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Evaluation of the dimensionality of the employee silence measurement scale: Discrimination issues between fear and resignation

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Abstract

This study addresses the phenomenon of employee silence, defined as the voluntary withholding of suggestions or warnings about the organization. Despite theoretical consensus on the conceptualization of employee silence, the empirical validity and dimensionality of this construct remain subjects of debate. This study aims to evaluate the discriminant validity of the dimensions of employee silence, specifically between the constructs known as resignation silence and defensive silence, using the scale by Knoll, et al. [1] recognized for its international use and validation in multiple languages. The research was conducted with a sample of 109 Spanish-speaking respondents in Chile, using reliability analysis via Cronbach's Alpha and Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis to assess the multidimensional structure of the scale. The results reveal that, although the scale demonstrates good reliability, there are issues with discriminant validity between the dimensions of resignation silence and defensive silence. Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis suggest that these two constructs overlap, leading to the creation of a new dimension termed resignation and fear silence. Finally, the study proposes a three-dimension solution for the silence behavior scale: a) prosocial silence; b) opportunistic silence; and c) resignation and fear silence. The study concludes with the need for further theoretical and empirical exploration to improve the understanding and measurement of the phenomenon of employee silence in organizations.

Keywords: Employee silence, Factor analysis, Organizational silence, Silence.

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1. Introduction

Employee silence refers to the voluntary withholding or abstention from sharing suggestions, warnings, or concerns regarding organizational practices by workers [1-4]. Research has shown that employees often choose not to voice their thoughts or perceptions, which can hinder the identification of problematic practices or processes within the organization [5]. This reluctance to speak up can restrict organizational learning, as poor information flow and deficient communication processes impede the effective exchange of insights [5-8]. As a result, employee silence creates barriers to detecting malpractice, which negatively impacts both the organization as a whole and its individual members [2, 9].

Employee silence contributes to the broader phenomenon of organizational silence, which enables malpractice to persist unnoticed due to a lack of communication or reporting [5, 10-12]. This silence fosters "climates of silence," where implicit social norms discourage open communication, often because it is seen as either dangerous or futile [5, 8]. In such environments, unethical behaviors can thrive unchecked [2]. Moreover, individuals who experience or witness silence may suffer from negative emotions and personal costs, which can detrimentally affect job satisfaction and productivity [2, 5, 8, 11, 13-17]. This underscores that employee silence negatively affects both the organization [18] and the individuals within it [2, 5, 7, 9].

Despite widespread agreement on the theoretical importance of employee silence [8, 19-25] and a general consensus on its negative consequences for organizational silence [2, 5, 7, 9, 14] the empirical understanding of this phenomenon remains incomplete. In particular, there is ongoing debate about how to effectively measure employee silence and its operational properties, including its dimensionality [2, 5, 26, 27]. Although employee silence is recognized as a multidimensional construct [2, 5] there is no consensus on the exact number of dimensions, which has led to the development of various measurement scales with differing dimensions [2].

The most commonly used scale is that of Dyne, et al. [27] which identifies three primary motives for silence: (1) acquiescent silence, characterized by resignation; (2) quiescent or defensive silence, driven by fear or self-protection; and (3) prosocial silence, aimed at benefiting others by avoiding embarrassment or harm. Building upon this, Knoll and Van Dick [5] proposed a fourth dimension, opportunistic silence, which refers to silence for personal gain at the expense of others, thus contrasting with prosocial silence. This scale was subsequently updated by Knoll, et al. [1] and adapted internationally, retaining the four original dimensions. In addition, Brinsfield [26] introduced a scale with six dimensions—deviation, distrustful, relational, defensive, disengaged, and ineffective—while other scales, such as those by Tangirala and Ramanujam [28] and Detert and Edmondson [29] also exist. However, the scale of Dyne, et al. [27] and its updated version by Knoll and Van Dick [5] are the most widely used.

It is important to note that not all researchers have validated the dimensionality of employee silence through factorial structures [30]. The original proposal by Dyne, et al. [27] lacks empirical validation in this regard, and the discriminant validity of the various silence dimensions has not been sufficiently substantiated [8, 30]. Another issue with measurement is that while the Dyne, et al. [27] scale is designed to assess silence through supervisor reports, silence itself is not directly observable by these informants [2, 31]. Additionally, there is no theoretical justification for the mutual exclusion of the silence motives, leaving room for overlap between dimensions, which complicates the operationalization of employee silence in some studies [2]. Some dimensions, such as prosocial silence, exhibit clear discriminant validity, while others, like acquiescent and defensive silence, show high correlations, leading some researchers to combine them into a single dimension [30].

This research aims to evaluate the discriminant validity between resignation silence and defensive silence behaviors. Given the variability in scales and empirical operationalizations of silence dimensions, we have chosen to employ the most up-to-date and internationally validated scale, that of Knoll, et al. [1].

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Silence Behavior in Organizations: A Comprehensive Analysis

Silence behavior occurs when employees withhold ideas or information about problems or opinions related to the organizational processes of which they are members, or about their own work. This includes situations where employees do not speak about errors, unfair treatment, or violations of moral or legal standards [5, 32]. This phenomenon reflects the functioning of the individuals' behavioral inhibition system, resulting in the cancellation or withholding of behaviors [33].

Silence behavior is particularly relevant when employees withhold their expressions about organizational evaluations toward those perceived with the capacity to change the situation [2, 3, 34].

In this context, studies indicate that negative forms of leadership promote silence [2, 35] with a strong relationship between abusive supervision and silence, especially for employees with a high orientation toward power distance [36]. Additionally, organizational circumstances that encourage silence, from the contextual to the individual level—such as the role of managers, social norms, or implicit beliefs about the undesirability of speaking out due to perceived risks—are important contributors to silence behavior [5].

Personal motives also contribute to silence behavior in an organizational context, with an approach that moves from the individual to the contextual. These personal motives for maintaining silence have been conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon [26, 27, 37-39] recognizing four constructs associated with this phenomenon [5]:

1. Acquiescent Silence due to Resignation.
2. Quiescent or Defensive Silence due to Fear or Threats.
3. Prosocial Silence to Benefit Others.
4. Opportunistic Silence for Personal Gain.

Each of these dimensions is related to specific motives for silence behavior, which will be explored in the subsections below.

2.2. Acquiescent Silence

Acquiescent or resigned silence refers to the passive withholding of relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation and submission. It is related to low participation, abandonment of responsibilities, and low perceived self-efficacy. Employees would remain silent because they believe their opinions are neither wanted nor valued by organizational authorities, contributing to a silence climate in which dissent is suppressed or conformity is encouraged. Silence due to resignation reflects disengaged behavior from employees who perceive the improvement of situations as impossible or are unwilling to make efforts to change the situation [27, 39, 40].

The following items are used to measure this type of silence behavior [1]:

1. "I remained silent at work because, in any case, I wouldn't have found anyone understanding who would want to listen."
2. "I remained silent at work because, in any case, nothing would have changed."
3. "I remained silent at work because my superiors are not open to new proposals, concerns, etc."

2.3. Quiescent or Defensive Silence

Quiescent or defensive silence consists of the intentional and proactive withholding of relevant ideas, information, and opinions due to self-protection mechanisms based on fear, with the aim of safeguarding the individual from external threats and ensuring psychological safety [7, 27, 39]. Unlike acquiescent silence, defensive silence is active, where employees withhold information to protect themselves from undesirable consequences. Employees who engage in defensive silence may disagree with specific actions and are aware of alternatives, but they believe withholding information is safer for their personal security.

The following items are used to measure this type of silence behavior [1]:

1. "I remained silent at work because of fear of possible negative consequences."
2. "I remained silent at work to avoid being in a vulnerable position in front of colleagues or superiors."
3. "I remained silent at work because I was afraid of the possible disadvantages of speaking up."

2.4. Prosocial Silence

Prosocial silence refers to the intentional withholding of ideas, information, and opinions related to work in order to benefit third parties or the organization. This type of silence is an active behavior motivated by altruism or cooperation [5, 27]. It can be seen as an ethical behavior, where silence is considered valuable in certain situations for protecting relationships or preserving social capital. However, prosocial silence can also be considered unethical when it involves unethical pro-organizational behavior, where employees engage in unethical actions with the intention of benefiting the organization or its members. In such cases, silence can create ethical breaches for the benefit of the group.

The following items are used to measure this type of silence behavior [1]:

1. "I remained silent at work because I didn't want to embarrass others."
2. "I remained silent at work because I didn't want to hurt the feelings of colleagues or superiors."
3. "I remained silent at work because I didn't want to get others into trouble."

2.5. Opportunistic Silence

Opportunistic silence refers to the withholding of information for personal gain, even at the expense of harming others. This type of silence involves a selfish motive where employees do not want to give up power, status, or the advantage they have from possessing certain information. Unlike defensive silence, which seeks to avoid negative consequences, and prosocial silence, which aims to benefit others, opportunistic silence is primarily non-cooperative and self-serving. It involves withholding information to achieve personal benefits, such as avoiding additional work or taking credit for ideas without sharing them.

The following items are used to measure this type of silence behavior [1]:

1. "I remained silent at work because it would have led me to have to do additional work."

2. "I remained silent at work because I was concerned that others might take advantage of my ideas."
3. "I remained silent at work to avoid losing the advantage that my knowledge gave me."

3. Methodology

The objective of this research is to assess the measurement scale of silence behavior, highlighting its multidimensional characteristics. The aim is to support and promote its application in scientific research and organizational interventions, addressing potential concerns about the discriminant validity of the constructs measured by the scale. Specifically, this study focuses on the distinction between acquiescent or resigned silence and quiescent or defensive silence, as some studies have combined these constructs into a single dimension [30]. However, we propose that silence behavior is a construct composed of four distinct dimensions, each representing different underlying motives for silence: resignation, defensiveness, prosocial behavior, and opportunism.

To empirically validate the scale developed by Knoll, et al. [1] we conduct an evaluation of the reliability and validity of each construct. This study aims to validate the scale within a Spanish-speaking population in the South American context, specifically in Chile. To achieve this, we perform a reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha, along with dimensionality assessments through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), using SPSS and AMOS software. The extraction method for the EFA is Principal Axis Factoring, which seeks to uncover a latent structure that justifies the presence of the four constructs outlined in the theoretical framework.

The sample consists of 109 Spanish-speaking participants, selected for convenience, who completed the survey online through the LinkedIn social network. Demographically, 4.6% of respondents have doctoral studies, 36.7% have postgraduate studies, 20.2% hold a professional degree, 2.8% completed 4-year careers, 0.9% have 2-year careers, 33% have incomplete university studies, and 1.8% have completed secondary studies. In terms of age distribution, 18.3% are over 65 years old, 16.5% are between 55 and 64 years old, 11.9% are between 45 and 54 years old, 15.6% are between 35 and 44 years old, 7.3% are between 25 and 34 years old, and 30.3% are between 18 and 24 years old. Regarding gender, 62.2% of respondents identified as male, 34.9% identified as female, 1.8% identified as non-binary, and 0.9% preferred not to answer the gender question.

As for the scale used, while silence behavior has been studied using various measurement instruments [5, 27-29] this research adopts the scale translated and validated into Spanish by Knoll, et al. [1] The scale consists of twelve items—three items for each of the four constructs identified in the theoretical section.

4. Results

The analysis of reliability (fidelity) and validity was conducted to empirically evaluate the four constructs associated with the dimensions of silence behavior in employees within organizations. This general construct, which encompasses the four specific constructs, is understood as the behavior of voluntarily withholding communication about ideas, proposals, or issues related to the organization and its work processes. Employee silence, in this context, is a multidimensional phenomenon composed of four distinct constructs, each linked to different motives for withholding information. These constructs are as follows:

a) Silence by resignation (SRG): Refers to when individuals withhold information because they have no expectation of being heard.
b) Defensive silence (SMG): Refers to when individuals withhold information to avoid potential risks or harm.
c) Prosocial silence (SPSG): Refers to when individuals withhold information to benefit third parties.
d) Opportunistic silence (SOG): Refers to when individuals withhold information in order to achieve personal advantages at the expense of others.

To assess the reliability of each subscale associated with the specific constructs outlined in the theoretical framework, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each construct. The results show that all four subscales, each consisting of three items, demonstrate high reliability:

a) Silence by resignation (SRG): Cronbach's Alpha = 0.863 (Table 1).
b) Defensive silence (SMG): Cronbach's Alpha = 0.903 (Table 2).
c) Prosocial silence (SPSG): Cronbach's Alpha = 0.851 (Table 3).
d) Opportunistic silence (SOG): Cronbach's Alpha = 0.842 (Table 4).

Table 1.
Silence by Resignation.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**Number of Items**
0.863	3

Table 2.
Defensive Silence (or Fear).

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**Number of Items**
0.903	3

Table 3.
Prosocial Silence.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**Number of Items**
0.851	3

Table 4.
Opportunistic Silence.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**Number of Items**
0.842	3

After establishing the reliability of each subscale for the specific constructs, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to validate the multidimensionality of the general employee silence scale [1]. The goal was to identify the underlying structure that reflects the four specific constructs. However, the results revealed that four independent factors were not generated as expected, according to the conceptual definitions presented in the theoretical framework. This aligns with the concerns raised in other research regarding the discriminant validity of the underlying motives for employee silence behavior [2, 30]. Specifically, resignation silence and defensive silence overlapped, while prosocial silence and opportunistic silence demonstrated clear differentiation and discriminant validity.

Resignation silence and defensive silence, while theoretically distinct—resignation silence being a passive form of withholding information driven by disengagement, and defensive silence being an active form rooted in fear or threat perceptions—were not successfully differentiated in this analysis. Given this overlap, the analysis proceeded by attempting to force the solution into four factors, but the constructs of resignation silence and defensive silence continued to merge without achieving clear differentiation.

Further testing was conducted by excluding respondents who were younger, on the assumption that they may lack sufficient work experience to distinguish between these two types of silence. Specifically, 30.3% of the sample, representing individuals between the ages of 18 and 24, were removed. However, this exclusion did not result in the expected four-factor solution; instead, a three-factor solution persisted, with resignation silence (SRG) and defensive silence (SMG) grouped together.

Attempts were also made to remove items with lower contributions to the reliability of the scale, but the overlap between resignation silence and defensive silence remained. Consequently, the decision was made to proceed with a three-factor solution, merging resignation silence and defensive silence into a new construct labeled SRMG (Silence by Resignation and Fear).

The three-factor solution showed a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of 0.88, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p < 0.001$, as shown in Table 5. The final model, reflecting the three-dimensional structure, is summarized in Table 6.

Table 5.
KMO and Bartlett of Three-Factor Solution.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.880
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	831.810
	gl	66

Table 6.
Rotated Factor Matrix by Principal Axis Factoring.

Rotated Factor Matrix[a]			
	Factor		
	1	2	3
SR1	0.721		
SR2	0.707		
SR3	0.764		
SM4	0.839		
SM5	0.753		
SM6	0.818		
SPS7		0.743	
SPS8		0.867	
SPS9		0.649	
SO10			0.566
SO11			0.760
SO12			0.897

Extraction method: Principal Axis Factoring.
Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.

Note: [a]. The rotation has converged in 5 iterations.

Despite evidence suggesting that employee silence behavior generally operates within three dimensions, the decision was made to further test the hypothesized four-factor structure using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the expected dimensionality composed of four specific constructs. The CFA was performed with a four-factor model, and the results indicated an adequate fit for the model (see Table 7 and Table 8), with the following fit indices: CFI = 0.985, IFI = 0.985, and RMSEA = 0.049. However, the analysis failed to establish discriminant validity between the resignation silence and fear silence dimensions (Table 9), reinforcing the findings from the Exploratory Factor Analysis that both constructs overlap. This result supports the decision to interpret the silence behavior scale as consisting of three distinct dimensions rather than four.

Table 7.
Baseline Comparisons.

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	0.931	0.905	0.985	0.979	0.985
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Table 8.
RMSEA.

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	0.049	0.000	0.084	0.497
Independence model	0.336	0.316	0.356	0.000

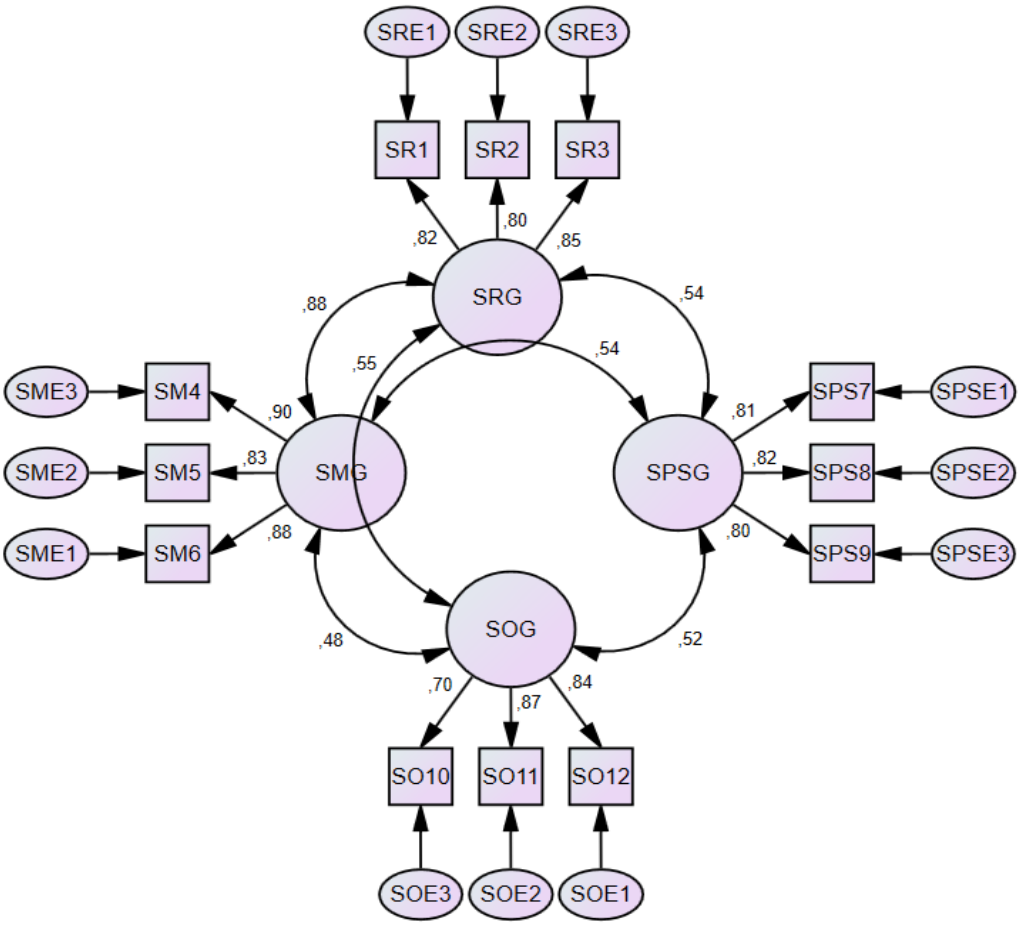

Figure 1.
Four-Factor Model.

In this context, despite the adequate model fit, the issue of discriminant validity between resignation silence and defensive silence remains unresolved. This is evident from the correlation matrix based on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and its square root, which shows a high correlation of 0.883 between resignation silence and defensive silence. This further confirms the overlap between these two constructs, reinforcing the need to reconsider their distinctiveness within the overall framework of silence behavior.

Table 9.
Correlation Matrix and AVE.

	SRG	SMG	SOG	SPSG
SRG	Square Root of AVE: 0.8246211251 (AVE: 0.68)	0.883	0.547	0.545
SMG	0.883	Square Root of AVE: 0.8124038404 (AVE: 0.66)	0.479	0.544
SOG	0.547	0.479	Square Root of AVE: 0.871779788 (AVE: 0.76)	0.521
SPSG	0.545	0.544	0.521	Square Root of AVE: 0.8062257748 (AVE: 0.65)

Source: Developed by the author using AMOS and Excel.

This confirms the findings from the Exploratory Factor Analysis regarding the overlap between the resignation silence dimension (coded as SRG) and defensive silence (coded as SMG), leading to the conclusion that there is no discriminant validity between resignation silence (SRG) and defensive or fear silence (SMG). This conclusion is further substantiated by the high correlation of 0.883 between these two constructs (Table 9 and Figure 1).

As a result, a three-dimensional solution is adopted instead of four, merging the resignation silence construct with the defensive or fear silence construct into a new coding, termed SRMG. One possible explanation for this merger is that resignation and fear as motives for silence may overlap in individuals' perceptions. Fear can lead to resignation, and within this resignation, defensive silence may persist. Although resignation silence is passive and defensive silence is active, the distinction between these two forms of silence is not supported by the collected data.

However, prosocial silence and opportunistic silence retain their discriminant validity, remaining distinct and independent constructs within the overall framework of silence behavior. Consequently, Confirmatory Factor Analysis is conducted again with a three-factor solution (Figure 2), combining resignation and defensive silence into a construct termed resignation and fear silence (coded as SRMG).

Given the low discriminant validity between resignation silence (SRG) and defensive or fear silence (SMG), and the subsequent merger of these constructs into a new one, Cronbach's Alpha is recalculated for the six merged items (Table 10). The result is 0.922, demonstrating the reliability of this new construct, coded as SRMG, in SPSS statistical software.

Table 10.
Resignation and Fear Silence.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**Number of Items**
0.922	6

As a result of merging the resignation silence and defensive silence dimensions, a model is constructed in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis with three constructs (Figure 2), which demonstrates an adequate fit (Tables 11 and 12). The following fit indices are observed: CFI = 0.962, IFI = 0.963, and RMSEA = 0.075, alongside a satisfactory Correlation Matrix and Square Root of AVE (Tables 13 and 14). Consequently, discriminant validity is confirmed for the three-dimensional model, which includes prosocial silence (SPSG), opportunistic silence (SOG), and resignation and fear silence (SRMG).

However, the dimensionality of the model presents a theoretical inconsistency with the resignation and fear silence construct. Specifically, resignation is considered a passive behavior, while fear is associated with an active behavioral response. This inconsistency calls for further neuroscientific exploration into the emotional and perceptual aspects of silence, which could provide deeper insights into this issue. At present, the available data does not allow for a definitive conclusion regarding this theoretical discrepancy.

Table 11.
Baseline Comparisons.

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	0.906	0.879	0.963	0.951	0.962
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Table 12.
RMSEA.

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	0.075	0.042	0.104	0.096
Independence model	0.336	0.316	0.356	0.000

Table 13.
Correlations.

			Estimate
SRMG	<-->	SOG	0.523
SRMG	<-->	SPSG	0.563
SOG	<-->	SPSG	0.520

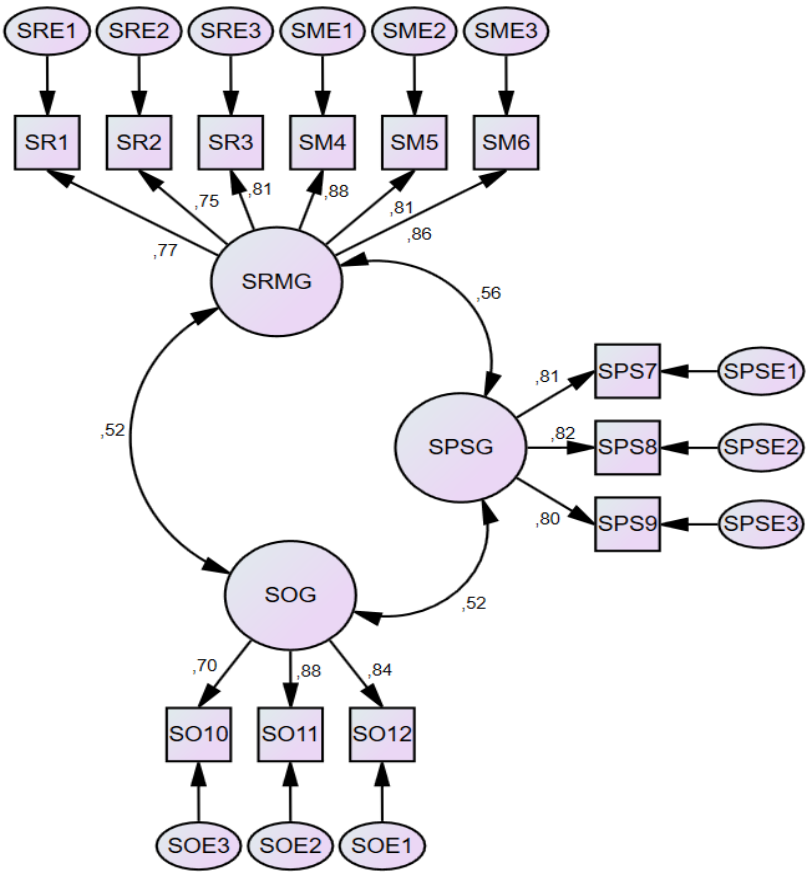

Figure 2.
Three-Factor Model.

Table 14.
Correlation Matrix and Square Root of AVE.

	SRMG	SOG	SPSG
SRMG	0.812403840 (AVE 0.66)	0.523	0.563
SOG	0.523	0.8062257748 (AVE 0.65)	0.520
SPSG	0.563	0.520	0.812403840 (AVE 0.66)

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a significant contribution to the understanding of silence behaviors in organizational settings by empirically evaluating the reliability and validity of constructs associated with employee silence. The results highlight the multidimensional nature of silence behavior but also reveal challenges in differentiating between certain dimensions, particularly resignation silence (SRG) and defensive or fear silence (SMG). While prosocial silence (SPSG) and opportunistic silence (SOG) demonstrated clear discriminant validity and reliability, the overlap between resignation and fear-driven silence suggests a deeper psychological and emotional connection between these constructs.

This overlap could stem from the emotional underpinnings of both constructs: resignation silence is a passive withdrawal often associated with disengagement and hopelessness, while defensive silence is an active mechanism aimed at self-protection in response to perceived threats. The high correlation (0.883) and lack of discriminant validity between these constructs suggest that employees may not distinctly perceive these motivations. This merging into a single construct (SRMG) raises theoretical questions but offers a practical approach for understanding and measuring silence behavior in organizations. Additionally, the results confirm that prosocial silence and opportunistic silence are distinct and maintain their validity as independent dimensions.

The findings suggest revisiting the theoretical distinction between resignation silence and defensive silence, with two potential issues identified in the four-factor dimensionality: on one hand, the possibility that the item propositions on the scale may be poorly formulated for the Spanish language, preventing discrimination between resignation silence and defensive silence; on the other hand, there may be a theoretical issue with the links between resignation and fear, which could lead to a redefinition of the analytical distinction underlying the difference between the constructs.

Various studies have shown that the constructs of employee silence due to resignation and employee silence due to fear or defensive reasons have overlapping factorial structures and high correlations between the two constructs [8, 30, 41-43] often combining both constructs into a single dimension or exhibiting very high correlations between the dimensions, such as a correlation of 0.98 [30]. This aligns with the findings of this research, showing a correlation of 0.88. This does not contradict the notion that silence is a multidimensional phenomenon [27] but it does question what these dimensions are.

In the case of constructs based on resignation and fear, they share the negativity of a destructive or antisocial nature that seeks to distance, disconnect, reject, or flee. This situation is empirically different from the prosocial dimension, which seeks to connect or adhere to others for group or third-party benefit, as opposed to fear and resignation, and it is also distinct from opportunistic silence, which seeks personal gain. Thus, the structure originally proposed by Dyne, et al. [27] and continued by Knoll, et al. [1] was not confirmed in this study. In this sense, there is a consensus on the relevance of silence behavior but a lack of theoretical and empirical consistency regarding the constructs involved in the scale. One possible explanation is provided by Morrison [2] who suggests that the reasons for silence behavior are not necessarily mutually exclusive, leading to overlaps or correlations in this area.

The exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses reinforce these findings, providing adequate model fit indices for the three-factor model. Despite this, the theoretical inconsistency of merging passive and active silence behaviors underscores the need for further exploration of the psychological and neuroscientific mechanisms underpinning these behaviors.

5.1. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this study:

1. Sample Composition: The study excluded a significant portion of younger respondents (30.3% of the sample aged 18-24) to improve factor differentiation. This exclusion may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader population, particularly those with less work experience. Moreover, the convenience sampling and small size of 109 participants may affect the robustness of the findings. Increasing the sample size would be crucial to confirm these results.
2. Construct Overlap: The inability to achieve discriminant validity between resignation silence and defensive silence highlights a limitation in the conceptual clarity and operationalization of these constructs. Future studies may need to refine the measurement items or explore alternative methods to distinguish these dimensions.
3. Cultural and Contextual Factors: The study does not explicitly account for cultural or organizational contexts that may influence silence behaviors. Cultural norms, organizational climates, and leadership styles could significantly impact the manifestation and perception of silence.
4. Self-Reported Data: As with many psychological constructs, reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases, such as social desirability or recall inaccuracies. This limitation may affect the accuracy of responses regarding sensitive topics like silence behaviors.
5. Cross-Sectional Design: The study's cross-sectional nature limits the ability to infer causality or observe changes in silence behaviors over time. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore the dynamics of silence behaviors.
6. Observation Limitations: Silence behavior is inherently non-observable. While self-reports remain a primary research method, qualitative research methods such as interviews or focus groups could complement survey findings, providing deeper insights into this phenomenon.

5.2. Future Research Directions

Given the findings and limitations, several avenues for future research are suggested:

1. Refinement of Constructs: Further work is needed to refine the measurement of resignation and defensive silence to achieve clearer differentiation. This may involve the development of new items or the incorporation of qualitative methods to capture the nuances of these constructs.
2. Neuroscientific Exploration: To address the theoretical inconsistency of merging resignation and fear-driven silence, future studies could incorporate neuroscientific methods to explore the emotional and cognitive processes underlying these behaviors.
3. Cultural Comparisons: Investigating silence behaviors across different cultural and organizational contexts could provide insights into how cultural norms and organizational climates influence the motivations for silence.
4. Longitudinal Studies: Longitudinal research could help understand the temporal dynamics of silence behaviors, including how they evolve in response to changes in organizational environments or individual experiences.

5. Intervention Studies: Future research could explore interventions aimed at reducing negative forms of silence, such as resignation and defensive silence, while fostering positive forms like prosocial silence. This could involve testing the impact of leadership training, organizational policies, or communication strategies.
6. Intersection with Emotional States: Examining the interplay between silence behaviors and emotional states, such as fear, anxiety, or disengagement, could provide deeper insights into the psychological mechanisms driving these behaviors.
7. Scale Development and Validation: Evaluation and reformulation of scale items to better capture the original theoretical distinctions could be achieved through expert consultations or qualitative studies.

6. Conclusions

This study advances the understanding of silence behaviors in organizations by evaluating the multidimensional nature of employee silence and its underlying constructs. The results demonstrate the reliability of the general scale and its subscales but also reveal significant challenges in differentiating between resignation and defensive silence. The decision to merge these constructs into a single dimension (SRMG) provides a pragmatic solution but raises theoretical questions that warrant further investigation.

It is possible to conclude that silence behavior is a multidimensional phenomenon. However, the data do not reveal the theoretically expected number of dimensions, which may be due to issues with the formulation of the scale items in its Spanish version or a need to theoretically review the relationship between resignation behavior and fear behavior. Despite this, the findings do not preclude considering resignation and fear as distinct reasons for silence behavior, provided that correlations and proximities between the two psychological situations are evaluated. The theoretical distinction between passivity in resignation and activity in fear or defense may exist and, at the same time, overlap in people's minds. However, this research does not provide sufficient quantitative evidence to treat resignation silence and fear silence as completely separate phenomena. In this sense, we conclude that there could be an aggregated construct termed resignation and fear silence, as opposed to other constructs based on different reasons for silence behavior.

The findings underscore the importance of recognizing silence as a multifaceted phenomenon with distinct motivations, ranging from prosocial intentions to self-protection and opportunism. By addressing the limitations and pursuing the proposed research directions, future studies can enhance the theoretical clarity and practical utility of silence behavior constructs. Ultimately, this can contribute to more effective organizational policies and practices that promote open communication and psychological safety in the workplace.

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