

THE IMPACT OF PERSONALITY TRAITS OF INDIVIDUALS ON ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE IN ITS FOUR FORMS

Marek KUNASZ

University of Szczecin; marek.kunasz@usz.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1577-0425

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of personality traits of individuals on organizational silence in the context of its four forms, discussed in prevailing angles taken in relevant literature. Respondents' personality traits are differentiated according to the five-factor model of personality (the Big Five).

Design/methodology/approach: The empirical material was obtained through a survey by means of a questionnaire with 47 questions (including questions about discriminatory behaviour, forms of organizational silence and respondents' personality traits). The survey was conducted in 2021 in the West Pomeranian province, Poland. 426 questionnaires were analysed.

Findings: There are statistically significant correlations (overall, positively-oriented) for acquiescent silence with results of self-assessment of respondents' personality traits in the domain of extraversion, conscientiousness and openness to experience, while for defensive silence – in the domain of extraversion, neuroticism (exceptionally - negative correlation) and openness to experience.

Research limitations/implications: The analysis is based on respondents' subjective declarations. Intensification of respondents' personality traits is examined on the basis of self-assessment, which may limit the pre-editorial capacity of the measuring tool.

Practical implications: The study presents individual descriptions of personalities which determine the differentiated behaviours relating to organizational silence. This knowledge may be used in the context of managerial actions for breaking silence.

Originality/value: This research may be considered pioneering in the Polish literature, while such investigations in international writings are rare and conducted in a different typological configuration.

Keywords: organizational silence, personality traits, five-factor model of personality.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The subject matter of organizational silence is not strongly represented in Polish literature. We may only see a few listings that focus on these issues (Moczulska, Stankiewicz, 2008; Grzesiuk, 2014; Adamska, 2015, 2016; Adamska, Jurek, 2017; Jurek, 2019). Internationally though, it has a strong presence.

The aim of this paper is to assess the impact of personality traits of individuals on organizational silence. This study is both theoretical and empirical. In the empirical sphere I present research results which link respondents' declarations on organizational behaviours that refer to four forms of organizational silence with results of personality self-assessment according to the five-factor model of personality (the Big Five). Relevant research in the national literature may be considered pioneering, while such investigations in international scholarly writings are rare and conducted in a different typological configuration.

2. Literature review

The subject matter of organizational silence has been present in a scientific discussion since 2000. It appeared with the article by Milliken and Morrison (2000). Before that, it had been taken up in other contexts: bottom-up communication, voicing one's thoughts (Bies, Shapiro, 1988; Withey, Cooper, 1989), whistle-blowing, the MUM effect (that demonstrates reluctance to give negative information and postponement of confrontation with a recipient of this information) (Rosen, Tesser, 1970), the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Bowen, Blackmon, 2003) or self-censorship (Hayes, Scheufele, Huges, 2006).

Milliken and Morrison (2000) treat organizational silence as a collective phenomenon in opposition to the discussion carried out in the literature so far on employees' voicing their opinions. Earlier research focuses on employees' individual decisions whether to speak up in a given situation. The authors quoted assume that if there is silence in an organization it is not an effect of unrelated individual choices but rather a product of forces within the organization that reinforce organizational silence. This silence is rooted in managers' fear of negative feedback and in the collection of covert unspoken convictions in managers' heads. The authors cited specify these beliefs as follows:

- employees only care for their interests and are not trustworthy,
- managers can best decipher the meaning of most organizational concepts,
- unity and consensus are signs of an organization's health.

Managers' beliefs and fear of feedback determine the emergence of predictable organizational structures and management practices which contribute to the creation of a specific silence climate and a belief widespread among employees that voicing their opinions will not affect change, or quite the contrary - it may bring specific adverse consequences. With such climate in place, silence prevails in an organization, not voice. At the same time, studies that focus on organizational silence at the individual level have started surfacing (Pinder, Harlos, 2001; van Dyne, Ang, Botero, 2003).

Pinder and Harlos (2001, p. 334) define silence in an organization as employee reluctance to give/express their opinions (in any form: behavioural, cognitive or affective) on the organizational situation to persons who are perceived to be capable of affecting change. In such an angle employee silence may not be treated as a unidimensional concept in which different employee motifs that prevent them from voicing their opinions are ignored. There have been attempts in this context to categorize organizational silence in relation to the motivation of employee behaviours.

Van Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003, p. 1363), analysing strategies for voice and silence, identify three employee motivations that differentiate how they act: resignation, fear of consequences and of the risk of losing one's job and orientation towards others. In effect, they identify three categories of silence:

- acquiescent silence – silence based on resignation related to a feeling that voicing one's opinions will not change anything,
- defensive silence – behaviour resulting from fear that expressing one's opinion will draw attention of other members of the organization to the person expressing these opinions, which in consequence carries the risk of losing: one's job or image,
- prosocial silence – silence resulting from altruism or a sense that such behaviour may jeopardize cooperation between employees.

In this context Adamska (2016, pp. 77-78) differentiates between "being silenced" and "being silent". In the first case, decisions on voicing one's opinions are made automatically, below the consciousness level, thus quickly and thoughtlessly. Routines for taking these decisions are formed in socialization processes. They fit within publically shared beliefs about what may and what may not be said. In turn, in this context we must examine the essential influence of what superiors think about employees' behaviours. Employee behaviours have a greater influence on beliefs about superiors than the result of their real behaviours (Detert, Edmondson, 2011, p. 462).

In the second case, decisions on speaking up are taken consciously and are based on results of calculations of profits and losses after much consideration. Therefore, such decisions have a tactical nature.

In everyday work circumstances our behaviour in terms of voice is rather determined by automatic processes (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino, Edmondson, 2009, p. 165).

Knoll and van Dick (2013, p. 351) lean on this typology of silence and introduce another, fourth category – opportunistic silence. In this case silence is motivated by a concern that voice may result in additional workload or in a risk of weakening one's position in the team. An individual calculates whether it is worth voicing their opinions in such a situation. Such behaviour fits in the strategy of remaining silent.

These authors present measurements to diagnose types of organizational silence that are used in literature (Polish and international) in empirical uses (Adamska, 2016; Adamska, Jurek, 2017; Jurek, 2019).

Research of the impact of personality traits of individuals on organizational silence (in its four forms) may be considered pioneering in the Polish literature. Such analyses are also quite rare in international writings (Dilek, Taskiran, 2016; Hatipoglu, Akduman, 2019; Isik, Kucuksahin, 2020) and are based on a classical (van Dyne, Ang, Botero, 2003) rather than extended (Knoll, van Dick, 2013) typology of organizational silence (research lacunae).

3. Methodological aspects of the research

The data analysed comes from research on the subject matter of organizational silence (subject of research). The empirical material was gathered in September-October 2021 (research period) from respondents from the West Pomeranian province, Poland (spatial scope). Ultimately, the empirical material was collected from 426 respondents who filled out the questionnaire.

In the analysis of the typology of organizational silence I use the tool offered by Knoll and van Dick (2013) which was then translated into the Polish language. These authors, in turn, rooted their analytical concept in the works of Milliken, Morrison, Hewlin (2003); Van Dyne, Ang, Botero (2003); and Brinsfield (2009). The questionnaire comprised 20 statements that all began with the common core: "I keep silent at work...". Authors of the concept use a confirmatory factor analysis to identify questions that may be used in the context of the research for the four individual types of silence in an organization discussed here. 3 statements were identified in each area. This is why the analysis presented here takes into account jointly respondents' declarations on 12 questions. Respondents could choose their answers on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 meant disagreeing with a statement completely and 5 – agreeing with the statement completely. In individual areas the mean was the synthetic value of responses taken into account in further analyses. Apart from the demographics section, the questionnaire had a separate block with questions on the basis of which it was possible to build other potentially related constructs (e.g. job satisfaction or turnover intention). The questionnaire had 47 questions in 3 blocks in total.

Respondents also evaluated their personality according to the five-factor model of personality (the Big Five) (Fiske, 1949; Norman, 1963). The self-assessment was made on a five-point Likert scale, where the extreme values were marked with opposite characteristics for each domain of the self-assessment:

- extraversion (I am: extravert – introvert),
- agreeableness (I am: agreeable – quarrelsome),
- conscientiousness (I am: conscientious – unconscientious),
- neuroticism (I am: neurotic – emotionally stable),
- openness to experience (I am: creative – conventional).

Therefore, there were no procedures to evaluate the intensity of such self-assessments among respondents by means of special questionnaires, which must be considered a significant limitation of predictive possibilities of this measurement tool.

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to investigate the statistical significance of differences in means. The latter were calculated on the basis of respondents' declarations on issues related to silence in an organization in groups of respondents who marked different scores in the self-assessment of their personality traits in separate domains of the self-assessment. The study presents only the p-value obtained in the test, which indicates generally occurring differences in declarations among groups of respondents. A series of post hoc tests was used to identify pairs of groups of respondents where statistically significant differences in declarations were observed. LSD-based tests were used for the analysis in the research procedure. The accepted limit for p-value is $p < 0.1$. Correlations between the variables investigated were analysed in parallel on the basis of Pearson correlation coefficients. The statistical significance of this coefficient was also established at $p = 0.05$.

4. Research results

Table 1 presents the structure of respondents' declarations with reference to selected statements that discriminate individual types of organizational silence. The coefficient of skewness was calculated for each of the statements.

Table 1.

The structure of respondents' declarations in reference to selected statements that discriminate individual types of silence in an organization (together with the coefficient of skewness)

I keep silent at work...	1	2	3	4	5	skewness
acquiescent silence						
because my opinions will not fall on fertile ground anyway	38.1	22.8	25.7	6.0	7.5	0.75
because my superiors are not open to proposals or solutions	36.9	21.6	19.4	11.9	10.1	0.60
because nothing will change anyway	40.7	18.3	20.5	10.8	9.7	0.65

Cont. table 1.

defensive silence						
for fear of negative consequences	38.3	22.6	23.3	9.0	6.8	0.70
because I fear the damage associated with speaking up	43.8	24.7	18.4	7.5	5.6	0.94
not to expose myself to criticism from my colleagues or superiors	39.6	26.1	17.2	12.7	4.5	0.74
prosocial silence						
because I do not want to hurt the feelings of my colleagues or superiors	34.0	23.1	19.4	11.6	11.9	0.56
because I don't want to embarrass others	39.9	23.9	18.7	9.7	7.8	0.78
because I don't want others to get into trouble because of me	23.1	20.9	20.5	18.7	16.8	0.13
opportunistic silence						
not to give away knowledge advantage	40.3	22.0	19.4	11.9	6.3	0.69
for fear that others may use my ideas	39.2	21.3	22.8	9.3	7.5	0.69
because it would mean having to do additional yet avoidable work	43.3	23.5	17.9	7.8	7.5	0.90

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

A right-skewed asymmetric distribution (positive values of coefficient of skewness) was recorded for each of the presented structures of respondents' declarations. Respondents relatively more often did not agree with the presented statements, usually choosing the response options 1 or 2, or a neutral option. Therefore, we may assume that they did not think that a given factor was responsible for their silence in the organization. The coefficient of skewness for these statements oscillates in a rather narrow range between 0.56 and 0.94, which proves a relatively similar distribution of a variable. The structure of respondents' declarations (despite the prevailing slight right-skewed asymmetry) departs from this model in the third question that discriminates prosocial silence (I am silent at work because I don't want others to get into trouble because of me – this statement is supported by 35.5% of respondents, coefficient of skewness is 0.13).

The analysis also covered the sample in the context of respondents' responses on self-assessment of their own personalities in selected domains, according to the concept of the Big Five. In this case too, the coefficient of skewness was calculated for each distribution of a variable.

Table 2.

The structure of respondents' declarations about their self-assessment of their personalities in selected domains (together with the coefficient of skewness)

domain	1	2	3	4	5	skewness
extraversion	11.7	22.6	34.2	21.1	10.5	0.03
agreeableness	15.8	29.7	30.8	19.9	3.8	0.13
conscientiousness	26.8	42.6	19.6	6.8	4.2	0.88
neuroticism	5.3	12.8	25.6	28.2	28.2	-0.48
openness	19.5	36.5	26.3	12.0	5.6	0.52

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

The distribution of respondents' declarations is similar to a normal distribution (with the dominant choice of a neutral response 3) in the case of the extraversion and agreeableness domain. This is confirmed by a relatively low value of the coefficient of skewness. In this case

it is difficult to point to a relative dominance of a selected extreme feature under a given self-assessment area.

The greatest asymmetry of distribution may be observed for conscientiousness and neuroticism. In the first case a right-skewed asymmetry is observed in a distribution of a variable (relative prevalence of conscientious individuals), and in the second – a left-skewed asymmetry (as proven by a negative value of the coefficient of skewness, a relative prevalence of emotionally stable persons is observed).

A right-skewed asymmetry is also identified for the distribution of a variable for the domain of openness to experience (relevant prevalence of creative persons; however, values of the coefficient of skewness are lower than in the analysis for the conscientiousness domain).

Table 3 presents information that allows an assessment of the impact of personality traits of individuals on organizational silence.

Table 3.

Correlations between a form of silence and characteristic features of respondents' personalities

form of silence	personality domain	ANOVA p-value	pairs of groups for the LSD test (statistically significant correlations)	r_{xy}
acquiescent silence	extraversion	0.00***	1-3, 1-4, 1-5, 2-4, 2-5, 3-4, 3-5	0.288*
	agreeableness	0.46		-0.016
	conscientiousness	0.01*	1-4, 1-5, 2-4, 2-5, 3-4, 3-5	0.175*
	neuroticism	0.34		-0.071
	openness	0.10*	1-2, 1-4, 1-5	0.131*
defensive silence	extraversion	0.00***	1-2, 1-4, 1-5, 2-4, 3-4	0.209*
	agreeableness	0.08*	2-4	0.060
	conscientiousness	0.11	1-5, 2-5, 3-5	0.116
	neuroticism	0.00***	1-4, 1-5, 2-5, 3-4, 3-5	-0.246*
	openness	0.00***	1-2, 1-3, 1-4, 3-4, 4-5	0.187*
prosocial silence	extraversion	0.72		0.066
	agreeableness	0.87		-0.012
	conscientiousness	0.62		0.042
	neuroticism	0.80		0.020
	openness	0.98		-0.022
opportunistic silence	extraversion	0.56		0.011
	agreeableness	0.49		0.053
	conscientiousness	0.22		0.102
	neuroticism	0.91		0.011
	openness	0.12	2-3, 3-5	0.005

Source: author's own compilation on the basis of author's own research.

No statistically significant correlations in individual areas of personality self-assessment are recorded with prosocial and opportunistic silence.

For defensive silence we note statistically significant differences in respondents' declarations in the domain of extraversion, openness to experience and neuroticism (confirmed with results of an analysis of variance and correlations). In the first two cases we must note a positive correlation between variables (on the basis of analysis of the correlation coefficient) and a negative correlation in the last one. This means that a relatively greater intensity of silence motivated by fear should be expected among introvert persons (domain: extraversion),

conventional persons (domain: openness to experience) and also neurotic persons (domain: neuroticism; negative correlation between variables). Significant differences in respondents' declarations in the area of agreeableness must be noted. However, it is a consequence of the high p-value limit assumed. Post hoc tests point to significant differentiation of declarations only for one of the comparisons (groups 2-4). This correlation has not been confirmed in the analysis of correlations (assumed p-value = 0.05).

Statistically significant differences in respondents' declarations must also be noted for acquiescent silence in the areas of extraversion, conscientiousness and openness to experience. In each of the cases the correlations identified are positive (positive values of correlation coefficients in each of the cases identified, statistically significant). This means that a relatively greater intensity of silence motivated by resignation may be expected among introvert persons (area: extraversion), non-conscientious persons (area: conscientiousness) and also conventional persons (area: openness to experience). In the last of the domains of personality self-assessment we note the p-value at the threshold of the statistical significance assumed, yet a confirmation of statistically significant correlations may also be found in results of the analysis of the correlation coefficient.

5. Conclusions

The research confirms that organizational silence must be treated as a multidimensional phenomenon. Instruments to break it should be adjusted to an adequate form of silence. This study focused in this context on respondents' individual personality traits. The existing research (Dilek, Taskiran, 2016; Hatipoglu, Akduman, 2019; Isik, Kucuksahin, 2020) has focused on a classical three-element arrangement of forms of silence. The novum of this study in the context analysed concentrated on opportunistic silence identified additionally by Knoll and van Dick (2013). Unfortunately, no statistically significant correlations were found for this type of silence which would reflect the impact of personality traits of an individual according to the five-element model on organizational silence so motivated. No adequate correlations for prosocial silence were identified either. In turn, the research shows that in the context analysed, when looking for actions to break silence, we must mainly note individual personality characteristics of respondents in the areas of extraversion and openness to experience, as they determine respondents' different behaviours when it comes to resignation- and fear-motivated silence.

References

1. Adamska, K. (2015). Milczenie w organizacji. Rola uważności społecznej i czynników kontekstowych. *Zarządzanie Zasobami Ludzkimi, No. 1*, pp. 115-130.
2. Adamska, K. (2016). Milczenie i przełamywanie milczenia w organizacji. *Roczniki Psychologiczne, Vol. 19, No. 1*, pp. 75-88.
3. Adamska, K., Jurek, P. (2017). Adaptation off the Four Forms of Employee Silence Scale in a Polish Sample. *Current Issues in Personality Psychology, Vol. 5, No. 4*, pp. 303-312.
4. Bies, R.J., Shapiro, D.L. (1988). Voice and justification: their influence on procedural fairness judgments. *Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 31, No. 3*, pp. 676-685.
5. Bowen, F., Blackmon, K. (2003). Spirals of Silence: The Dynamic Effects of Diveristy on Organizational Voice. *Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 40, No. 6*, pp. 1393-1417.
6. Brinsfield, C. (2009). *Employee silence: Investigation of dimensionality, development of measures, and examination of related factors* (Unpublished doctoral disertation). Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University.
7. Detert, J.R, Edmondson, A.C. (2011). Implicit voice theories: taken-for-rules of self-censorship at work. *Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 54, No. 3*, pp. 461-488.
8. Dilek, Y., Taskiran, E. (2016). A Research for the Determination of the Effects of Personality Traits on the Organizational Silence. *Bartın University Journal of Faculty of Economics & Administrative Sciences, Vol. 13, No. 7*, pp. 403-433.
9. Fiske, D.W. (1949). Consistency of factorial structures for personality ratings from different sources. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Vol. 44, No. 3*, pp. 329-344.
10. Grzesiuk K. (2014). Milczenie organizacyjne jako przejaw biernego oporu wobec zmian. In: M. Pawlak (Ed.), *Nowe tendencje w zarządzaniu. Tom V* (pp. 153-167). Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.
11. Hatipoglu, Z., Akduman, G. (2019). The psychological contract violation effect on organizational silence by the mediating role of personality characteristics. *Electronic Journal of Social Sciences, Vol. 72, No. 18*, pp. 2129-2151.
12. Hayes, A.F., Scheufele, D.A., Huye, M.E. (2006). Nonparticipation as self-censorship: Publicly observable political activity in a polarized opinion climate. *Political Behavior, Vol. 28, No. 3*, pp. 259-283.
13. Isik, M., Kucuksahin, D. (2020). The relationship between five factor personality traits and organizational silence: an ampiric study on store employees. *Suleyman Demirel University Journal of Faculty of Economics & Administrative Sciences, Vol. 25, No. 3*, pp. 257-276.
14. Jurek, P. (2019). Związek między zaufaniem do przełożonego a postawami pracowników wobec organizacji i milczeniem organizacyjnym. *Zarządzanie Zasobami Ludzkimi, No. 2*, pp. 71-84.

15. Kish-Gephart, J.J., Detert, J.R., Trevino, L.K., Edmondson, A.C. (2009). Silenced by fear: The nature, sources and consequences of fear at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 29, pp. 163-193.
16. Knoll, M., van Dick, R. (2013). Do I Hear the Whistle...? A First Attempt to Measure Four Forms of Employee Silence and Their Correlates. *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 113, No. 2, pp. 349-362.
17. Milliken, F.J., Morrison, E.W., Hewlin, P.F. (2003). An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues that Employees Don't Communicate Upward and Why. *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6, pp. 1453-1476.
18. Moczulska, M., Stankiewicz, J. (2008). Milczenie pracowników a zarządzanie wiedzą. *Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Ekonomiczno-Społecznej w Ostrołęce*, nr 6, pp. 141-156.
19. Morrison, E.W., Milliken, F.J. (2000). Organizational silence: a barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world. *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 706-725.
20. Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence: A theory of public opinion. *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 43-51.
21. Norman, W T. (1963). Toward an adequate taxonomy of personality attributes: Replicated factor structure. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 66, No. 6, pp. 574-583.
22. Pinder, C.C., Harlos, K.P. (2001). Employee Silence: Quiescence and Acquiescence as Responses to Perceived Injustice. In: G.R. Ferris (Ed.), *Research in Personnel and Humana Resources Management*, vol. 20 (pp. 331-369). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
23. Rosen, S., Tesser, A. (1970). On reluctance to communicate undesirable information: The MUM effect. *Sociometry*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 253-263.
24. Van Dyne, L., Ang, S., Botero, I.C. (2003). Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs. *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 6, pp. 1359-1392.
25. Withey, M.J., Cooper, W.H. (1989). Predicting exit, voice, loyalty and neglect. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 521-539.