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Silo mentality in teams: emergence, repercussions and recommended options for change

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Abstract

Purpose – This article summarizes practitioner observations on three research questions. First, the factors that lead to the emergence and persistence of such teams. Second, the repercussions of siloed teams. And third, practical suggestions and recommendations that practitioners can employ to prevent silo formation or address existing silos. This article thus complements recent academic work that has previously explored the formation of silos.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors used the input of current team leads from a focus group along with their consulting experience to explore these three research questions. The team lead input and consulting expertise are integrated with academic research on silos.

Findings – The emergence and persistence of silos was mostly attributed to company characteristics (size, growth and stakeholder management) as well as communication inefficiencies (lack of role clarity and ownership within teams), which in turn were impacted by situational variables (pandemic and turnover). The authors noted the effect of team composition effects, team competition and organizational changes (rapid growth and restructuring) as potential contributors to the formation and persistence of silos. The team lead experts and our consulting experiences were congruent with the literature focused on repercussions of silos, from poor information exchanges to inefficiencies, divisions and perceived isolation of teams from the organization. Solutions focused on project organization and documentation as well as the adoption of new decision-making tools and practices, and the creation of more exchange and learning opportunities. The authors added additional options to promote more visibility, appreciation, proactive monitoring within teams and organizational identification initiatives.

Originality/value – The current article adds a pragmatic perspective to silos and how organizations can address these when they become problematic and hinder performance and collaboration.

Keywords Communication, Team composition, Organizational development and change, Silo formation, Silo mentality, Team competition

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The existence of silos in organizations becomes of concern to many managers when they impact performance and work culture. The term silo originates from agricultural storage units that are used to store specific produce away from other crops (Silberman *et al.*, 2022). According to Waal *et al.* (2019) and Silberman *et al.* (2022), silos are a structural feature in organizations as they capture vertical, horizontal and functional structures and expert groupings. The concept of a silo can reflect both positive and negative characteristics of

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people working closely together. This is further reflected by Waal *et al.* (2019, p. 1) who argue: "At best, silos offer a practical way for organizations to operate efficiently". A review of the work by Stipp *et al.* (2018) on a study of cross-functional teams by the HRMID (2019, p. 31) similarly posited that silos have their positives: "Working as part of a close-knit group of people, who trust each other implicitly and have each other's back, would be regarded by many as a huge plus point. And if you worked as part of a secret organization, skunkworks, or other special unit, working in a silo would be positively encouraged".

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that silo mentality – and the associated issues around communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing (Neill and Jiang, 2017) – have far-reaching consequences for teams and organizations overall. Here, we define silo mentality in teams as a situation where teams consider themselves as separate, distinct and potentially independent of other teams. This can lead to a stronger inward focus and potentially insular behavior. Silo mentality is a well-known phenomenon where teams therefore often stop communicating or sharing information with other teams. This "insular mind-set or mentality" (Waal *et al.*, 2019, p. 2) then impedes their ability to collaborate, communicate and problem solve with others. This phenomenon has been observed in many settings, from research teams, to multi-disciplinary teams in healthcare and HR teams (Collyer and Smith, 2020; Forsten-Astikainen *et al.*, 2017). Adopting this insular stance can have negative consequences on a team's performance, creativity and openness to change (Waal *et al.*, 2019). As Ahuja (2016) notes, a competency trap is the false belief that one's past approaches will lead to success in the future. Siloed teams may inadvertently also walk into this trap by relying on what worked for them in the past (Willcock, 2013), rather than exploring alternatives.

However, the picture is more mixed when we view the effectiveness and performance of siloed teams in the workplace where knowledge sharing becomes essential. Waal *et al.* (2019, p. 1) notes that: "At worst, they create a silo mentality where departments do not want to exchange knowledge or information, hindering internal collaboration and organizational learning, thus preventing achievement of high performance and organizational sustainability". LugoSantiago (2018, p. 20) argues that "silos negate productivity, multiply duplication of effort and deny access to the talents of the workforce." Given today's co-dependencies of many cross-functional and agile teams with many external stakeholders (especially in tech and manufacturing; Stipp *et al.*, 2018), the emergence of a silo mentality therefore becomes a barrier to their success.

The current article focuses specifically on discussing siloed teams rather than other organizational forms that were not intentionally siloed by the organization, but became silos over time. This means that we focus on silos as units, departments or functional silos (Forsten-Astikainen *et al.*, 2017; Waal *et al.*, 2019). We focus here on siloed teams as those which "operate as sealed off windowless units within the business" (Edwards, 2020, p. 157), which focus inwards or internally, engaging in silos where teams work towards the team's agenda (Corfield and Paton, 2016; Huggins and Scheepers, 2019).

Theoretical frameworks

Depending on the perspectives taken in the research, different theories provide insights to understand teams' development of a silo mentality.

The theory around the psychological contracts, contract breaches and violations, represents one important theoretical lens in this paper. The psychological contract is usually defined as an implicit – rather than explicit – promissory agreement, which includes a set of "unwritten and unofficial expectations between an individual and his organization" (Aggarwal and Bhargava, 2008, p. 11). An employee is naturally motivated to work for an employer when they allow them to fulfill their psychological needs (Meckler *et al.*, 2003).

Contract breaches are usually associated with an employee's cognitive assessment of some undesired outcome or change, while violations are often linked to the emotional response employees may have to such a breach. This means that the research around psychological contracts tends to focus on the expectations that one party (such as the employee) has in relation to another party (such as the employing organization; Meckler *et al.*, 2003).

Another important perspective is to consider teams' reactions and self-isolation as a response to perceived threats. The inward focus and detachment can be considered a form of protectionism or defense mechanism. The Protection Motivation Theory by Rogers and Prentice-Dunn (1997) posits that individuals will engage in various appraisals when they face certain situations. For example, when individuals perceive themselves as vulnerable and under severe threat, they will focus on threat appraisals (assessing the potential impact and preventive strategies when facing threats). Furthermore, when individuals assess their ability to cope with threats, they engage in a coping appraisal (to see how they can overcome a challenging situation, given their resources and capabilities as well as the repercussions of certain responses).

We utilize both theoretical lenses in our paper, but focus specifically on psychological contracts in a later section of our paper.

Research questions

The current viewpoint paper addresses three research questions. First, which team or organizational factors contribute to the emergence of silos? Learning about these can help practitioners to adopt preventive strategies at the team and organizational levels. Second, what are the repercussions of silos according to the literature and practitioners? This point explores the undesirable effects when silos form unintentionally or start to impede organizational efforts. As long as the effects of siloed teams are ignored or left unexplored, silos are unlikely to dissolve on their own. And third, according to practitioners' experiences and the research, which practical solutions and recommendations can address silos and prevent them from becoming disruptive forces in organizations?

Methods

The authors used a retrospective design, similar to Van der Schaft *et al.* (2020) in their study on how social interaction affects psychological contracts in transforming organizations. The practical insights on silos were obtained from two sources. Some of the input was generated as part of a collaborative focus group (rather than traditional retrospective interviews like Van der Schaft *et al.*, 2020). The focus group included highly experienced team leads working in cross-functional teams in a matrix organization as part of a consulting process. The team leads were part of an international workforce which included both internal employees as well as contract employees working in teams and squads on joint projects. The conclusions were summarized by one of the co-authors who was a participant in this focus group. Furthermore, the team leads gave consent for the general conclusions of the focus group to be used by the author for this viewpoint paper. Finally, both authors contributed suggestions and recommendations based on their consulting and HR experience in industry in the UK, the USA and Germany. Ethical approval was also sought but not required. The Social Research Ethics Committee at University College Cork confirmed that the research did not need to go through further formal ethics approval processes, given the reflective nature of the article, permissions given by participants and the confidentiality and anonymity adhered to during publication.

Results

This section summarizes the key results for the first and second research questions from the focus group, which were complemented by the authors' observations from practice.

We summarize our findings in Figure 1. The practical recommendations in response to the third research question and our literature review as well as practitioner insights are summarized in the practical section following the discussion.

RQ1. Factors leading to the emergence of siloes

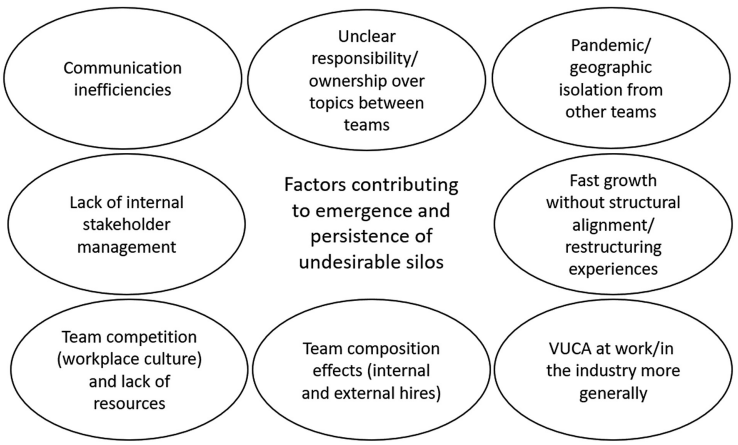
A number of factors at the team and organizational levels can contribute to the emergence of silos in our participants' organization as well as organizations the authors worked with. Some of these are summarized in Figure 1, which represents the insights from the focus group with experienced team leads.

Organizational size and structure

In the first instance, the focus group attendees discussed why silos are common in organizations. One deciding factor was company size as the team leads felt that it was normal for larger organizations to have silos. For example, some silos are a reflection of expert groups (so not problematic as long as they do not stand apart in terms of communication and collaboration). They also noted that it is important to audit the organization to identify thresholds where silos become an issue due to unnecessary/misaligned work.

Situational constraints and organizational changes

The pandemic was a situational contributory factor to the formation of silos (e.g. lack of physical interactions/on-site exchanges, lack of personal connections across teams and departments). Some silos emerged due to a monopolization of information in teams (not sharing critical information), which may be intentional or unintentional (e.g. pandemic isolation). Many organizations underwent significant company changes during the pandemic, adding two stressors on organizations simultaneously. When companies rapidly grow, the combination of rapid development of business units which lack cohesion and communication, can generate a number of problems for the business and foster silos as a response. Other factors that contribute to silos in organizations include company growth pains (e.g. lack of structural integration may lead to silos, some teams will work more independently and fail to re-connect when the company scales). These developments may also be influenced by situational factors such as volatility, uncertainty, complexity and



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 1.
Overview of factors leading to silos

ambiguity (VUCA). Other factors noted here include staff fluctuation in combination with personal connections vs functional roles (people who know each other separate themselves from others who are new hires).

Communication practices and unclear ownership

Certain communication practices (e.g. all voices are heard and everybody can have their say) made it difficult for experts to make their voices heard when it comes to decision-making. As a result, many people focus on team-specific communication and agreements. Lack of clarity over ownership and responsibility was an additional factor (e.g. where teams are not clear when they have individual or shared ownership over or responsibility for specific processes and workflows).

RQ2. Factors leading to the persistence and repercussions of silos

In line with the research above, our focus group participants reported the following effects of silos in their organization. The authors further summarized a few additional points which were not covered specifically in the focus group but are often important in practice. We first explore team-specific points, combining the points from the focus group with our own consulting experience.

Coordination inadequacies

According to the focus group participants, the lack of coordination between teams reduced information sharing and communication. This generated inefficiencies. For example, some participants observed multiple people working independently on the same project aspects, wasting time due to lack of coordination. Company changes can lead to a lack of internal stakeholder management, which subsequently affects decision-making and prioritization. Furthermore, teams may neither agree on common goals nor engage in project auditing/monitoring (as teams get used to defining their own goals and proceeding as they see fit). Restructuring, for example, may involve structural or procedural changes in the organization, dismissals, or outsourcing. As a result, teams often find that their established ways of working, coordination and processes are no longer effective (Balogun, 2006). In addition, in the absence of clear communication and a sense of mutual cohesion, expert-led teams will create their own roadmaps, agendas and priorities. This can make teams more inefficient.

Team composition and differentiation of workers (core and periphery)

Teams at the periphery of organizations or those composed of team members from other organizations may similarly tend to become silos. In our experience, mixed teams with many external or contract workers are at greater risk of developing their own dynamics and identity. For example, half of a team could identify with the organization, while the external or contract workers' contingent may continue to identify more with the outsourcing organization. Many organizations do not onboard external or contract workers to the same degree. Nor do many organizations make an effort to openly educate teams to recognize and address issues of silo mentality or lack of organizational identification.

Team competition instead of collaboration

According to the focus group participants, some of their teams exhibited an "us vs them" mentality (spirit and rivalry), which made it more challenging to address shared pain points. This resulted in members remaining isolated from others. Competition vs cooperation drivers can correspondingly create tensions between teams (Balogun, 2006; Hogg *et al.*, 2012).

Organizations take different approaches to influence inter-team collaboration and communication, within their organization and with external stakeholders. Certain strategic decisions made at management levels, however, directly impact the development and reinforcement of silos. One common practice is pitching teams against each other, in support of competition instead of cooperation to achieve a shared outcome. This practice creates and sustains the development of silo mentalities – even more so, when the competing teams are starved of resources (combining lack of resources with territoriality). This situation leads to a coping appraisal where teams realize that they do not have access to resources, leading them to become more defensive and protective of the resources they have within the team.

Team vs organizational identification

In some instances, silos can be helpful or operationally required (for example, if they are tasked to keep highly sensitive information confidential). Accordingly, organizations often cluster expertise or create teams according to different parameters and organizational needs. For example, expert groups organized by function are often intentionally segregated, creating silos that are structurally supported by policies and practices within their own organization (Silberman *et al.*, 2022; see observation about research groups by Collyer and Smith, 2020). These teams also see themselves as separate entities and do not necessarily share the sense of being part of the same organization – requiring a sustained cultural community building effort.

Discussion

We believe that our retrospective insights on how silo mentality forms, emerges and changes, represent a sound starting point for studying the dynamic nature of psychological contracts (see Bankins, 2015; Schalk and Roe, 2007; Van der Schaft *et al.*, 2020). The current discussion will focus on two specific factors. That is, the importance of communications and the impact of restructuring as both shape – independently and conjointly – silo mentality in teams as well as the psychological contracts held by team members affected by silos.

Silo mentality may emerge for numerous reasons, as outlined in previous sections. Three factors seem to be particularly relevant to both silo mentality as well as the dynamic nature and revisions applied to psychological contracts (in terms of how these are corrected and compared as well as how individuals respond to breachers or violations; Rousseau, 1990; Schalk and Roe, 2007). These factors include a number of organizational and communication practices as well as the experience of restructuring or change events. We propose that specific organizational practices related to recruitment and socialization can have significant effects on contract definition as well as the formation of silo mentality. For example, when a psychological contract created during recruitment is solely based on an individual's expected benefits and their responsibilities, managers may inadvertently, lay the foundation for silo mentality.

Furthermore, if individual performers expect to be praised and evaluated on their individual performance alone, but not on team contributions, there is no incentive for individuals in organizations to proactively support team-based or cross-functional communication. |Silo mentality is more likely to arise as a default mindset. Similarly, if cross-functional communication or team-related performance aspects are not part of the recruitment, onboarding or performance processes, it is unlikely that these aspects will be part and parcel of an individual employee's reciprocal expectations when they enter an organization. As a result, such unrealistic communication is likely to prompt a correction or revision of the psychological contract (see also Van der Schaft *et al.*, 2020). This also might mean that the onboarding experience will be less smooth for the new hire.

Another building block that contributes to a silo mentality is the increased reliance on transactional employment relations and transitional employment contracts, which also shape psychological expectations of what employees need to invest in return for certain benefits. Employees in these situations do not have an incentive to volunteer information or engage in behaviors outside their prescribed roles. According to the authors' experience in organizations, this setup may unintentionally be further aggravated by different onboarding tracks for freelancers or temporary employees as well as a lack of interaction with people outside their immediate team. It is critical that during recruitment and socialization, all employees need to be given role context such as the importance of task interdependence. They also need to be briefed on success criteria such as sustained reciprocal relationship building and maintenance via collaboration and communication. This will reduce the likelihood of a silo mentality being adopted and the need to correct the psychological contract during onboarding.

Change is omnipresent in organizations and society today. However, how these changes are managed, communicated and implemented can trigger employees to revise their psychological contracts. Social interactions during transformations are well known to influence psychological contracts, as noted in a Dutch study (Van der Schaft *et al.*, 2020). The experience of support and fairness shapes the extent to which employees embrace the new reality or shield themselves from it (e.g. by withdrawing personally or within their team, leading to stronger or more silos within the organization). Organizational change may be perceived as a threat to one's role and team, thus triggering perceived psychological contract corrections (Schalk and Roe, 2007). In such circumstances, employees and teams may only focus on their job and what they need to accomplish themselves and on their own – further deteriorating communication and engagement across an organization. This creates another corner stone for silo mentality to emerge and/or persist.

Changed circumstances and possibilities for promotions and raises may also trigger perceptions of contract violations (in line with a transactional breach according to Rousseau, 1990). This aligns with Bankins (2015) who noted in a study with employees in Australia and New Zealand that breaches or violations can lead to a withdrawal of contributions. Generally, less productive exchanges will lead to fewer exchanges over time and reduce affective attachment of a team to the organization (see related work with American students by Lawler *et al.*, 2008). This is disconcerting, especially when we consider the important role of many key high performers during change events. Most worryingly, the effect of a breach on performance may be more negative for those who previously reported higher trust and support. Accordingly, Bal *et al.* (2010) reported supportive evidence in a study with American service organizations by noting that the negative relationship between psychological contract breach and performance is shaped by the strengths of social exchange relationships, perceived organizational support and trust.

This tendency to reduce communication and thus become more siloed during restructuring rounds is further impacted by employee anxiety about how such changes will affect them in the future. Trust in the organization is known to correlate positively with perceived organizational support (Bal *et al.*, 2010). As soon as employees feel they are receiving less support – often in line with less transparent communication – their trust in the organization may also decline (this might be classified as a relational breach, see Rousseau, 1990). As a result, we have observed teams in organizations becoming more territorial. During restructuring, such teams may consider any request to share information or collaborate as the first step towards reducing their importance and role, and with this, leading to the loss of their unique knowledge within the organization. In some cases, such approaches can lead employees to feel that their psychological contract has been breached or violated as a result. This then creates a negative feedback loop where future cross-functional communication is rebuffed even more strongly each time, leading to less and less

communication attempts overall. This may be also affected by employees' perceptions of fairness, injustice or inequity. Abu-Doley and Hammou (2015, p. 34) concluded accordingly in a study of Jordanian insurance companies that "personal beliefs can aggravate or alleviate the negative effects of a psychological contract breach on employees' organizational outcomes" such as in-role performance and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Our research and practitioner-based observations demonstrate the importance of revisiting psychological contracts to better understand how expectations of mutual obligations have been met or changed over time. Bankins (2015) and Van der Schaft *et al.* (2020) suggested that contract repair and renegotiation are options that can be utilized when psychological contracts are negatively influenced by events such as transformations.

Future exploration of how silos affect psychological contracts in particular (and the expectations around communication practices, social exchange relationships, reciprocity and identity) will represent a useful lens through which researchers can gain a better understanding of the implications of silos on the behavior of teams in organizations. An intriguing area for further research, in combination with psychological contract research, would be the exploration of silo mentality and its relationship to microsocial orders. Lawler (2002, p. 4–5) defined "a micro social order [. . .] as a set of recurrent patterns of interaction among a set of actors, from which they come to perceive themselves as a unit (i.e. a group) and to develop feelings about that unit." He argues that such microsocial orders vary in terms of how members feel, think and behavior as part of their affiliation. These characteristics make micro social orders an interesting and multi-faceted lens through which researchers could explore silo mentality and the idea of psychological contracting as a dynamic process in organizations (Schalk and Roe, 2007; Van der Schaft *et al.*, 2020).

Recommended options for organizations

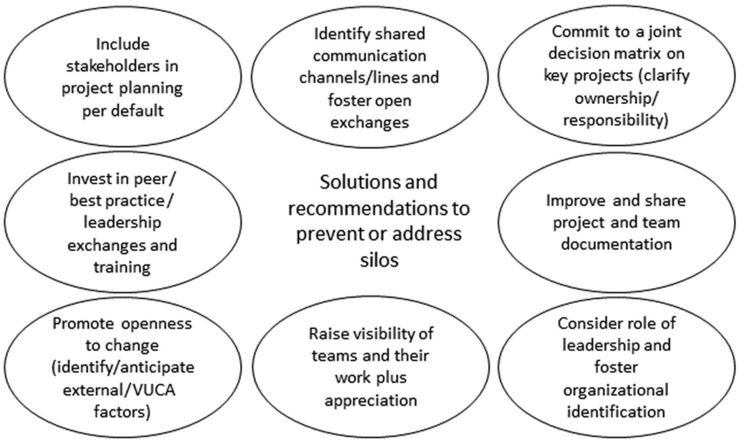
A number of recent papers have focused on proposing solutions to limit the effects of silos or to create measures to bust them (e.g. Waal *et al.*, 2019). As noted in earlier sections, silos are not by default problematic. They may be a natural phenomenon in organizations that set up clusters of expertise along specific functions, levels and functions (Waal *et al.*, 2019).

What is more, we need to recognize that we have two options in business, firstly identifying ways to prevent silos from arising by looking at the factors that lead to their (unintentional) development. Secondly, finding organizational or team-based interventions or solutions that will reduce the influence and repercussions associated with already existing silos.

In the next section and Figure 2 we outline recommendations for organizations and practitioners. These tend to focus on how to address existing team silos. That said, many of these could also be utilized to prevent silos from forming or becoming permanent fixtures once organizations recognize which factors facilitate their formation (see earlier section on the emergence of silos). Figure 2 provides a summary of key points. For more recommendations, please also consider the work by Bento *et al.* (2020), Nanayakkara *et al.* (2022), LugoSantiago (2018) and Willcock (2013).

Recommendations on how to begin the process of taking down silos

When organizations have silos that are not productive or result in isolation from other teams, we begin by recommending two specific approaches. One, share/provide support and resources for all teams that need to re-connect and their stakeholders. Two, the organization must create opportunities for the affected teams and their stakeholders to implement new ideas. The next section outlines recommendations about where to begin based on our own and our team leaders' practical experience with such interventions. So how can we in our



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 2.
Overview of options to address silos

organization, collaborate more closely on our shared goals? What can team leads do to help break down silos?

Organizational communication. Several options apply. For example, move away from departmentally focused project planning (without stakeholders) to include stakeholders (need to set priorities with stakeholders, not just within departments). This could be achieved by creating a map of the internal stakeholder landscape and tracking communication to identify disconnected communication lines. The outcome is to identify new shared channels of communication (i.e. social media channels for expanded cross-departmental communication). Furthermore, teams could be asked to create and commit to following a joint decision matrix (e.g. who decides what – ownership and responsibilities of different teams). Using this map, all teams internally and with each other commit to continuously checking and promoting clarity on their upcoming priorities for other teams (e.g. by sharing roadmaps, OKRs, KPIs and deadlines). This also helps to proactively align on product development processes with other teams (rather than planning next steps in isolation). We highlight further suggestions in the next subsection on sustaining processes.

Organizational learning and team specific recommendations. This could mean identifying additional initiatives that could promote openness to discuss current practices (peer exchanges, cross-functional leadership programs). In addition, the establishment of new peer mentoring/learning meetings to focus on expanding skills and exchange of information/best practices may further promote organizational learning. One option for teams is to monitor engagement with others so that leads notice when a team is creating a wall between itself and other teams (e.g. by being defensive). This could include working together to "open" up again to other teams and the organization (see also organizational communication tips). Another option is to promote openness to change (e.g. by regularly accounting for and taking stock of external "forces"). This ensures that the team gets used to and can flex, when necessary, rather than withdrawing behind a wall to defend their own plans. Finally, a commitment to improve on processes and documentation and share these within and with other teams may be required. This means identifying and adopting a best practice approach when it comes to handovers (e.g. project expectations that go along with projects, stakeholder management and clarity, clear ownership of different project phases).

Sustaining processes to build and reinforce the culture of collaboration

Teamwork visibility and appreciation. Many siloed teams perceive themselves as specialist or expert teams, which sometimes results in specific communication styles which further isolate such groups from others. If appreciation is more likely to be awarded to experts (Silberman *et al.*, 2022), the organization may inadvertently support this formation of silos. It is therefore helpful to ensure that all teams are visible, appreciated and recognized for their cross-functional engagement (LugoSantiago, 2018). Similarly, by focusing on the shared responsibilities of teams for certain aspects such as risk management (Sarker *et al.*, 2016), organizations can increase internal visibility of critical agendas and thus highlight the importance of teams jointly owning or tasked with such responsibilities. An alternative option to raise visibility in some teams is to address a potentially structural lack of cross-functional connections and spokespeople. Having both in place can ensure that the teams gain more visibility through public appreciation. This can be achieved using various approaches. One is to share information (such as product roadmaps) with and across the organization to highlight how the team contributes to its strategic goals of the organization (see Edwards, 2020).

Another option is to more carefully reflect on and prescreen all candidates for senior positions to identify those leaders and senior managers who are experienced when it comes to dealing with silo mentality and formation (see the work about CEO characteristics and their impact on organizational cultures and silos by Mouta and Meneses, 2021). The training of skilled team members to support intra-team and cross-organizational communication can facilitate the integration of a siloed team to be represented and seen (see Forsten-Astikainen *et al.*, 2017). A third option is to actively ask more siloed teams to contribute to knowledge sharing initiatives such as "Lunch"n"Learn". All these steps lead to a more bi-directional communication exchange which moves teams to collaborate, rather than to isolate. Once the team perceives that it is "seen" and recognized for its work (e.g. when members are actively consulted and included again), such a team will often slowly open up again to other teams and stakeholders.

Open exchanges and retrospectives. While communication is often a pivotal aspect that needs to be reviewed when silos have been identified, it is necessary to recognize two aspects before communication initiatives are launched. First, if you have functional silos, communications solutions that are function-focused or department specific will not succeed where problems or issues are actually of a cross-functional nature (Naslund and Norrman, 2022; Neill and Jiang, 2017). Second, while "silos are often considered a leadership problem" (Bento *et al.*, 2020, p. 4), we propose that a shared ownership approach for the problems and communication practices within a team is more likely to lead to a change which is more fruitful than leaving the team leads to address silos on their own.

Open peer or lead exchanges and increased opportunities for social interactions can be helpful in opening siloed team members' eyes to the possibilities of collaboration (Edwards, 2020). Such initiatives should include team leads as team members in this proposal. Another alternative is to establish cross-functional "communities of practice" which include all the experts or specialists to share and learn from one another (Forsten-Astikainen *et al.*, 2017; Willcock, 2013). That said, before these approaches are adopted, let us consider when they are likely to be effective. One critical observation we made with our practitioners was the fact that some folks perceived silos, while others did not. In other words, the perception of which teams are defined as silos or not, may actually depend on the adopted perspective, cross-functional dependencies and frequency of contact between teams. This means that it is helpful to begin by openly discussing processes with team members to "see through their eyes" before it is assumed that silo mentalities are the root of the problem.

If silos are perceived, learning workshops can be designed in a way that helps team members understand how such silos are perceived and the impact that a silo mentality has

on other teams (e.g. feeling excluded, seeing other teams as closed off and not open to suggestions). Some teams close themselves off for various reasons (see discussion around VUCA) and may not even be aware of how their mannerisms and behaviors are perceived or how their approaches can further promote isolation when they do not invite other teams to engage with them. It may also be helpful to employ questionnaires like the one developed by Waal *et al.* (2019), which focus on organizational processes, management practices, employee trust and perceptions of management, employee and stakeholder relationships. Leadership development enabling managers to become risk competent and embrace uncertainty (Kelly, 2023) can help them to embrace further options. Enabling team members to understand their triggers to isolate can increase their readiness to try new approaches and thus create a starting point for learning interventions (Sessa and London, 2008).

Silberman *et al.* (2022) noted that sharing a common language, focusing on the cross-functional needs of the business and reducing the tendency to prioritize expert or specific team perspectives over others can help foster organizational potential. While organizational communication initiatives can promote many of these aspects (Waal *et al.*, 2019), we have found that peer exchanges and retro-style workshops with teams make a positive impact. Engaging the leads and influencers (people who are listened to but have no formal authority) of all teams helps to focus on communication and collaboration patterns. For example, regular retro-style workshops conducted every quarter with all team representatives can be helpful to identify which routines, processes and communication formats work well for the collaboration across teams. This process highlights those aspects that should be revised or abandoned if they are counterproductive or undermine collaboration and communication within and between teams.

Fostering organizational identification. Research on the influence of organizational identification can provide helpful insights (Porck *et al.*, 2020). One feature of silos is the emergence of subcultures and a sense of "us" vs "them" (Edwards, 2020). According to Blustein (2011, p. 11), "culture functions as a form of a holding environment for individuals as they cope with work-based challenges". Culture can provide security and connection, which enables individuals to cope with work-based changes (Blustein, 2011). Cultural assessment can identify areas of consent and disagreement among different teams and business units in the same organization. Subcultures can emerge based on shared characteristics, such as geography or function (Corfield and Paton, 2016). If internal assessments show that siloed teams have created their own cultural norms, values and assumptions, organizations have several options to proceed. For example, they can set up workshops and efforts to foster the identification of these team members with the organization in order to address divergent values and shared values, which can help to resolve this dichotomy. When using this approach, it is important to invest time to understand what the core values of the team are and how these match, conflict or complement how other teams see the organization.

By identifying similar identification pointers, practitioners can create a bridge which helps the more siloed team to see a connection to the organization overall. In addition, it will be helpful to identify barriers for the team. Legacy and historical issues are often a force that will, if not considered, undermine any efforts to support efforts to promote a stronger organizational identification. For example, if the siloed team has traditionally included more external consultants or members, more work will have to be invested to ensure that the contract workers are sufficiently embedded in the organization. As long as contract workers are excluded from such activities, teams that are composed of both internal and external team members will not be able to identify similarly and strongly with the organization.

Conclusions

The current article summarizes the perspectives of practitioners regarding the impact and repercussions of silos, why these emerge and persist in organizations and the options that organizations can adopt to address these. Future work should explore the theoretical frameworks that impact the psychological, social and technological factors that lead to silos. The consideration of coping and threat appraisals in teams is just one option. Alternative frameworks need to be explored to better understand the various situational, organizational and team variables that lead to or prevent the emergence of silos and their negative impact on performance in organizations.

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