

Exploring the Causal, Contextual, and Intervening Conditions of Organizational Anxiety in Iranian State-Owned Banks and Its Consequences for Job Burnout and Employee Silence

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The sampling strategy requires more procedural detail. The manuscript states that “participants were selected through purposive sampling using a theoretical sampling strategy,” but purposive sampling and theoretical sampling are not interchangeable. In grounded theory, theoretical sampling should be driven by emerging categories and the need to elaborate their properties and relationships. The authors should explain how the initial participants were selected, what categories emerged during early analysis, how these emerging categories guided subsequent recruitment, and why additional managers, experts, or academics were sought. A description of the sequence of sampling decisions would provide evidence that theoretical sampling was genuinely implemented rather than merely claimed.

The justification of theoretical saturation is currently insufficient. The sentence “Ultimately, theoretical saturation was reached after 22 semi-structured interviews” reports the final number but does not document how saturation was assessed. The authors should distinguish between code saturation and meaning saturation and state after which interview no substantively new concepts emerged. A saturation table or supplementary matrix showing the accumulation of categories across interviews

would increase methodological transparency. The manuscript should also report whether additional interviews were conducted after the apparent saturation point to confirm that category properties and relationships were adequately developed.

The participant composition raises questions about the alignment between the sample and the study outcomes. The sample included 12 senior managers and banking experts and 10 university faculty members, yet the study makes conclusions about employee burnout, self-censorship, and defensive silence. The perspectives of frontline bank employees—the individuals most directly experiencing these outcomes—appear to be absent. The authors should justify why academic faculty and senior managers were considered sufficient sources for understanding employees' lived experiences of burnout and silence. Alternatively, the conclusions should be reframed as expert interpretations rather than direct evidence of employee experiences. Including frontline employees would likely improve the credibility and experiential grounding of the proposed model.

Several numerical inconsistencies must be resolved before publication. Table 5 reports 43 codes for defensive silence, whereas the final summary states that “defensive silence, with 25 codes,” had the highest absolute frequency. This is a major internal contradiction. Similarly, the manuscript reports 12 main categories, but the tables and narrative do not clearly enumerate all 12 categories or show how they correspond to causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and consequential components. The authors should conduct a full numerical audit of all code counts, percentages, category totals, and textual interpretations and ensure consistency across the abstract, tables, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

The grounded theory model appears incomplete because the “strategies” component of the Strauss and Corbin paradigmatic model is not presented in the findings. The interview guide reportedly included “strategies,” yet the reported results focus on causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, and consequences. The absence of action–interaction strategies is theoretically significant because grounded theory should explain how actors respond to the central phenomenon, not merely identify antecedents and outcomes. The authors should either report the strategy categories and explain their relationships to organizational anxiety or justify why no strategy category emerged. Without this component, the model resembles a thematic classification more than a fully developed grounded theory.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The manuscript should provide explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants. The phrase “possessed extensive knowledge of and practical experience with Iran’s state-owned banking system” is too general to permit replication. The authors should report the minimum required years of experience, managerial level, field of academic specialization, history of employment in state-owned banks, and any other eligibility conditions. They should also explain how potential participants were approached, how many declined, whether recruitment occurred through organizational channels or professional networks, and whether any existing hierarchical relationships could have influenced participation.

The interview protocol requires fuller reporting. The manuscript states that “the interview guide was developed according to the dimensions of the paradigmatic model,” including causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. Designing questions directly around predetermined paradigmatic components may have constrained theoretical emergence and introduced confirmation bias. The authors should provide representative interview questions and explain how they maintained openness to unexpected categories. They should also clarify whether the concept of the “anxious organization” was introduced to participants before they described their experiences, because doing so could have primed responses and shaped the resulting coding structure.

The data analysis procedure should be described in considerably greater detail. The manuscript notes the use of open, axial, and selective coding but does not show how 134 initial codes were reduced to 24 concepts and then to 12 main categories. The authors should provide examples of raw interview excerpts, initial codes, focused concepts, and final categories to demonstrate the analytic chain. They should also explain whether coding was conducted manually or with qualitative data analysis software,

how constant comparison was performed, how negative cases were treated, and how memos contributed to theory development. A coding paradigm table containing representative quotations would greatly improve auditability.

The reliability and trustworthiness procedures are inadequately specified. The methodology refers to “the reliability of the qualitative interviews,” but reliability is not a property of interviews themselves. The authors should state whether they assessed intercoder agreement, coding stability, or agreement between coders and provide the exact formula, number of transcripts double-coded, and obtained coefficient. More broadly, the manuscript should address credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Procedures such as member checking, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, reflexive memoing, negative-case analysis, and maintenance of an audit trail should be reported where applicable.

The use of percentages in the qualitative findings is conceptually problematic and requires correction. For example, Table 2 reports that “mandated interest rates inconsistent with market conditions” accounted for 47%, while Table 5 reports emotional exhaustion and defensive silence at 100%. It is unclear what denominator was used to calculate each percentage. Some percentages appear to represent the proportion of participants mentioning a concept, while others may represent the proportion of codes within a category. The authors must define the denominator for every percentage and apply a consistent calculation method. More importantly, frequency should not be equated with theoretical importance, causal strength, or effect magnitude in grounded theory.

The repeated use of causal and statistical terminology is not fully supported by the qualitative design. Statements such as “all three components of the causal conditions had positive effects,” “chronic inflation had the strongest intensifying effect,” and “job burnout and employee silence were directly and positively affected” imply experimentally or statistically established relationships. Qualitative grounded theory can identify perceived mechanisms and theoretically proposed relationships, but it cannot establish effect direction, magnitude, or statistical significance without appropriate quantitative testing. These claims should be revised to formulations such as “participants perceived,” “the analysis suggested,” or “the proposed model indicates.” The terms “effectiveness,” “positive effect,” and “strongest effect” should be avoided unless supported by inferential evidence.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.