Chapter 10

Silo Syndrome in Work Life: Organizational Blindness and Behavioral Barriers

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Abstract

Silo syndrome constitutes a multidimensional organizational pathology that simultaneously affects the structural, behavioral, and digital dimensions of work life. This chapter systematically examines the conceptual foundations, organizational manifestations, and strategic remedies of silo syndrome within the contemporary context of digital transformation and Society 5.0. Drawing on established organizational behavior literature, the chapter argues that silo formation is not merely a structural dysfunction, but an intricate phenomenon deeply intertwined with organizational culture, leadership orientations, and individual work attitudes.

The analysis demonstrates that silo syndrome operates as a significant antecedent of several adverse workplace outcomes, including knowledge-hiding behavior, workplace ostracism, technostress, and the emerging phenomenon of quiet quitting. Moreover, the chapter establishes a conceptual linkage between silo mentality and organizational blindness, wherein habituated routines and fragmented information systematically impair an organization's capacity to perceive risks, opportunities, and environmental changes. Empirical evidence cited in the chapter indicates that many executives acknowledge the detrimental impact of silos on organizational performance and cross-functional collaboration.

The chapter further contends that dismantling silo structures necessitates the simultaneous pursuit of cultural transformation, transformational and servant leadership development, and the adoption of knowledge-sharing infrastructures aligned with digital collaboration tools. It is concluded that breaking down silo barriers represents an indispensable precondition for organizations aspiring to achieve the human-centered, technology-integrated organizational models envisioned by the Industry 5.0 and Society 5.0 paradigms. Accordingly, this chapter contributes to both academic discourse and managerial practice by offering an integrative framework for understanding and addressing silo syndrome in organizational life.

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1. Introduction

Organizations are continually compelled to restructure their internal dynamics in order to sustain their existence and gain competitive advantage. In this restructuring process, the effectiveness of information flow, the alignment of units with one another, and employees' commitment to organizational goals assume a decisive role. However, many organizations find themselves confronted with invisible walls -silo structures- that gradually emerge between different units. These structures profoundly affect both individual behaviors and organizational processes, thereby negatively shaping the quality of working life and organizational performance (de Waal et al., 2019).

Another source of "silo syndrome" which has been observed in many organizations, irrespective of their for-profit status is employees who foster an "us versus them" mentality, and managers who reinforce this division by favoring certain units. This tendency becomes particularly evident in the presence of units that either do not recognize the authority of top management or can manipulate decision-making processes to their own advantage. Operating outside the control of the official hierarchy, these units weaken organizational cohesion and increase the likelihood of silo syndrome (Özgül & Mengi, 2018). Although silo syndrome has a well-established history in the organizational literature, it nonetheless remains a critically relevant concept that necessitates reexamination within the framework of digital transformation processes and the human-centered, integrated organizational understanding emphasized by the Society 5.0 paradigm. While Society 5.0's human-machine collaboration-based production philosophy amplifies organizations' need for horizontal and open communication channels, silo structuring positions itself in direct opposition to this very need (European Commission, 2021). When evaluated within the context of technostress, the operation of digital systems in a non-integrated manner gives rise to increased cognitive load and perceptions of ambiguity among employees, a condition that further deepens the individual-level manifestations of silo syndrome (Tarafdar et al., 2007).

In this chapter, silo syndrome is systematically examined with respect to its conceptual framework, its effects on organizational behavior, and the strategies for its dissolution. The primary purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the silo phenomenon in working life constitutes not merely a structural problem, but rather an integrated organizational problematic encompassing cultural, behavioral, and digital dimensions alike.

2. Silo Syndrome: Conceptual Framework and Organizational Reflections

2.1. Definition, Scope, and Core Dimensions

In its original sense, the concept of silo refers to closed structures used for grain storage that maintain highly limited connectivity with the outside world. Within the organizational behavior literature, the concept was first employed to describe the disconnected functioning of departments; subsequent studies have treated it as an indicator of organizational dysfunction, fragmentation, cross-functional disconnectedness, and a lack of collaboration (Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012). In the organizational literature more broadly, this metaphor is used to denote the phenomenon whereby units, departments, or groups operate in an insular manner, avoid sharing information and resources with others, and prioritize their own sub-goals over those of the organization (Lencioni, 2006). In this sense, silo syndrome ought to be regarded not merely as a structural problem, but rather as a multi-layered pathology constituted by the interplay of organizational culture, leadership philosophy, and individual attitudes.

The term "silo syndrome" is used to describe a state of functional breakdown in which departments or units within an organization effectively retreat behind an invisible wall, refusing to collaborate with one another. This condition results in the inability to share knowledge and experience, as well as the severing of interactions grounded in mutual motivation. The underlying cause lies in the unwillingness of employees within units to share their knowledge with other stakeholders across the organization. This mindset ultimately gives rise to the emergence of structural barriers between departments, leading units to pursue their own priorities exclusively rather than shared institutional goals (Serrat, 2017, p. 711).

Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as shared assumptions, values, and behavioral patterns, and further emphasizes that these cultural elements may, over time, facilitate the formation of silo structures. Accordingly, organizational climates in which the distinction between "us" and "them" is reinforced constitute the cultural substrate upon which silo syndrome thrives. In a similar vein, Argyris and Schön (1978), in the context of organizational learning, advance the concept of "defensive routines," characterizing units' tendency to conceal failures and withhold information as one of the primary triggers of silo behavior.

When the core dimensions of silo syndrome are examined, three primary axes emerge: (1) knowledge insulation, that is, the containment of information

flow within unit boundaries and the obstruction of its dissemination across the organization; (2) goal misalignment, that is, the unit's objectives conflicting with or being prioritized over the organization's strategic goals; and (3) identity overidentification, that is, employees identifying themselves exclusively with their own unit rather than with the organization as a whole (de Waal et al., 2019; Lencioni, 2006). These three dimensions constitute a mutually reinforcing cycle that, over time, renders the functional dysfunctions within the organization permanent.

When approached from a digital transformation perspective, silo syndrome becomes further intertwined with issues of corporate data architecture and system integration. The independent use of ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems by different units gives rise to data inconsistencies, duplicate record creation, and informational asymmetry in decision-making processes (Davenport, 1998). In this context, the human-data-technology integration envisioned by Society 5.0 can be meaningfully operationalized only within organizations in which silo structures have been dismantled (Akman & Tiryaki Yenilmez, 2025).

Perhaps the least visible among the barriers to digital transformation is that which originates from the silo syndrome that organizations generate internally. It has been argued that organizational silos constrain knowledge sharing and thereby exert a detrimental effect on both performance and workplace culture (Jeske & Olson, 2025; Jones et al., 2024). In the worst-case scenario, the silo mentality evolves into a structure in which departments are unwilling to share knowledge and information, thereby undermining internal collaboration and organizational learning, and consequently constituting a serious impediment to high performance and organizational sustainability. In this regard, digital transformation is not merely a matter of technological investment; rather, it necessarily demands organizational openness and an integrated culture of knowledge sharing.

2.2. Effects on Employee Behaviors

Silo syndrome profoundly affects not only organizational structure but also employees' behaviors and motivations, with the most well-documented manifestation of this effect emerging as knowledge-hiding behavior. Connelly et al. (2019) demonstrated that knowledge hiding manifests in the forms of evasive hiding, rationalized hiding, and playing dumb, and that these behaviors are observed more frequently in silo culture environments characterized by high competition and low trust. Indeed, it has been emphasized that competitive organizational climate constitutes one of the significant macro-level determinants of knowledge hiding (Shrivastava et al., 2018).

Leaders are not always inclined toward collaboration and openness; that is, they themselves may generate silos both within and across organizations. This silo mentality reveals that departments within a company maintain a guarded stance toward knowledge sharing and establish internal barriers that impede data flow. Although this tendency is primarily addressed within the context of intra-organizational dynamics, it also emerges as a decisive factor when inter-institutional collaborations and strategic partnerships are at stake (Cilliers & Greyvenstein, 2012). Accordingly, senior executives-such as CEOs and board chairs—by exercising strong dominance over open data and data-sharing mechanisms, suppress the cultivation of collaborative big data infrastructures and the conversion of the innovation capacity that may emerge from such structures into tangible value. When the attitudes of SMEs toward platform integration are examined, it becomes apparent that enterprises of this scale do not demonstrate autonomous willingness to participate in such structures unless compelled by the pressure of an original equipment manufacturer or a key customer or supplier (Friedrich et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the relationship between workplace ostracism and silo syndrome must not be overlooked. Workplace ostracism, as conceptualized by Ferris et al. (2008), may manifest as employees being ignored by colleagues outside unit boundaries and being excluded from communication and collaboration. In organizations where silo structuring is pronounced, this ostracism dynamic becomes more conspicuous; in particular, employees engaged in cross-unit projects are observed to experience a weakening sense of belonging and a decline in organizational citizenship behaviors (Podsakoff et al., 2000).

When evaluated from the perspective of the technostress literature, the non-integrated digital systems to which employees are exposed to silo environments feed the "techno-overload" and "techno-complexity" dimensions as defined by Tarafdar et al. (2007). Employees who are compelled to work with multiple, disconnected software platforms experience increases in cognitive load, declines in job satisfaction, and symptoms of burnout. This finding clearly demonstrates that silo syndrome is not merely a structural problem, but also an organizational risk factor that threatens individual psychological well-being.

The phenomenon of quiet quitting is likewise considered to bear a meaningful connection to silo syndrome. In a silo culture, employees come to feel that their contributions go unrecognized and that they are unable to generate value; this condition leads to the dysfunction of the motivating factors defined in Herzberg's (1968) motivation-hygiene theory. As a result, employees tend toward minimum-level performance rather than leaving

their jobs outright, and their organizational commitment gradually erodes (Gallup, 2022).

2.3. The Blindness Effect on Organizations

Organizational blindness is a phenomenon frequently encountered in organizational contexts yet characterized by a relatively low level of awareness. This concept refers to the condition in which employees, because of gradually becoming accustomed to the practices and ways of doing business within their organization, become unable to perceive problems, risks, and opportunities (Altınay et al., 2012). Organizational blindness may give rise to numerous obstacles and overlooked problems within institutions, thereby inflicting serious harm on both the organization and its employees (Akar, 2025). Consequently, organizations may find themselves confronted with adverse conditions across multiple dimensions.

Seymen et al. (2016) have defined this phenomenon more comprehensively as the inability to perceive risks, opportunities, threats, problems, and changes in both the internal and external environment, owing to the influence of habits, routines, adaptation mechanisms, concentration on specific domains, and individual as well as organizational factors such as culture, leadership style, and industry structure. In other words, routine and repetitive organizational experiences rigidify individuals' cognitive schemas; this, in turn, paves the way for organizational blindness to become normalized as a cultural output and for organizations to lose their capacity to adapt to changes in their environment (Kump & Scholz, 2022).

Yeşil and Özbağış (2022), in their study, demonstrated that although the dimensions of institutional blindness exert differentiated effects on employee attitudes, job satisfaction, and job performance, the institutional and sectoral dimensions positively influence employee attitudes and work outcomes, whereas the individual dimension produces a negative effect on both job satisfaction and job performance. Kump and Scholz (2022), for their part, argue that organizational routines constitute a direct source of ethical blindness, asserting that such routines cause decision-makers to overlook ethical dimensions through cognitive mechanisms.

Although this phenomenon may be observed across all levels of the organizational hierarchy, it manifests in a considerably more pronounced and functionally costlier manner in managerial positions. Indeed, managers preoccupied with day-to-day problems may, due to organizational blindness, experience difficulty in generating solutions even to problems that could otherwise be resolved with relative ease; moreover, with respect to matters

directly pertaining to the organization's future, their inability to perceive emerging opportunities or anticipate risks may result in significant losses or deprive the organization of substantial gains (Altınay et al., 2012).

3. Breaking Silo Syndrome: Cultural Transformation and Solution Strategies

3.1. Organizational Culture and Leadership Approaches

Breaking silo syndrome necessitates, above all else, a fundamental transformation in organizational culture. Structural or technological changes implemented in the absence of cultural transformation are insufficient to prevent the reproduction of silo dynamics. In this context, Kotter and Heskett (1992) emphasize that the adaptive culture possessed by high-performing organizations is grounded in open communication, shared values, and a sense of collective responsibility. The absence of these characteristics paves the way for silo syndrome to become chronic.

Leadership style constitutes a decisive factor in either dismantling or reinforcing silo culture. When evaluated within the framework of transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985), leaders who are visionary, inspirational, and capable of uniting employees around a common purpose can erode the artificial boundaries between units and strengthen the sense of shared identity. By contrast, managerial philosophies that evaluate unit performance independently of one another and rely on competitive incentive systems structurally reward silo behaviors, thereby encouraging the reproduction of silo syndrome (Lencioni, 2006). Furthermore, the servant leadership approach offers an effective framework for dismantling silo culture. In this approach, as conceptualized by Greenleaf (2002), the leader prioritizes serving the needs of both employees and the organization, foregrounding collective welfare rather than the interests of their own unit. Since servant leaders internalize behaviors such as bridge-building between units, active listening, and empathy, they increase interpersonal trust among employees and thereby create the conditions for knowledge sharing. In this regard, Carmeli and Gittell (2009) demonstrated that in organizations where units are built upon high-quality relationships grounded in shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect, vertical hierarchy loosens while horizontal collaboration is reinforced. Consequently, leadership style ought to be treated as a strategic variable that directly shapes not only individual performance but also the organization's holistic coordination capacity.

From the perspective of organizational democracy, the dismantling of silo syndrome requires the adoption of managerial philosophies that foreground

employee participation and collective decision-making processes. Fotaki and Prasad (2015) demonstrate that democratic organizational models increase knowledge sharing and reinforce the sense of trust between units. In these models, employees are positioned not merely as bearers of their own units but as stakeholders of the organization. Within the Industry 5.0 framework, the adaptation of the human-centered design principle to organizational structures necessitates the construction of a participatory organizational architecture in which every employee can contribute meaningfully to processes of process improvement and knowledge generation (European Commission, 2021).

3.2. Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration-Based Organizational Models

The redesign of knowledge management infrastructure assumes a critical function in overcoming silo syndrome. Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model -socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization- systematically explains how knowledge circulates from individuals to the organization and across units. In silo structures, this cycle is observed to break down particularly at the "combination" stage; the absence of open and reliable knowledge-sharing platforms prevents individual and unit-level knowledge from being converted into organizational knowledge.

In the process of digital transformation, technological infrastructures that support knowledge sharing -such as enterprise social media platforms, shared knowledge repositories, instant messaging, and collaboration tools- carry the potential to overcome silo culture. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends not solely on the mere existence of the technology, but on whether the employees who use them have internalized sharing norms (Leonardi, 2014). For this reason, the deployment of digital collaboration platforms must be carried out concurrently with cultural transformation efforts.

The "super-smart society" model, which emerges prominently within the context of the Society 5.0 vision, foregrounds the symbiotic relationship among individuals, organizations, and technology. The organizational-level counterpart of this vision consists of integrated organizational models in which the flow of knowledge between units is ensured in an uninterrupted and secure manner, human-artificial intelligence collaboration is operated at an optimal level, and every employee's contribution is rendered visible. Organizations that have overcome silo syndrome occupy a structurally and culturally more prepared position in transitioning to this model, which in turn provides them with a sustainable competitive advantage (Akman & Erdirençelebi, 2024).

Toffler asserts that the formation of silos, a factor contributing to organizational blindness, can be mitigated by the establishment of a common objective to which all units are aligned. However, the successful implementation of such a shared objective necessitates effective coordination, integrating physical, financial, and human resources. Achieving such coordination is conducive to generating value and contributing to social well-being. Ensuring such coordination, however, is contingent upon a continuously and effectively functioning information system, a robust and shared organizational culture, managers' unbiased approach to differing viewpoints, and the establishment of a culture of transparency (Özgül & Mengi, 2018).

Cross-functional teams constitute one of the most frequently employed organizational interventions aimed at reducing silo syndrome. Bringing together employees from different units in shared projects increases mutual understanding, breaks down preconceptions, and reinforces the sense of organizational identity (Parker, 2003). However, the functionality of these teams is contingent upon clear role definition, a robust project management structure, and leadership support. When these conditions cannot be met, cross-functional teams face the risk of devolving into a form of resource consumption that increases coordination costs.

For cross-functional teams to function effectively, leaders are needed who can manage teams with diverse functions, facilitating collaboration, and aligning the team's efforts with organizational goals (Chikezie et al., 2024). In this context, role clarity is expected to clarify expectations, reduce ambiguity, and minimize potential conflicts, enabling team members to understand how their expertise aligns with broader collaboration objectives, and thereby nurturing a sense of ownership and accountability. Indeed, the incorporation of structural knowledge-sharing practices into governance mechanisms for the purpose of facilitating knowledge sharing and coordination reinforces cross-functional collaboration and accelerates organizational learning (Yeboah, 2023).

4. Conclusion

Silo syndrome is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon that simultaneously affects the organizational, behavioral, and digital dimensions of working life. This chapter has demonstrated that silo syndrome is not merely a structural problem; rather, it exists in profound interaction with organizational culture, leadership philosophy, employee behaviors, and digital transformation processes. As one of the sources from which such contemporary organizational problems as knowledge hiding, workplace ostracism, quiet

quitting, and technostress are nourished, silo syndrome merits comprehensive attention from both academic and applied management perspectives.

The silo effect, characterized by limited communication between specialized business units, has long been a pervasive problem in organizations. Research findings also quantitatively demonstrate the impact of silo syndrome on organizational life. In a study conducted by de Waal et al. (2019) involving 11 different organizations, 83% of participants acknowledged the existence of silo structures within their organizations, while 97% stated that this situation had a negative impact on organizational performance. Quantitative studies on this topic demonstrate that the silo effect produces statistically significant negative outcomes on organizational performance, productivity, innovation capacity, and organizational climate. These findings collectively highlight that the silo effect constitutes a significant challenge that organizations must address to improve their operations and collaborative capacity (Shah et al., 2025).

The human-technology integration envisioned by the Industry 5.0 and Society 5.0 paradigms clearly demonstrates that it is not possible for organizations to fully adapt to this transformation without first overcoming silo structures. In this context, the following recommendations are offered to both researchers and practitioners: First and foremost, organizational culture transformation must be treated as a prerequisite for structural or technological changes. Subsequently, leadership development programs ought to be redesigned with a view to reinforcing transformational and participatory leadership competencies. Finally, the implementation of digital collaboration tools must be carried out concurrently with cultural interventions that support employee behaviors and sharing norms. The dismantling of silo syndrome constitutes an indispensable prerequisite for greater organizational agility, stronger employee engagement, and the sustainable, human-centered organizational structures envisioned by Society 5.0.

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