

How to get people to speak up in meetings

December 13 2023



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

An appointed devil's advocate could be one of the many strategies to encourage people to share ideas in meetings, according to new research from the University of Sydney Business School and Lund University.

The new research, [published](#) in the *Academy of Management Learning &*

Education, draws insight from interviews with 18 academics at a top Western business school to understand the barriers that prevent people from speaking up in [meetings](#).

"Everyone has experienced the frustration of hearing people complain in private about an issue at work after staying silent in a meeting with leaders and [decision-makers](#)," said Professor Betina Szkudlarek, lead author of the study.

"We found that a fear of career damage and a sense that nothing would change anyway, were not the main reasons preventing people from speaking up—these expressed reasons often served as excuses for a wider range of motivations."

The researchers identified four main behaviors related to silence in meetings:

- **Opportunism:** a focus on individual career progress, in which [self-interest](#) outweighs organizational goals, leads to people not seeing value in contributing to organizational change;
- **Convenience:** a desire for an uncomplicated working life, in which silence during meetings is seen as the most efficient way to limit the need to take action on the undesired work processes;
- **Ineptitude:** the belief that only a few people possess the ability to lead and speak up in meetings;
- **Detachment:** related to the trend of "quiet quitting," in which people focus solely on the narrow scope of things and do not feel responsibility for, or connection to, their workplace.

Professor Szkudlarek acknowledged that while the study involved a small and specific sample, she believes the findings could have applications beyond academia.

To improve meeting participation, she suggests leaders and participants change structures, rituals and expectations to encourage input, and help make meetings a productive use of everyone's time.

"Leaders should expect that people come to the [meeting](#) prepared and are expected to share their views and [ideas](#)," Professor Szkudlarek said.

"They can also run breakout groups to encourage idea sharing and give the groups responsibility for leading discussions—especially around organizational pain points—and implementing actions, which requires dedicated time in their regular workload.

Professor Szkudlarek also suggested those workers already inclined to speak up should create alliances with their quieter colleagues.

"A collective voice has more power: think long term, stay engaged and exercise responsibility for enacting change," she said.

"For those who struggle to speak up: be courageous. Stop outsourcing the responsibility to others for raising the issues that are important to you. The more you exercise your voice, the more impactful you will become."

More information: Betina Szkudlarek et al, Doing Silence: How Silence Is Produced in Meetings, *Academy of Management Learning & Education* (2023). [DOI: 10.5465/ame.2021.0521](https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2021.0521)

Provided by University of Sydney

Citation: How to get people to speak up in meetings (2023, December 13) retrieved 28 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-12-people.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.