their departments, with regards to the hierarchical rank of the employees. Organizational silence can be found to the greatest extent at the bottom-level of the hierarchy.
- The presence of organizational silence is inversely correlated with education level, and this applies to both genders.
- It is observable that experience (or alternatively age) after a certain point starts to correlate positively with organizational silence, while prior to that point the opposite relationship holds (negative correlation is observed). Specifically it was revealed that employees with less than 10 years of experience are ‘organizationally-silent’, so to speak, possibly because they are in the early stages of their careers and are afraid to jeopardize their careers or because they still feel they are too inexperienced to speak up. Conversely, employees with 10-29 years of experience communicate with greater ease and frequency than any other years-of-experience group. From then and onwards (meaning those with 30 years of experience or more), individuals seem to readopt organizational silence and that

may be because they are approaching their exit from the service office (due to retirement).

- Evidence suggests that the economic crisis has affected employees' relationships with their supervisors when it comes to matters of the public service office for which the employees work, the department in which they work, and the specific work for which an employee is responsible. Conversely, supervisors report that their relationships with employees on the whole have been unaffected by the crisis, and this appears to be the case regardless of whether the supervisor is male or female.

The above observations all seem to converge upon a general finding: gender and hierarchical rank in the presence of the ongoing economic turmoil, are sources of great differentiation in employee behavior in the public sector as it pertains to organizational silence. It is of utmost importance that these differences and organizational silence on the whole be eliminated, with the intent of redesigning and reforming the public sector for the better. This will allow for policies to be discovered and implemented that result in increased productivity and overall output of the Greek public sector.

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