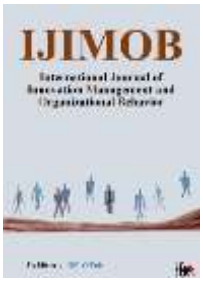
Journal Website

Article history:
Received 26 June 2026
Revised 17 October 2026
Accepted 25 October 2026
Initial Publication 26 October 2026
Final Publication 01 July 2027

International Journal of Innovation Management and Organizational Behavior

Open Peer-Review Report



E-ISSN: 3041-8992

Designing a Contingency Model for Breaking Organizational Silence in Iranian Public Organizations

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the first paragraph of the Materials and Methods section, the manuscript states, “This study employed grounded theory. Accordingly, the research was qualitative and fundamental in terms of its purpose (Zagzebski, 1996).” This methodological justification requires substantial revision. First, the cited work should be verified as an appropriate methodological source for classifying grounded theory research as fundamental research. Second, the philosophical positioning of the study is not sufficiently coherent: the Abstract identifies pragmatism as the philosophical foundation, while the methods section primarily presents classical Glaserian grounded theory, which has its own epistemological assumptions. The authors should explicitly explain how pragmatism is compatible with the Glaserian emergent approach adopted in this study and distinguish the research paradigm, methodological approach, research purpose, and data-analysis strategy rather than treating them as interchangeable concepts.

In the second paragraph of the Materials and Methods section, the sentence, “Three approaches to grounded theory have been identified: the systematic approach, the emergent approach, and the constructivist approach… In the present study, the

emergent, or Glaserian, approach was employed," requires a more rigorous methodological rationale. Merely identifying the Glaserian approach does not explain why it was preferable to Straussian or constructivist grounded theory for the research question. The authors should explain why an emergent approach was methodologically necessary for discovering the process of breaking organizational silence, how preconceived categories were minimized, and how constant comparison, theoretical sampling, memo writing, theoretical sensitivity, and theoretical saturation were operationalized. Without these procedural details, the study currently reads more like thematic categorization than classical grounded theory.

The manuscript states, "In this study, a combination of the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability was used to assess the validity of the data and the interpretations derived from them." Although these are appropriate qualitative trustworthiness criteria, Table 1 does not demonstrate them with sufficient rigor. For example, prolonged engagement and reporting to supervisors are presented as evidence of credibility, but there is no discussion of member checking, peer debriefing, negative-case analysis, triangulation, reflexivity, or an audit trail. Similarly, confirmability is inferred from a "professional yet friendly" interview environment, which does not by itself establish that interpretations were independent of researcher bias. The authors should strengthen this section by identifying concrete procedures undertaken for each criterion and should avoid treating participant willingness to provide information as sufficient evidence of confirmability.

The test–retest reliability procedure requires methodological reconsideration. The manuscript reports that "two coded interview transcripts were selected completely at random… and were recoded by the researcher after an interval of 10 days," resulting in a reliability estimate of 72%. In qualitative grounded theory, intra-coder agreement can be reported as an auxiliary audit procedure, but it should not be presented as a substitute for interpretive credibility or theoretical coherence. More importantly, the authors should explain the exact denominator used in the reliability formula, because the reported values are not immediately transparent from the numbers of agreements and disagreements shown in Table 2. The manuscript should demonstrate the calculation for each interview and justify the threshold of 0.60 using an appropriate methodological source.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the participant-selection paragraph, the manuscript reports that "the research data were collected through interviews with 11 senior managers of the Iranian National Tax Administration" and that participants had "at least 15 years of professional experience." This sampling frame raises an important conceptual concern because organizational silence is fundamentally an employee voice phenomenon, whereas the participants appear to be exclusively senior managers. The authors should justify why senior managers were considered sufficiently positioned to describe mechanisms of employee silence and its disruption, especially because managerial perceptions may differ substantially from the experiences of employees who actually choose whether to speak or remain silent. The manuscript should acknowledge this asymmetry explicitly and explain whether any lower-level employees, middle managers, human-resource specialists, or individuals with direct experience of speaking up were considered during theoretical sampling.

The sampling description in the same paragraph is internally ambiguous. The manuscript states that "purposive sampling with a judgmental selection strategy was used," while classical grounded theory typically requires an initial purposive sample followed by theoretical sampling, in which subsequent participants or data sources are selected according to emerging conceptual needs. The authors should specify whether sampling remained judgmental throughout the study or evolved into theoretical sampling after preliminary categories emerged. If theoretical sampling was conducted, the manuscript should identify which emerging concepts guided subsequent participant selection, what gaps were being filled, and how the final three interviews contributed to theoretical completeness rather than simply increasing the sample size.

In the Findings section, the statement that "theoretical saturation was achieved after conducting eight interviews… [and] three additional interviews were conducted to enhance the robustness of the model" requires stronger empirical substantiation. Saturation should not be reported merely as the absence of new codes; in grounded theory, the more relevant issue is whether

IJIMOB
E-ISSN: 3041-8992

the properties, dimensions, relationships, and variation of the emerging categories are sufficiently elaborated. The authors should indicate how saturation was assessed, whether a saturation grid or coding comparison was maintained, what happened in Interviews 9–11, and whether those interviews produced no new categories, no new properties, or only redundant indicators. This information is necessary to make the claim of theoretical saturation methodologically credible.

In the coding-procedure paragraph, the manuscript states that "all stages of open coding, selective or focused coding, theoretical coding, and ultimately the development of the theoretical model were derived from the interview transcripts and the theoretical literature." This wording creates a potential contradiction with the Glaserian principle that categories should emerge primarily from data rather than be imposed through prior literature. The authors should clarify the role of the literature during coding. Specifically, they should explain whether the literature was used only to enhance theoretical sensitivity after substantive categories had emerged, or whether previously published concepts were directly used as codes. If existing literature informed code labels during open coding, the risk of forcing data into pre-existing conceptual structures should be addressed explicitly.

The coding description contains the sentence, "Because the researcher had already developed preliminary mental representations of certain codes during the interviews, incident-by-incident coding was employed during the coding process." This justification is problematic from a grounded theory perspective because having preconceived codes may increase the likelihood of confirmation bias rather than justify a specific coding strategy. The authors should revise this passage and provide a more methodologically defensible explanation of how coding was conducted. It would be useful to distinguish clearly among in vivo codes, researcher-generated substantive codes, focused/selective codes, and theoretical codes and to provide one worked example showing the transformation of an interview excerpt into an initial code, subcategory, main category, and theoretical relationship.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

2. Revised

Editor's decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief's decision: Accepted.

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E-ISSN: 3041-8992