

SILENCE IN AN ORGANIZATION AND TRUST IN AN ORGANIZATION – THE ROLE OF THE EMPLOYEE'S GENDER

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Purpose: The purpose of the work is to analyze the relationship between silence in the organization and trust in the organization, considering the differentiation of silence in the organization and the role of gender employees.

Design/methodology/approach: The empirical material was obtained through a questionnaire survey. The survey was conducted in 2021 in the West Pomeranian province, Poland, and 426 questionnaires were analyzed.

Findings: Research confirmed the conditions Polish attempts to research, which shows that growing trust in the organization is a factor contributing to the reduction scale silence of employees. Research confirms the significance of statistical compounds mentioned in the scope. For silence consenting in both gender groups, for silence defensive, and in the group men. Research highlights the importance of the analysis in the context of silencing opportunistic (in both gender groups). The power of those examined dependencies is generally relatively bigger in the group of men.

Research limitations/implications: The analysis is based on respondents' subjective declarations.

Practical implications: Research shows that to limit silence in the organization, you should undertake any possible Actions to build trust in organizations, leaders, and co-workers. You should also undertake Actions dedicated to gender-specific employees.

Originality/value: The tests they consider in the analyses often skip the category of silence opportunistic. They focus too on issues and gender differences in shaping their analyzed relations. They enter this in the identified gaps research.

Keywords: silence in organization, trust in organization.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Organizational relationships should be established based on trust. Trust in the organization is a prerequisite for communication and cooperation. In conditions of mutual trust, individuals are willing to take risks that can bring positive results, such as increased satisfaction or commitment or reduced turnover. People working in environments with high trust and feeling

more comfortable communicating their thoughts or feelings. Trust is a factor that significantly reduces the risk of an employee speaking out. An increase in trust in the organization is, therefore, able to limit the scale of silence in the organization for various reasons. This relationship has been examined in quite a thorough manner in a simple scheme. In this respect, the research conclusions are unambiguous. A negative relationship is identified between the variables mentioned, although the literature on the subject emphasizes its moderate strength - e.g. (Fard, Karimi, 2015). The conclusions from studies considering a wide range of employees' motives for silence are more ambiguous. In this respect, they are not so unambiguous. Therefore, there is a need for further research in this area. In addition, the research conducted does not consider gender differences in the studied area. The research presented in the work fills the above gap. In addition, such research was not conducted on a Polish sample - in this respect, the presented research is pioneering.

The work is of a theoretical and empirical nature. The work aims to analyze the relationship between silence in the organization and trust in the organization, considering the differentiation of the motives for silence in the organization and the role of the employee's gender. In part, the theoretical foundation is presented, the issues of silence and trust in the organization are presented, and a review of research on the relationships between the analyzed variables is also made. Then, the results of survey studies conducted on a Polish research sample of respondents from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship focusing on implementing the work's goal are presented. The work ends with a discussion of the results.

2. Theoretical aspects

The classic understanding of organizational silence stemming from Milliken and Morrison (2000) reflects this construct as a homogeneous category, a collective phenomenon not directly determined by individual choices. Instead, it is a product of forces within the organization originating from managers' fear of negative feedback and hidden beliefs that managers, not untrustworthy employees, can decipher the meaning of most organizational issues. Specific structural and managerial solutions follow this approach of managers in the organization. They determine a specific climate of silence. When such a climate exists in the organization, silence dominates, not voice (Kunasz, 2022).

At the same time, approaches that reduce silence to individual decisions of employees have appeared in the literature (Pinder, Harlos, 2001; van Dyne, Ang, Botero, 2003). In such an approach, silence (of employees, not organizational) cannot be a homogeneous category. The motives for silence may be different. In works focusing on this approach, attempts were made to specify these motives (Kunasz, 2024). van Dyne, Ang, Botero (2003) drew attention to three motives for silence: resignation, fear and orientation towards others, distinguishing

adequate categories of silence: acquiescent, defensive and prosocial. Knoll, van Dick (2013) supplemented this strongly emphasized in the literature classification of the typology of employee silence with a fourth component - opportunistic silence. He also proposed a scale for measuring employee silence based on the four motives for silence mentioned above. In the empirical part, this analytical approach and measurement scale were borrowed (discussed in more detail in the methodological part of the work). It can be assumed that there is an opposition between organizational silence and employee silence in the literature. The second approach is represented in this work, although the author uses the neutral category of "silence in the organization".

Second element of the cause-effect relationships examined in the work-trust in the organization are also not a homogeneous category. In individual analyses, the authors refer to different conceptual categories connected by the concept of trust. Following Mayer et al. (1995), institutional and interpersonal trust should be distinguished. Institutional trust refers to the employee's faith in the position of institutional structures in striving for success and creating one's future (McKnight, Cummings, Chervany, 1998). This type of trust focuses on the organization as a whole. The individual assumes that the organization will act to their advantage or at least not act in a way that harms them (Saglam, 2016). Interpersonal trust refers to individual relationships between employees. In this case, horizontal trust (to co-workers) and vertical trust (to managers and leaders) should be distinguished (Ellonen, Blomqvist, Puumalainen, 2008).

Trust should be viewed as a positive psychological process (Turner, Barling, Zacharatos, 2002) based on positive expectations about the intentions or behaviors of other individuals. When trusting another, individuals are more willing to take risks that may bring positive results (for example, it may reduce the intensity of silence in the organization). Destructive relationships are associated with distrust, inducing negative perceptions by the employees of the environment and members of the organization (Lazarus, 1995).

The distinct areas of building trust in an organization are mutually intertwined. Trust in the leader or co-workers builds trust and commitment throughout the organization. When employees trust the leader, this trust is reflected in the entire organization, as the leader is perceived as its key representative. Hence, the leader plays a key role in creating an atmosphere of mutual trust in the organization (Kim et al., 2019).

The author uses the universal semantic category of "trust in the organization" in the empirical analyses.

Identifying the relationship between organizational silence and organizational trust (regardless of the specific generic forms of individual categories considered in the analyses) is the subject of numerous studies. In most cases, a negative relationship is identified. Therefore, an increase in organizational trust is a factor that reduces the intensity of organizational silence. Usually, a statistically significant relationship is identified in this respect, although many studies point to its moderate strength (Fard, Karimi, 2015; Demet, Cevat, 2017; Akar, 2018a;

Akar, 2018b; Jurek, 2019). An exception in this respect should be the study by Saglam (2016), which indicates a positive, statistically significant relationship between organizational silence and organizational trust.

The subject of the analyses is also the identification of relationships in which constructs reflecting silence undertaken with a diverse spectrum of motives are cast as variables. The literature usually indicates the existence of such relationships in the context of defensive and acquiescent silence. Dedahanov, Rhee (2015) conducted analyses in the aforementioned area separately for the constructs of trust in the organization and trust in the leader. In the first area, a negative relationship was identified with acquiescent silence, while in the second area – it was also identified with defensive silence. Ozen Kutanis et al. (2014) indicate a lack of statistical significance of the relationship between trust in the superior and defensive silence. Schlosser, Zolin (2012) indicate a negative relationship between defensive silence and trust in coworkers. Saglam (2016) indicates a lack of statistical significance in the relationship between acquiescent and defensive silence and organizational trust. This author indicates a statistically significant but positive relationship between organizational trust and prosocial silence.

To sum up this part of the considerations, it should be stated that the conclusions from the above-mentioned studies on the relationships between silence in the organization and trust in the organization are pretty ambiguous, both at the level of silence in the organization in general and after taking into account the specific motives of employee silence. Studies at the second of the above-mentioned levels usually do not take into account the fourth category of employee silence (opportunistic silence) introduced to the discussion in 2013 by Knoll, van Dick (2013). The present discussion fits into this research gap. Moreover, previous studies do not take into account the aspects of gender differences in the formation of the relationship between silence in the organization and trust in the organization. This work also fits into this research gap. In this context, the research can be described as original and pioneering in the national literature.

3. Method

The study investigated the cause-effect relationships between silence in the organization (explained variable) and trust in the organization (explanatory variable). The research was conducted in a quasi-experimental design (independent, simple measurement). The classification variable considered was gender. Differences between groups of women and men were examined.

The explained variable was analyzed in general and subcategories reflecting silence from four motives (resignation, fear, orientation towards others, and opportunism). When introducing the division of the explained variables, the measurement scale proposed by Knoll, van Dick (2013) accepted in the literature was used. These authors constructed

a measurement instrument comprising 20 statements beginning with a common root, “I am silent in the organization ...”. Based on the results of confirmatory factor analysis, the creators of the measurement tool indicated questions differentiating individual categories of employee silence. For each of the analytical categories, three differentiating questions were indicated. Therefore, a total of 12 questions differentiating four constructs can be indicated. Answers to only these questions were subjected to analysis. Respondents referred to the presented statements on a five-element Likert scale with extreme cases: 1 – complete disagreement with the statement and 5 – complete agreement with the statement. The average value of the respondent’s attitudes to the appropriate differentiating questions was calculated when creating adequate constructs. For the overall silence construct, the mean value of the respondent’s indications in response to the 12 differential questions from the questionnaire (Knoll, van Dick, 2013) was calculated.

Trust in the organization was considered in the analyses as a homogeneous construct using a six-item measurement scale. All statements were positively oriented; hence, there was no need to use reverse procedures. Respondents could also refer to the statements using a five-item Likert scale with adequate extreme statements for the intensity of reaction to the statements presented. A synthetic measure for this construct was also created for each respondent by averaging selected partial ratings. Therefore, a total of 6 constructs were considered in the analyses. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for individual constructs. Data in this respect are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the studied constructs

Construct	Cronbach's alfa
silence generally	0,833
defensive silence	0,599
prosocial silence	0,699
opportunistic silence	0,595
acquiescent silence	0,735
trust in organization	0,698

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

The values of this measure are generally within the norm (> 0.6). For defensive and opportunistic silence, Cronbach's alpha balances on the border of the norm. Therefore, it can be assumed that the scales are reliable.

A single-variable regression instrument was used to analyze the causal relationships investigated. A total of 15 models were estimated (five for the entire sample and the subgroups of women and men – due to the consideration of 5 explained variables). Model parameters were estimated using the classic least squares method. To assess the quality of the model fit, the following were calculated for each of them: R square, the sum of squared residuals, and the logarithm of likelihood. Appropriate calculations were performed using the Gretl package.

The average of synthetic measures calculated for individual respondents reflected the average level of intensity of a given feature within a given construct. These measures were also analyzed to find differences in the respondents' declarations in groups distinguished by gender. To verify whether these differences were statistically significant, the Student's t-test was used (as differences were examined in two groups). Appropriate calculations were performed in the Statistica package.

In econometric modeling and statistical inference, the strength of the relationship was differentiated with respect to the assumed limiting probability level. Three levels were adopted: $p = 0.1^*$; $p = 0.05^{**}$; $p = 0.01^{***}$.

The study was conducted on a sample of 426 respondents from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. The material was collected in September-October 2021 using the PAPS method (via a paper questionnaire). The survey questionnaire was submitted to respondents in Polish.

Like every research, also these May own limitations:

- Research have partial not complete character.
- You should return attention to subjectivism declaration respondents in response to questions survey.
- Range spatial research limits them to a regional dimension (voivodeship West Pomeranian Voivodeship), not national.
- Research presented static picture of reality, dynamics changes, and they could reflect tests oblong research.

4. Research results

At the beginning, an analysis of differences in the declarations of respondents of both sexes was conducted at the level of the constructs considered in the work. The opinions of respondents on silence in the organization were examined, taking into account a diverse spectrum of motives in accordance with the classification (Knoll, van Dick, 2013). A measure reflecting the general construct of employee silence and a uniform construct of trust in the organization were also examined. The data are presented in Table 2. In addition to the average measures of the intensity of the examined feature within a given synthetic measure (construct), the result of the Student's t-test was presented, reflecting the statistical significance of the identified differences in the analyzed groups of respondents.

Table 2.

Differences in declarations respondents due to gender on the level under consideration constructs

construct	mean		t-test	p-value
	women	men		
silence generally	2,29	2,29	-0,02	0,985
defensive silence	2,40	1,97	3,41	0,001***
prosocial silence	2,48	2,52	-0,34	0,736
opportunistic silence	2,02	2,32	-2,70	0,007***
acquiescent silence	2,25	2,33	-0,63	0,527
trust in organization	3,12	3,27	-0,91	0,365

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

The organizational reality is dominated by silence from a prosocial motive in both groups of respondents (no statistically significant differences were noted in the declarations of women and men – very high p-value). The lowest average measure of silence from the selected motive was noted among women for opportunistic silence while among men – for defensive silence. Therefore, representatives of the individual groups of respondents are silent the least often from these motives. For these motives of silence in the organization, statistically significant differences were identified in the respondents' declarations, which is emphasized by the very low level of p-value. At the level of analyses of the measure synthetically reflecting the construct of employee silence, practically no differences were identified in the declarations of respondents from both gender groups (the measure of the average level of silence intensity was shaped in both groups at the level of 2.29 - p-value 0.985). Also, no statistically significant differences can be noted in the opinions of women and men regarding the level of trust in the organization. However, the average measure was slightly higher for this construct among men.

Similar analyses were conducted at the level of partial measures (questions from the survey). For measures of employee silence from selected motives, responses to three dedicated questions were analyzed (the average response to all questions from this category was used to construct the overall measure). The explained variable was reduced to the construct level based on respondents' responses to 6 questions in Table 3.

Table 3.

Differences in declarations respondents due to gender in relation to variables partial

acronym	question	mean		t-test	p-value
		women	men		
explained variables - silence in organization – I'm silent ...					
qs1	for fear of negative consequences	2,55	2,02	3,48	0,001***
qs2	because I fear disadvantages from speaking up	2,33	1,88	3,08	0,002***
qs3	to not make me vulnerable in the face of colleagues or superiors	2,34	2,04	1,98	0,049**
ps1	because I do not want to hurt the feelings of my colleagues or superiors	2,40	2,47	-0,40	0,691
ps2	because I don't want to embarrass others	2,13	2,28	-0,93	0,352
ps3	because I don't want others to get into trouble because of me	2,90	2,82	0,47	0,642
os1	not to give away knowledge advantage	2,06	2,33	-1,67	0,095*

Cont. table 3.

os2	because of concerns that others could take an advantage of my ideas	2,11	2,34	-1,46	0,146
os3	because it would mean having to do avoidable additional work	1,88	2,30	-2,68	0,008***
as1	because my opinions will not fall on fertile ground anyway	2,20	2,23	-0,20	0,840
as2	because my superiors are not open to proposals or solutions	2,27	2,43	-1,00	0,318
as3	because nothing will change anyway	2,28	2,33	-0,31	0,759
explanatory variable: trust in organization					
z1	I believe my employer is highly honest	3,21	3,34	-0,61	0,545
z2	I fully trust my employer	3,06	3,08	-0,13	0,900
z3	My employer is open and honest with me	3,25	3,33	-0,39	0,700
z4	I can expect my employer to treat me in a consistent and predictable manner	3,06	3,37	-1,56	0,122
z5	My employer is always honest and truthful	3,14	3,17	-0,12	0,905
z6	Generally, I believe that the motives and intentions of my employer are good	3,06	3,41	-1,73	0,086*

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

The data again indicate areas in which statistically significant differences in the declarations of respondents from both gender groups are revealed. These differences are revealed to the greatest extent in the case of partial variables referring to defensive silence (in the case of answers to each of the three questions), statistically significant differences were noted in the declarations of respondents from both gender groups. For questions differentiating silence for an opportunistic motive, these differences are mainly revealed in the answer to subquestion os3 (I am silent in the because it would mean having to do avoidable additional work) - such a lack of voice activity is indicated more often by men. Statistically significant differences in the declarations of respondents were noted for subquestion os1. However, it should be noted that these differences are on the border of the lowest probability threshold adopted from the point of view of statistical significance of relationships, $p = 0.1$.

The least significant differences in the declarations of respondents of both sexes in the case of the explained variables were noted in the answers to the questions constituting partial measures for the construct of acquiescent silence (as1 and as3). In the case of the explanatory variable (trust in the organization), the least significant differences in the distinguished groups of respondents were noted for statement z5 (My employer is always honest and truthful). One of the partial statements for the explanatory variable - z6 (Generally, I believe that the motives and intentions of my employer are good) can be placed on the border of statistical significance. This question, therefore, significantly differentiates the opinions of women and men.

The next step of the analysis examined the relationship between silence in the organization (including several constructs reflecting the spectrum of motives for silence – explained variable) and trust in the organization (explanatory variable). The direction and strength of this relationship were identified based on the estimated univariate regression models. Analyses were conducted in general and in groups of women and men. Five econometric models were

estimated in each category (total, women, men). Data are presented in Table 4. The third column presents the coefficient estimate for the explained variable together with the estimated standard error, the fourth column presents the p-value level for the variable.

Table 4.
Model estimation results

model no.	explained variables	coefficient (standard error)	p-value
TOGETHER			
1	silence generally	-0,17 (0,05)	0,001***
2	defensive silence	-0,11 (0,07)	0,136
3	prosocial silence	-0,04 (0,08)	0,637
4	opportunistic silence	-0,21 (0,06)	0,002***
5	acquiescent silence	-0,33 (0,07)	0,000***
WOMEN			
6	silence generally	-0,14 (0,08)	0,073*
7	defensive silence	0,01 (0,12)	0,921
8	prosocial silence	-0,14 (0,12)	0,220
9	opportunistic silence	-0,17 (0,08)	0,036**
10	acquiescent silence	-0,25 (0,11)	0,028**
MEN			
11	silence generally	-0,20 (0,06)	0,003***
12	defensive silence	-0,18 (0,08)	0,032**
13	prosocial silence	0,06 (0,11)	0,603
14	opportunistic silence	-0,26 (0,09)	0,007***
15	acquiescent silence	-0,41 (0,09)	0,000***

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

In most cases, the relationships were consistent with those identified in the literature – negative. Growing trust in the organization reduces the scope of silence in the organization.

Analyzing the entire research sample, it is necessary to identify a statistically significant relationship with trust in the organization of silence in general. When analyzing silence for specific reasons in a similar scope, attention should be paid to acquiescent and opportunistic silence. Here, statistically significant relationships were noted between the variables considered. An increase in trust in the organization by one unit contributes to a decrease of 0.33 units in the intensity of acquiescent silence and by 0.21 units – in the intensity of opportunistic silence.

Analyzing the relevant data in the groups of women and men, one can notice a greater strength of the studied relationship in the group of men. In general, an increase of one unit of trust in the organization reduces the intensity of silence by 0.20 among men and by 0.14 units in the subsample of women. Additionally, in the case of analyses for forms of silence, where statistically significant relationships were noted for the entire sample (acquiescent and opportunistic silence), the strength of the identified relationship is greater. In the group of men, a statistically significant relationship was also identified in the studies on the relationship between defensive silence and trust in the organization. In the group of women, the coefficient in the model for this explained variable oscillates around zero. Only in the case of the prosocial silence variable (where the generally lowest strength of the studied relationship was noted) can

we assume that increasing trust in the organization reduces silence for such reasons practically only among women (in the group of men, the relevant coefficient oscillates around zero, although formally it takes positive values – therefore, we observe a statistically insignificant positive relationship).

The quality of individual models' estimates was assessed using R square, the sum of squared residuals, and log-likelihood. Table 5 presents data for individual models in the analyzed groups of respondents.

Table 5.
Modelling quality assessment measures

model no.	R ²	sum of squared residuals	logarithm of likelihood
TOGETHER			
1	0,065	81,6	-182,1
2	0,013	170,1	-246,7
3	0,001	211,5	-265,9
4	0,054	144,1	-232,2
5	0,110	177,1	-250,3
WOMEN			
6	0,047	34,4	-73,9
7	0,000	85,7	-105,4
8	0,022	78,9	-102,5
9	0,064	39,0	-78,2
10	0,070	74,1	-100,4
MEN			
11	0,080	47,0	-107,9
12	0,043	73,3	-131,6
13	0,003	130,2	-162,3
14	0,066	98,1	-147,2
15	0,149	101,3	-148,9

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

In each of the analyzed groups of respondents, the best-fitting model, considering the R square criterion, is the last model in a given category (5, 10, and 15, respectively – related to acquiescent silence). The level of this measure oscillates between 0.07 and 0.14 (for men). At the general level, model 3 (focused on prosocial silence) should be assessed the worst, taking into account the analyzed measure. A similar position can be indicated for the appropriate model in the group of men. In the group of women, a zero R square was noted for model 7 (where the explained variable was defensive silence).

When analyzing another measure of fit, generally, the models estimated in the group of women should be assessed best in this point of view. In each of the analyzed groups of respondents, the fit of models focused on silence in general (adequate models 1, 6, and 11) can be assessed best. At the opposite end, however, in individual groups of respondents, the models focused on prosocial silence can be indicated as the least fitted to the actual data in the entire sample and in the group of men, while in the group of women – on defensive silence. The above-mentioned models can be indicated in extreme positions (indicating the best and worst quality of fit) in the case of the third considered measure of estimated model assessment (log-likelihood).

5. Discussion

The conducted research confirmed in the conditions of the Polish research sample that growing trust in the organization is a factor contributing to the reduction of the scale of employee silence. Similar conclusions can be drawn from the studies presented in the theoretical part (Akar, 2018a). However, as previously mentioned in the literature, some studies identify a positive relationship between the analyzed constructs (Saglam, 2016). Most studies indicate a moderate strength of the studied relationship – e.g. (Fard, Karimi, 2015). Such conclusions cannot be drawn from the presented studies. These studies confirm the statistical significance of the considered relationship in the groups of respondents distinguished according to gender (although the strength of this relationship is more significant in the group of men).

The literature on the subject also includes studies relating to selected categories of silence in an organization (taking into account the diverse spectrum of motives that guide employees).

Studies in the aforementioned context mainly indicate the significant role of defensive silence - e.g. (Schlosser, Zolin, 2012) and acquiescent silence - e.g. (Dedahanov, Rhee, 2015). The conclusions from the studies cited in the theoretical part at this level of analysis are ambiguous. The studies presented in the paper confirm the statistical significance of the relationships in the aforementioned scope for acquiescent silence (here, the strongest relationships were noted both at the level of the entire sample and in both gender groups). For defensive silence, a negative statistically significant relationship between the studied variables was identified only in the group of men; in the model in the group of women, the analyzed coefficient oscillates around zero.

The presented research highlights the importance of opportunistic silence in the analyzed context (also in all considered groups of respondents).

It should also be noted that in the case of most models built for variables reflecting silence due to selected motives (except for the model taking into account prosocial silence), the strength of the relationship was relatively more significant in the group of men (in comparison with the group of women). Hence, it seems that in this gender group, actions promoting the growth of trust in the organization may bring slightly more significant effects on the male population.

Considering the utilitarian dimension of the presented research, it should be stated that to reduce the scale of silence in the organization, all possible actions should be taken to build trust in the organization, leaders, and co-workers. Dedicated actions should also be adjusted to the employee's gender (for example, actions aimed at men to reduce defensive silence).

Future studies in a similar scope could consider other characteristics of respondents (age, seniority, functions performed in the organization, etc.). Studies in a similar scope could also be carried out for the generic categories of trust distinguished in theoretical considerations (to the organization, leader, or co-workers). In the presented studies, trust in the organization was treated as a homogeneous category (while silence in the organization was considered a sum of lower-order constructs).

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