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# EMPLOYEE SILENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST – THE CONTEXT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *The aim of the work is to analyze the relationship between employee silence and organizational trust, taking into account the differentiation of motives for silence in the organization in the context of the development of artificial intelligence.*

**Need for the study:** *Previous studies focus on the analyzed relationship between general constructs, and studies consider internal divisions of employee silence from selected motives. The authors focus on the classic triad van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003) proposed. However, the category of opportunistic silence is not taken into account. The literature also lacks works combining the conducted considerations with the problems of artificial intelligence applications (in the context of employee silence and trust in the organization). This work can, therefore, be considered pioneering in both areas.*

**Methodology:** *The analyzed empirical material comes from research on the issue of employee silence conducted on a sample of 426 respondents from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Single-variable regression instruments were used to analyze the studied relationships. A total of 5 econometric models were estimated. Individual constructs were synthesized by averaging partial indications of respondents in response to questions formulated in the survey copy relating to the considered constructs.*

**Findings:** *Other studies' findings on the relationship's negative nature were confirmed. The presented studies also deepened the ambiguity of the conclusions regarding the studied relationship at the level of constructs reflecting silence from selected motives. A negative, statistically significant relationship was identified between prosocial and opportunistic silence (categories practically absent in the literature in the aforementioned context). These categories should focus on building trust in the organization and implementing artificial intelligence solutions. The paper indicates practical implications in this area. This issue has not been exposed in the literature so far.*

**Practical Implications:** *The work identifies areas for possible action in building trust in the organization and reducing organizational silence. In this context, the challenges and prospects of artificial intelligence development are discussed.*

**Keywords:** employee silence, organizational trust, trust in the leader, artificial intelligence, AI, econometric models.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to analyze the relationship between employee silence and organizational trust, taking into account the differentiation of motives for silence in the organization in the context of the development of artificial intelligence.

Organisational relationships are established based on trust, which is a prerequisite for communication and cooperation. People working in environments with high levels of trust in the organisation, leaders, and co-workers feel more comfortable communicating their thoughts and feelings. Trust, therefore, reduces the risk of an employee speaking up.

Hence, the studies cited later in the work observe a negative relationship between employee silence and trust in the organisation. In an environment filled with mutual trust, along with the decreasing risk accompanying employees speaking out, the intensity of silence in the organisation decreases (therefore, the cause-effect relationship is negative). Most of the studies cited later in the work confirm such a relationship.

The research is conducted considering the internal divisions of the studied constructs. The research examines silence revealed as a result of the impact of specific motives (defensive, permissive and prosocial silence – in the triad proposed by van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003) and later extended to include opportunistic silence by Knoll & van Dick (2013). The category of trust in an organisation can also be described as heterogeneous. Apart from the above-mentioned general organisational level, the research references to trust in the leader (manager) or co-workers. The variables considered in the work that create the studied relationship are also included in the analyses, considering the third variable (mediator, moderator). Such studies are also cited in the theoretical part of this work.

Previous studies took into account the classic triad. The presented studies, filling the emerging research gap, also include the category of opportunistic silence in the analyses of the relationships with trust in the organisation.

It is worth emphasising that the identified relationships can be bilateral. Trust in the organisation reduces the intensity of silence. By reducing silence through the impact of other instruments, we also influence organisational trust, also in the context of artificial intelligence solutions.

These considerations are conducted when applying artificial intelligence and intelligent management. The fourth industrial revolution, along with the progress in artificial intelligence, is causing and will cause significant transformations in many industry and services sectors. Chui et al. (2015) specify that artificial intelligence and robotics can replace 45% of tasks previously performed by humans. AI awareness may raise concerns among employees whether artificial intelligence will not replace them in a particular time perspective. Such a state may translate into an extension of the range of silence (practically for any reason), fearing for their future. An alternative path of dealing with fears can also be indicated, in which the consequence of transformation is an extension of the range of voice behaviors in the organization. Employees, treating change as an opportunity, can demonstrate their professional competencies and contribution to the organization through voice behaviors. Trust in the organization is a factor that additionally induces employee voice.

The literature in the mentioned area (employee silence/voice, communication, or trust in the organization) is currently feeble (more in the literature review); hence, placing the considerations in the context of artificial intelligence can be treated as a pioneering task.

In the structure of the work, in the first part, the literature review presents two constructs considered in the analyses (silence in the organisation and trust in the organisation). Then, a review of studies focusing on analysing the relationships between both variables (in many dimensions, e.g. internal classification divisions) is presented. The next part presents the methodological aspects of the research presented in the work and their results. The work ends with a point presenting a discussion of the presented research results, where the issue of implementing artificial intelligence solutions in the context of building trust in the organisation and reducing silence in the organisation is also addressed.

## 2. SILENCE IN THE ORGANISATION

The issue of voice/silence was introduced to organisational science by Hirshman (1970). The author indicated four alternative forms of response from dissatisfied employees and customers of the organisation (exit, voice, loyalty, and silence). In this approach, building mechanisms for reporting

work-related problems into the organisational system (voice mechanisms) allows employees to express their concerns and solve problems in a dialogue with management instead of reacting by leaving (Perlow & Repenning, 2009). Hence, the initial focus in organisational literature was on employees' voice behaviour (Withey & Cooper, 1989; Folger, 1977; Kunasz, 2022a). The issue of voice/silence was also present in psychological, political science, sociological, and anthropological literature in other contexts (bottom-up communication, whistleblowing, research on the MUM effect, spiral of silence, self-censorship, procedural justice, issue selling, social ostracism or deaf ear syndrome (Rosen & Tesser, 1970; Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Miceli & Near, 1992; Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Williams & Sommer, 1997; Peirce, Smolinski & Rosen, 1998).

The issue of silence/stillness has been taken up in the literature on the subject only since the turn of the century. The pioneering work in this area was Milliken & Morrison (2000). They treated organisational silence as a collective phenomenon in opposition to the considerations on speaking up by employees conducted so far (Kunasz, 2022b). These focused on the individual decisions of employees to speak up in a given situation. When there is silence in an organisation, it is not the result of unrelated decisions of employees but rather the product of specific forces in the organisation reinforcing organisational silence (Kunasz, 2024a). The key in this respect is the hidden beliefs of managers and the fear of feedback. They determine the creation of organisational structures and the implementation of management practices that support the creation of a climate of silence (the belief shared by employees that speaking up will not contribute to change and, on the contrary, may be met with specific consequences for those speaking up). When such a climate exists, silence, not voice, dominates in the organisation.

In opposition to this thinking pattern, works have appeared in the literature emphasising the individual dimension of employees' decisions to remain silent. In this context, we can speak of employee silence (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). In this approach, employee silence may result from different motives because it is not treated as a monolith as in the original approach (Kunasz, 2024b). The first attempts to categorise the types of employee silence appeared on this basis. van Dyne, Ang & Botero (2003) distinguished three motivations of employees in an organisation: resignation, fear and orientation towards others, distinguishing adequately permissive silence (voice will not change much), defensive silence (fear of the consequences related to speaking out), prosocial silence (voice activity may harm good cooperation between employees).

Knoll & van Dick (2013) extended the original typology of employee silence by adding a fourth category – opportunistic silence. The motive for silence in such a case is the calculation of the benefits and disadvantages associated with voice activity. Perceived disadvantages inhibit voice.

There is currently a consensus in the literature on etymologising the motives for silence (including employees' silence from four motives). However, some Authors (for example, in the case of the studies by other Authors presented below) refer to the 'classic' triad. In this respect, the author's research presented in the further part of the work (also focusing on opportunistic silence) will bring added value to the literature.

We can also speak of consensus in terms of measurement methodology. This instrument was proposed in the context of the considerations on the fourth motive of employee silence by Knoll & van Dick (2013). This instrument will be presented in more detail in the methodological part of the work.

In the above-described context, one should distinguish organisational silence (treated as a uniform construct conditioned by the climate of silence in the organisation) from employee silence (individual decisions induced by a diverse spectrum of motives). Hence, the author uses the analytical category of silence in the organisation of this work. So far, It has not been decided whether voice and silence should be treated as opposite ends of a continuum (Milliken & Lam, 2009) or as separate constructs (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009). In this context, numerous postulates exist to integrate the literature on voice and silence in organisations (Morrison, 2011).

### 3. TRUST IN THE ORGANISATION

Trust should be defined as a psychological state that includes the intuition to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations about the intentions or behaviours of another person (Rousseau et al., 1998). This positive expectation is rooted in the knowledge and skills of the other party needed to obtain desired

outcomes and in their ethical motivation (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Trusting another party, individuals are more willing to take risks that can bring positive outcomes such as higher levels of task performance, prosocial behaviour, job satisfaction, or reduced turnover intentions (Mayer & Gavin, 2005; Zhu & Akhtar, 2014).

Trust should, therefore, be viewed as a positive psychological process (Turner, Barling & Zacharatos, 2002). Trust reduces the perception of future risk by fostering positive expectations and belief in a specific goal. Destructive relationships are associated with distrust because they induce negative feelings and perceptions of the environment and other organisation members (Lazarus, 1995).

Trust or organisational trust is not a homogeneous category. In various analyses, the research authors refer to different conceptual categories that are actually connected by the term in question. There are also different ways of isolating the components of organisational trust.

Following Mayer, Davis & Schoorman (1995), a distinction should be made between interpersonal and institutional trust. Interpersonal trust is further divided into horizontal and vertical trust.

Horizontal trust is defined as the trust that employees have in each other (trust in co-workers), and vertical trust is the trust between employees and managers (leaders) in the organisation (Ellonen, Blomqvist & Puumalainen, 2008). When employees are treated fairly by a leader they trust, they are likely to think of their relationship with the leader in terms of social exchange rather than economic exchange (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). According to social exchange theory, the relationship-based perspective assumes that followers will reciprocate the relationship (leader) (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Institutional trust refers to an employee's belief in the position of institutional structures in achieving success and shaping their own future (Mcknight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998). This type of organisational trust focuses on the organisation as a whole, reflecting an individual's confidence that the organisation will act in their favour or at least will not act in a way that will harm them (Saglam, 2016).

The aforementioned areas of building organisational trust are intertwined. Trust in co-workers or managers builds organisational trust and commitment (Kim et al., 2019). When employees trust the leader, this trust is reflected in the entire organisation because they see the leader as a representative of the organisation. Therefore, the leader plays a decisive role in creating trust in the organisation.

#### **4. STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMPLOYEE SILENCE AND TRUST IN THE ORGANISATION**

The subjects of numerous studies are analysing the literature on the subject and identifying the relationship between organisational silence/employee silence and trust in the leader or organisation. In most cases, a negative relationship is identified. Therefore, an increase in trust in the leader or organisation is a factor that reduces organisational silence or employee silence and vice versa.

Interestingly, many studies indicate a moderate strength of the negative relationship. All of them were conducted using samples from different educational market segments. This strength of the relationship is indicated by meta-analyses conducted in educational organisations by Akar (2018a) (the study examined trust in the manager) and Akar (2018b) (the study examined organisational trust). Also, at work (Cekinberg, Dede, Yilmaz, 2014), an adequate moderate relationship was identified (organisational trust was examined) on a sample of academic employees at work (Demet & Cevat, 2017) and on a sample of primary and secondary school teachers (trust in the supervisor was examined). A negative relationship in the analysed relationship was also identified in the studies presented in the works (Fard & Karimi, 2015) (organisational trust was examined – a statistically significant relationship); (Jurek, 2019) (trust in the supervisor was examined, the only study known to the author in this area conducted on a Polish sample of employees of enterprises from various industries) and (Karabay, Sener & Tezergil, 2018) (trust in the leader was also examined).

An exception in this respect is the work (Saglam, 2016). The author identified a positive statistically significant relationship between organisational silence and organisational trust in a sample of vocational schoolteachers in Turkey.

In the selected works, the studied relationship was analysed, taking into account data reflecting constructs reflecting silence undertaken concerning a diverse spectrum of motives (concerning the

previously discussed ways of categorising the types of organisational silence. The presented studies indicate the existence of the studied relationships in the context of defensive and permissive silence.

Dedahanov & Rhee (2015) conducted analyses on a sample of highly qualified employees separately for the constructs of trust in the organisation and trust in the supervisor. Trust in the organisation in these studies is associated with permissive silence, while trust in the supervisor is also associated with defensive silence. In turn, the relationship between trust in the supervisor and defensive silence in the studies (Ozen Kutunis et al., 2014) is not statistically significant. Schlosser & Zolin (2012), in turn, indicate that defensive silence is reduced by trust in employees.

It is also worth paying attention to the previously cited studies (Saglam, 2016), in which a statistically significant relationship (also positive, as in the case of the synthetic construct) was identified only in the analyses of prosocial silence. For the remaining components considered (permissive and defensive silence), the direction of the relationship was negative, but these relationships cannot be described as statistically significant.

To summarise this part of the discussion, the conclusions from the cited studies regarding the constructs reflecting silence for selected motives are quite ambiguous. In the literature on the subject, the relationships in the analysed scope for prosocial silence (introduced to the classification of silence for various motives by Knoll & van Dick (2013)) have not been studied.

The constructs constituting the analysed relationship were considered in the third variable analysis:

The ethical climate was considered a mediator of the analysed relationship (trust in the leader was examined) in the research (Karabay, Sener & Tezergil, 2018) carried out on a sample of insurance company employees.

Trust in the leader mediated the relationship between employee silence and the leader's destructive personality in a study of a sample of superior-subordinate dyads (Song et al., 2017).

Organisational silence, in turn, was considered in Bourantas, Nikolaou & Vakola's (2011) work as a mediator of the relationship between trust and attitudes towards mergers (using two case studies of companies undergoing a merger).

Trust was included as a moderator in the following studies on the relationship between employee silence:

- with the perceived organisational politics in the research conducted by Jaweria & Jaleel (2016) on a sample of academic staff (the construct of trust in the superior was analysed),
- with the perceived stress in the study by Chung & Dong (2021) conducted on a sample of white-collar workers (the construct of interpersonal trust was analysed),
- with value co-creation in the research by Boadi et al. (2022) conducted on a sample of front-line hotel employees (the construct of organisational trust was analysed, only defensive silence was focused).

The work also focused on the examined relationship with the extension of aspects complementing the current state of knowledge.

## 5. THE CONTEXT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The underlying relationship in the work was analyzed in the context of challenges and prospects for the development of artificial intelligence. In the Ebsco database, one work (newly published) was found focusing on the issue of employee silence and AI awareness among employees (Cheng, Zhang & Wang, 2025). Another work (Lin & He, 2024) indexed in the database in a similar context focuses on voice behavior (a path of voice activity in the organization independent of silence, although these constructs are related). Few works refer to the issue of communication in the organization<sup>1</sup> (including the issue of silence as an element of communication in the organization more broadly) in the context of using artificial intelligence solutions (without references to the issue of employee silence, however) – for example (Yue et al., 2024; Van Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2024; Koponen et al., 2025). In the Ebsco database, no work focused on the issue of trust in the organization, leader, or co-workers in the context of artificial intelligence applications<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> We did not analyze work carried out in communication sciences or work focusing on communication issues between artificial intelligence agents or humans and artificial intelligence.

<sup>2</sup> Works focusing on the issue of trust in artificial intelligence were not analyzed.

Using AI solutions in organizations may lead employees to have concerns about their career prospects. There is a fear that AI will replace their work. As a result, employees may reduce their voice activity due to fear of being fired (Cheng, Zhang & Wang, 2025) – they may remain silent for virtually any reason (fear, opportunism, pro-social approach or, to the least extent, lack of prospects – permissive silence).

However, in the aforementioned context, it is worth presenting the opposing idea that AI awareness can motivate employees, as its effect may be the motivation to formulate appropriate strategies to alleviate such fears (Liang et al., 2022). In such a scenario, employees perceive emerging stress as an opportunity to adapt to the evolving landscape of the workplace. This state of affairs may encourage employees to engage in behaviors that prevent the negative impact of introducing AI solutions in the organization. Voice behavior is one of the strategies for coping and career development of employees in the face of crises at work (Lin & He, 2024).

By articulating their proposals for solutions or improvements, employees can demonstrate their professional competencies and contribution to the organization to their superiors. This approach helps employees create a positive and credible image of themselves in the organization, creating favorable conditions for career development (Whiting et al., 2012). Employee voice is crucial for organizational effectiveness. Employees not only express dissatisfaction with work-related problems but also present many valuable observations aimed at progress, supporting the organization's long-term development (Lin, 2023). As previously mentioned, in an environment of mutual trust, voice dominates, not silence.

The above mechanisms can be included in the COR theory, which often defines the management research framework (Hobfoll, 1989). In the context of this theory, vocal expression is a way to secure additional resources in stressful conditions. Employees may perceive the introduction of artificial intelligence solutions in the workplace as a source of work-related stress, contributing to resource depletion (Teng et al., 2023). Voice behavior allows for securing resources that fill this gap.

## 6. METHODOLOGY

The analysed empirical material comes from research on the issue of employee silence (research subject). It was collected in September-October 2021 (research time frame) via a paper questionnaire from respondents from the West Pomeranian Voivodeship (research spatial scope). The research sample includes 426 respondents who completed the survey forms.

In analyses taking into account the typology of employee silence, a commonly used tool is the set of instruments proposed in the work (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). These authors based their analytical concept on other works (Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003; Brinsfield, 2009). For example, the cited instruments were used in the works (Adamska, 2015; Knoll, Neves, Schyns & Meyer, 2021) and in this work.

The questionnaire includes 20 statements beginning with a common root: "I am silent at work...". Based on confirmatory factor analysis, the authors of the concept indicated questions that can be used in the research context for each of the four types of silence in the organisation discussed in the work. In each area, three statements were indicated. Hence, in the analyses presented in this work, the declarations of respondents who responded to 12 questions from the measurement scale within the five-factor Likert scale (where 1 meant complete disagreement with the statement, and 5 - entire agreement with the statement) were taken into account. However, all 20 questions were included in the research survey.

A synthetic construct was also constructed based on the respondents' indications in response to all 12 questions. The variable constructed in this way reflected one of the constructs of silence taken into account in the analyses of the relationships considered—the silence of employees in general.

Organisational trust was surveyed among respondents using a six-item measurement scale.

Table 1 presents the specification of statements based on which synthetic measures (constructs) were constructed.

**Table 1.** Specification of statements used to construct synthetic measures (constructs)

| Construct                                                       | Question                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>SILENCE (I keep silent at work...) - explained variables</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| defensive silence                                               | due to fear of negative consequences<br>to avoid being criticised by colleagues or superiors<br>because I am afraid of the damage associated with speaking out                                                                                                                                   |
| opportunistic silence                                           | for fear that others might take advantage of my ideas<br>so as not to give up the advantage of knowledge<br>because it would mean having to do additional and avoidable work                                                                                                                     |
| prosocial silence                                               | because I do not want others to have problems because of me<br>because I do not want to hurt the feelings of my colleagues or superiors<br>because I do not want to embarrass others                                                                                                             |
| acquiescent silence                                             | because my superiors are not open to suggestions or solutions<br>because nothing will change anyway<br>because my opinions will not fall on fertile ground anyway                                                                                                                                |
| <b>TRUST IN ORGANIZATION - explanatory variable</b>             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| trust in organisation                                           | I believe that my employer is highly honest<br>I fully trust my employer<br>My employer is open and honest with me<br>I can expect my employer to treat me consistently and predictably.<br>My employer is always honest and truthful<br>Overall, my employer's motives and intentions are good. |

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

When creating a synthetic measure reflecting a given construct (e.g. defensive silence), the average value of the respondents' indications was calculated based on the statements constituting it. There was no need for corrections to the reverse for selected statements.

Table 2 presents selected statistical descriptions and reliability analysis measures for the studied constructs.

**Table 2.** Selected measures of statistical description and reliability analysis for the analysed constructs

| measures / variables          | defensive | prosocial | silence<br>opportunistic | acquiescent | all positions<br>(12) | trust in<br>organi-<br>sation |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS</b> |           |           |                          |             |                       |                               |
| median                        | 2,00      | 2,33      | 2,00                     | 2,00        | 2,17                  | 3,17                          |
| variance                      | 0,98      | 1,21      | 0,87                     | 1,14        | 0,50                  | 1,12                          |
| standard deviation            | 0,99      | 1,10      | 0,93                     | 1,07        | 0,71                  | 1,06                          |
| skewness                      | 0,83      | 0,47      | 0,60                     | 0,63        | 0,07                  | -0,02                         |
| kurtosis                      | -0,08     | -0,45     | -0,29                    | -0,47       | -0,71                 | -0,68                         |
| <b>RELIABILITY ANALYSIS</b>   |           |           |                          |             |                       |                               |
| Cronbach's alfa               | 0,599     | 0,699     | 0,595                    | 0,735       | 0,833                 | 0,668                         |

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

The distributions of the variables for the constructs reflecting the analysed categories of silence are asymmetric on the right side – the positive values of skewness evidence this. The most extraordinary asymmetry in the group can be noted in the case of defensive silence, and the smallest is for prosocial silence. Therefore, respondents relatively more often chose to disagree with the statement referring to the state of silence in the organisation. Such asymmetry is not revealed for the synthetic variable covering all items of the measurement scale of silence in the organisation. Also, it is impossible to identify asymmetry for the synthetic measure reflecting the trust in organisation construct (skewness close to zero).

All distributions for the analysed constructs are platykurtic, as evidenced by negative kurtosis values. Therefore, in these distributions, the variable values are clustered closer to the central measure (than in the normal distribution), and the tails are less developed. The lowest kurtosis value was noted

for defensive silence, while the highest was for the construct reflecting silence in the organisation based on all questions that make up the measurement scale. The lowest variance was noted for this variable (the smallest differentiation of the variable). The highest variance was noted for prosocial silence (variances are comparable due to the standard range of possible variants of the formation of variables on a scale from 1 to 5).

Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each construct. The values of this measure generally fall within the norm ( $> 0.6$ ). For defensive and opportunistic silence, Cronbach's alpha balances on the border of the norm. It can, therefore, be assumed that the scales are reliable.

The single-variable regression instrument was used in the analyses of the studied compounds. Five econometric models were estimated, and model parameters were estimated using the classical least squares method. To assess the quality of the model fit, the following were calculated for each:  $R^2$ , the sum of squared residuals, and the logarithm of likelihood.

Like any other research, this one also has its limitations. The research is partial and not complete. It is important to note the subjective nature of respondents' declarations in response to survey questions. The spatial scope of the research limits it to the regional dimension (West Pomeranian Voivodeship) and not the national one. The research presents a static image of reality. The dynamics of change could be reflected in longitudinal research.

## 7. RESEARCH RESULTS

The research estimated five single-variable regression models. In each case, the explanatory variable was trust in the organisation. The explanatory variables were constructs reflecting the four types of employee silence discussed in the literature review (permissive, defensive, prosocial, and opportunistic) and a construct reflecting the category of silence in general (the average of the respondent's responses to all 12 questions from the questionnaire differentiating the individual types of employee silence in the organisation). The relevant data are included in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Model estimation results

| Variable                        | Coefficient | Standard error | t       | p-value    |
|---------------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------|------------|
| model 1 - silence generally     |             |                |         |            |
| const                           | 2,76938     | 0,165132       | 16,77   | <0,0001*** |
| trust                           | -0,170294   | 0,0488454      | -3,486  | 0,0006***  |
| model 2 – acquiescent silence   |             |                |         |            |
| const                           | 2,39607     | 0,238362       | 10,05   | <0,0001*** |
| trust                           | -0,105646   | 0,0705068      | -1,498  | 0,1358     |
| model 3 - defensive silence     |             |                |         |            |
| const                           | 2,61928     | 0,265775       | 9,855   | <0,0001*** |
| trust                           | -0,0371445  | 0,0786155      | -0,4725 | 0,6372     |
| model 4 - prosocial silence     |             |                |         |            |
| const                           | 2,82228     | 0,219411       | 12,86   | <0,0001*** |
| trust                           | -0,205345   | 0,0649010      | -3,164  | 0,0018***  |
| model 5 - opportunistic silence |             |                |         |            |
| const                           | 3,23990     | 0,243180       | 13,32   | <0,0001*** |
| trust                           | -0,333039   | 0,0719318      | -4,630  | <0,0001*** |

Source: own study based on the conducted research.

A negative relationship between the analysed variables, known from the literature, was identified in all cases. Thus, an increase in the mean measure of trust in the organisation translated into a decrease in the mean measure describing a given category of employee silence. It, therefore, contributed to reduced employee silence (and, of course, vice versa). For example, in the model with a dependent variable reflecting silence in general, a decrease in the mean measure of trust by 0.17 should be associated with an increase in the mean measure of silence (within the measurement scale) by one unit.

In models 2 and 3, in which the explained variable in a given relationship was respectively acquiescent and defensive silence, no statistically significant dependencies were noted (p-value

adequately 0.136 and 0.637 – in the second case, a very high level of this measure). In the case of the other two constructs referring to the typology of division of employee silence, however, statistically significant dependencies were noted. The lowest negative value of the estimated parameter was noted for the construct of opportunistic silence (–0.333, the lowest p-value). It should also be noted that the model reflects the construct of employee silence in general in relation to organisational trust (synthetic measure – negative relationship).

To assess each model's modelling quality, three measures – R square, the sum of squared residuals, and the logarithm of likelihood - were calculated. The relevant data are included in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Modelling quality assessment measures

| model   | R <sup>2</sup> | sum of squared residuals | logarithm of likelihood |
|---------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| model 1 | 0,065294       | 81,6497                  | –182,145                |
| model 2 | 0,012739       | 170,1255                 | 246,746                 |
| model 3 | 0,001281       | 211,5064                 | –265,905                |
| model 4 | 0,054403       | 144,1487                 | –232,165                |
| model 5 | 0,109684       | 177,0717                 | –250,267                |

*Source:* own study based on the conducted research.

Considering the essential measure of econometric model assessment, i.e. R square, it should be noted that the indicator value is relatively low (models of one variable were studied, and other factors probably influence the explained variable simultaneously). This fact should be noted as a limitation of the research. The highest score in this respect should be assigned to model 5, where the most substantial relationship was noted. Models in which a statistically significant relationship was identified between the studied variables (models 1 and 4, respectively) can be rated relatively high.

The situation is similar for the next measure of fit used. The lowest sum of squared residuals (the model that best fits the actual measures) was observed for models 1, 4, and 5. The log-likelihood analyses partly confirm this pattern of data. The exception here is model 5, which can be assessed in this context as slightly worse in terms of fit than model 2.

## 8. DISCUSSION

The paper examines the causal relationship between employee silence and organisational trust (interpersonal and institutional trust). The findings from other studies on the negative nature of such a relationship were confirmed (Cakinberg, Dede & Yilmaz, 2014; Fard & Karimi, 2015; Demet & Cevat, 2017; Jurek, 2019). Thus, increasing trust in the organisation reduces employee silence (and vice versa). However, the relationships may be two-sided - actions to reduce silence in the organisation may also build trust in the organisation, including trust in artificial intelligence.

The examined relationship at the level of silence is statistically significant (p-value for the variable trust in the organisation  $p = 0.0006$ ). The literature on the strength of the examined relationship is not unambiguous. The prevailing view is that this relationship has moderate strength (Akar, 2018a; Akar, 2018b).

Also, at the level of constructs reflecting silence from selected motives, conclusions from the literature on the subject are ambiguous. Usually, two categories of employee silence are indicated in the aforementioned context (permissive and defensive silence) (Schloser & Zolin, 2012; Ozen Kutanis et al., 2014; Dedahanov & Rhee). For prosocial silence, the studies cited in the literature review indicate a statistically significant, although positive, relationship with organisational trust (Saglam, 2016).

The presented research deepened the previously mentioned ambiguity of conclusions resulting from analyses of the literature on the subject. No statistically significant relationships were identified in relation to organisational trust between permissive and defensive silence. However, in this context, they were identified for the practically absent categories of prosocial and opportunistic silence. In both cases, a statistically significant negative relationship was identified with organisational trust, with a significantly greater strength of this relationship noted for the category of opportunistic silence.

Therefore, it is necessary to focus on the role of the mentioned generic categories of employee silence (with particular emphasis on opportunistic silence) in the context of building trust in the organisation, including building trust in the context of implementing artificial intelligence solutions.

In this context, it is worth paying attention to the following aspects:

- Artificial intelligence significantly increases the possibilities of personalising communication – support in formulating messages tailored (not only in terms of content but, for example, presented in the right tone) to the individual preferences of individual employees (taking into account, for example, their gender, age, position or functional area). This can strengthen employee engagement and motivation to speak up in the form of, for example, feedback.
- Employees may find communicating with artificial intelligence (bots) easier than with humans. This may reduce the overall level of silence in the organisation. Of course, building trust in this form of communication and constantly improving its quality (compared to communication with humans) may play an important role here. Of course, the problem may be that the communicator may not be sure whether they are talking to artificial intelligence or a human (when it will become increasingly difficult to distinguish these forms of communication with progress).
- It is worth paying attention to the risk of misunderstandings in bot-human communication. The imperfection of solutions can be downright irritating, which by limiting trust in this form of communication can discourage communication in general in this form and parallel in other forms, increasing the space of silence. The aforementioned risk will be limited with the progress of technological solutions.
- One of the important threads raised in the discussion of employee silence is the issue of hiding mistakes as part of professional solidarity (e.g. in medicine). This is the primary motive for prosocial silence (a statistically significant relationship was observed for silence based on this motive in the studied relationship - high trust in the organisation can reduce this type of silence, but there will always be a margin of acceptance for this type of behaviour in the organisation due to pure professional loyalty towards co-workers). Errors and their negative consequences may appear in the case of artificial intelligence algorithms. Employees can hide them in the same way as in the case of behaviour towards their co-workers. This is a very interesting context for further research on employee silence (how they will approach errors made by artificial intelligence).
- Processing a huge amount of data allows managers to better identify and understand key problems that appear in employee feedback practically in real-time (reaction time is, therefore, shorter) and to react quickly in real-time. Such actions, such as increasing trust in the management staff/organisation that recognises the problems of lower-level staff and responds to them, can significantly reduce the space of employee silence (by increasing trust in the management staff).
- For example, the possibility of analysing emotions revealed in opinions or sentiments in social media provides a rich arsenal of adequate instruments for resolving and de-escalating conflicts adjusted to their current source, which, by influencing a positive assessment of the actions of managers (who correctly identify sources of conflicts) in response to employee opinions, also increases trust in the manager.
- The growing possibilities in data processing speed and the emergence of modern technological solutions allow for increased communication effectiveness related to the automation of responses (e.g. e-mail) in contact with employees. Such solutions can bring savings in time or human resources, which translates into financial efficiency, but also allows managers and employees to focus on more complex non-routine tasks, in which artificial intelligence cannot replace them or recognise key employee needs, responding to them in order to increase engagement and trust in the organisation.

It is worth remembering, however, that the effectiveness of the above-mentioned tools depends on the staff's openness to new technologies and willingness to use them in everyday life. Introducing AI to interpersonal relationships can bring many benefits but will not replace authenticity and empathy in interpersonal relationships. Artificial intelligence should be a tool that supports and does not replace human interaction. It is worth finding a balance between automation and the human aspect of communication so as not to dehumanise interactions, which will limit trust in artificial intelligence and managers or organisations. It is also worth remembering this in the context of reducing employee silence.

The aspects outlined above may become the subject of further research.

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