

ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM AND COMMUNICATION: “ONSTAGE” AND “OFFSTAGE”

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The aim of the study was to answer whether there is a relationship between organizational cynicism and communication. Organizational cynicism is considered to be an attitude towards those in power in an organization. Communication is analysed in its two aspects: “onstage”, where information is expected to be shared to achieve the company’s goals, and “offstage”, beyond the organizational rules and procedures, which mostly satisfies employees’ need for information. The flow of information is blocked “onstage” if employees keep silent and it flows freely offstage when they gossip. It was hypothesised that the cognitive aspect of the cynical attitude would predict negative gossip about superiors, and its affective aspect would predict employee silence. To verify the hypotheses, two correlational studies and one experimental study were conducted with participants recruited from different organizations ($N = 472$). The results showed that cognitive cynicism is related to an increase in negative gossip about a supervisor and partly support the expectation about relation between affective cynicism and employee silence. The results are discussed in the context of practical consequences of the relations between organizational cynicism and communication.

Keywords: organizational cynicism; communication; gossip; employee silence.

Those who hold power in an organization may be considered cynical when they declare values that are not supported by the adherence to organisational regulations

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(Dean et al., 1998; Kim et al., 2009). Authorities are expected to be credible, otherwise their influence is weaker (Doden et al., 2020). There is a vast range of consequences of perceiving authorities in organization as cynical, for example, decreased motivation to work and undertake extra-role behaviors (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Wanous et al., 2000), organizational commitment and performance (Abraham, 2000; Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008; Kim et al., 2009), the quality of relations (Scott & Zweig, 2021) and communication (Al-Abrrow, 2018). However, the relationship between cynicism and communication has been insufficiently studied, despite the fact that the exchange of information, which is crucial for effective cooperation, is closely linked to how the partner is evaluated (Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Communication is sensitive to what people think of each other. That is why a communication process can be described by a theatrical metaphor, with action taking place onstage, in the spotlight, and offstage, where it is less constrained by conversation requirements (Goffman, 1959). The “onstage” aspect of communication is crucial for the management processes through which tasks are defined, problems are resolved, creative ideas emerge, feedback on task performance is obtained and innovations are developed (Church, 1994; Miller, 2006). This formal communication is hindered by employees’ reluctance to share information, resulting in employee silence (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Employee silence intensifies in organizations whose authorities are perceived as not supportive and not open to the possibility of questioning the on-going practices (Bommer et al., 2005; Detert & Edmondson, 2011). In such environment organizational cynicism may develop and its affective aspect may reduce voice (Grant, 2013). On the other hand, the cognitive aspect of cynical attitude towards authorities may bring intensification in the “offstage” communication, manifested by negative gossip about a supervisor. People are strongly motivated to reduce cognitive inconsistencies (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2012), and “offstage” communication can satisfy this need (Dores Cruz et al., 2020).

The link between gossip, particularly negative gossip about a supervisor, employee silence and organizational cynicism is to be verified in present studies. These studies contributes to the literature in several ways. First, a new insight into the importance of communication in considering organizational cynicism’s consequences is provided. Second, two aspects of communication in organization are examined by showing how they are rooted in employees’ cynical attitude. Third, employee silence and gossip, as “onstage” and “offstage” communication respectively, are discussed and thanks to that their functions in the information flow are highlighted. The study is based on the assumption that communication reflects the quality of relations between employers and employees (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Due to the role emotions play in employee silence and cognitive motivation play in gossiping,

it is expected that affective cynicism is related to employee silence and cognitive cynicism is related to negative gossiping about a supervisor, as negativity is charged with information (Baumeister et al, 2001). The aim of the study is to examine these possibilities, thus contributing to the body of knowledge about the communicative consequences of organizational cynicism.

“Onstage”: Organizational Cynicism and Employee Silence

“Onstage” communication is a tool for coordinating complex activities of members of an organization (Church, 1994). It is regulated by rules and it is bidirectional: top-down and bottom-up (Miller, 2006). In the latter case, certain conditions must be met to enable employees to communicate openly, especially when the issues raised may jeopardize the relationship with supervisors and colleagues. One of them is coherence between the declared values and actual actions of managers (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Lack of perceived consistency can cause cynicism. As Dean, Brandes and Dharwadkar (1998) claim, organizational cynicism is a negative attitude of the organizations’ members toward their organizations. It has three dimensions: “(1) a belief that the organization lacks integrity; (2) negative affect toward the organization; and (3) tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with these beliefs and affect” (Dean et al., 1998, p. 345). Accordingly, the first dimension is cognitive cynicism, the second is affective cynicism, and the third is behavioral cynicism.

Those who display a cynical attitude are suspicious of the language used in public settings, doubt the sincerity of authorities’ speech and question authorities’ accounts of their motives and actions (Mazella, 2007). It may influence “onstage” communication, particularly when the affective aspect of cynicism is at play. Affective cynicism is negatively associated with self-assessed job performance and positively with top management incompetence (Kim et al., 2009). The roots of affective cynicism may be found in the psychological contract breach which arises from the belief that promises made by the manager have not been fulfilled (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Pfrombeck et al. (2020) suggest that cynicism is a kind of protection against future disappointments. Emotions toward authorities such as tension, irritation, aggravation and anxiety (Dean et al., 1998; Kim et al., 2019) harm “onstage” communication. This kind of communication requires certain principles to be fulfilled and above all, the one of transparency (Liu et al., 2010). Otherwise, it would be risky to reveal one’s opinions, emotions and judgements, particularly in situations of observed irregularities (Ashford et al., 1998; Burris, 2012; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Van Dyne et al., 2003).

Negative emotions limits communication aimed at improving the functioning of the organization and lead to employee silence (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). The emotion of fear is an important contributor to silence (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, 2011). Madrid et al. (2015) conducted a diary study and found that low-activated negative affect contributes to increased silence (this effect was found only for those employees high in rumination). In contrast, other authors point to the role of high-activated negative affect (Morrison, 2014; Seo et al., 2008). The affective aspect of a cynical attitude towards managers seems to contain the potential to reinforce employee silence.

Hypothesis 1. Organizational cynicism is positively related to employee silence.

Hypothesis 2. Of the three aspects of organizational cynicism, employee silence is most strongly predicted by affective cynicism.

“Offstage”: Negative Gossip About a Supervisor and Organizational Cynicism

Gossip represents the “offstage” communication. Unlike formal communication, which is restricted by formal roles and behavioral principles, gossip enables “free-flowing evaluative conversation” (Brady et al., 2017). It enhances social relations and provides information on social environment (Emler, 1994; Michelson et al., 2010; Sommerfeld et al., 2008). As Baumaister et al. (2004) emphasise, gossip offers the answer to the question how to deal with tensions caused by relations with others. Sharing information through gossip is a universal phenomenon but, according to Ben-Ze’ev (1994), it is confused with malice, although malice is neither typical nor common for gossiping. It is exactly the opposite: gossip is an intrinsically valuable activity because it satisfies the basic need to understand other people’s behavior. Dores Cruz et al. (2020) asked people to report on their experiences over a 10-day period of sending and receiving gossip. They found that 68.5% of the gossip content was evaluative and made it possible to assess the cooperativeness of people who were the subjects of conversation. The authors also found that people refer to cues of the credibility of the information being conveyed. Such information is useful in assessing the reputation of others and thus protects group members from the threat of exploitation (Feinberg et al., 2014; Feinberg et al., 2012).

Brady et al. (2017) make a distinction between negative and positive content of gossip in organization. They found that negative gossip about a supervisor was positively related to job ambiguity and negatively to procedural justice. This type of justice offers to employees an opportunity to discuss, understand and correct

a gap between declarations and practices through the mechanism of voice (Colquitt, 2001). In the absence of a formal means of dealing with inconsistencies, employees turn to their colleagues, engaging in the process of sensemaking (Bankins, 2015; Barge & Andreas, 2013; Pfrombeck et al., 2020). As Mignonac et al. (2018) findings show, the stronger the experience of ambivalence, the greater cognitive cynicism. These results support the line of reasoning linking organizational cynicism, as experienced inconsistency, with negative gossip about a supervisor. The supervisor as a representative of employer becomes the object of informal conversation. During this conversation information on the observed discrepancies between declarations and decisions is exchanged and verified. This way gossipers can protect themselves from the threat of exploitation. It can be expected that this aspect of organizational cynicism is the strongest predictor of negative gossip about a supervisor.

Hypothesis 3. Organizational cynicism is positively related to negative gossip about a supervisor.

Hypothesis 4. Of the three aspects of organizational cynicism, negative gossip about a supervisor is most strongly predicted by cognitive cynicism.

THE CURRENT STUDIES

Three separate studies were conducted to shed light on the relationship between organizational cynicism and communication. Study 1 aims at testing whether organizational cynicism is related to “onstage” communication whose manifestation is employee silence. Here two hypotheses are tested: organizational cynicism is positively related to employee silence (Hypothesis 1) and out of the three aspects of organizational cynicism, employee silence is most strongly predicted by affective cynicism (Hypothesis 2). Study 2 focuses on gossip in organization as an expression of the “offstage” communication and its relation to organizational cynicism and tests the hypothesis that organizational cynicism is positively related to negative gossip about a supervisor (Hypothesis 3). It is predicted that of the three aspects of organizational cynicism, negative gossip about a supervisor is most strongly predicted by cognitive cynicism (Hypothesis 4). In Studies 1 and 2 correlation and regression analyses are used. Study 3 supplements the previous two studies by using a different way of operationalizing organizational cynicism. “Onstage” communication in experimental Study 3 is expressed in terms of a dimension, one end of which is withdrawal from speaking, while the other end is willingness to express one’s opinion.

STUDY 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data for the study were collected from 220 employees of various Polish organizations of different size and ownership structure (public and private). The survey was anonymous and voluntary. A part of the survey was conducted individually and in a group setting (as part of a postgraduate course on communication in organization; after completing the questionnaires, issues related to gossip and silence were discussed, so that participants would get a return on the attention invested in fulfilling questionnaires): the participants were asked to complete a questionnaire in paper-and-pencil format. Other respondents were recruited online by using snowball method.

The study sample included 90 men and 129 women. The average age was about 38 years ($M = 38.05$, $SD = 11.13$). Considering organizational position, 163 of the participants were employed in non-managerial positions and 56 in managerial positions. The average job seniority was about 17 years ($M = 17.17$, $SD = 12.28$). The participants had been working at their current place of employment for minimum six months and maximum of 32 years.

Measures

To measure **organizational cynicism** the 11-item scale of organizational cynicism developed by Brandes, Dharwadkar and Dean and presented by Kim et al. (2009) was used. Four items were used to measure cognitive cynicism, e.g. "I believe top management says one thing and does another", four items to measure affective cynicism, e.g. "When I think about top management, I feel irritation", and three items for behavioral cynicism, e.g. "I criticize top management's practices and policies with others". Participants answered the question to what degree they agree with each of eleven items on a five-point Likert-type format, ranging from 1 (*I strongly disagree*) to 5 (*I strongly agree*). The scale was translated into Polish and then back-translated, and this version was compared with the original scale to eliminate any inconsistencies. Measurement reliability estimated for the cognitive cynicism in the current study was $\alpha = 0.85$, for the affective cynicism it was $\alpha = 0.93$ and for the behavioral cynicism it was $\alpha = 0.78$.

In order to measure **employee silence**, the Four Forms of Employee Silence Scale (Knoll & van Dick, 2013, adapted by Adamska & Jurek, 2017) was used. Each of four subscales includes three items describing reasons why participants withhold information regarding problems noticed in the workplace, e.g. "...because of fear of negative consequences" (quiescent silence), "...because nothing will change anyway" (acquiescent silence), "...because I do not want others to get into trouble" (prosocial silence), "...because that would mean having to do avoidable additional work" (opportunistic silence). Participants used a 7-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*very often*) to rate all items. The 12 items were combined to form a single measure of employee silence. Measurement reliability estimated for employee silence in the current study was $\alpha = 0.91$.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the variables examined in Study 1. Observations with missing data were not included in the analyses.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Variables Under Study (Study 1)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Employee silence	3.45	1.71	(0.90)			
2. Cognitive cynicism	3.14	1.04	0.33**	(0.85)		
3. Affective cynicism	2.90	1.23	0.48**	0.82**	(0.92)	
4. Behavioral cynicism	3.01	1.09	0.35**	0.74**	0.77**	(0.78)

Note. $N = 219$. On the diagonal in brackets the Cronbach's alpha coefficients are given.

** $p < .001$.

A multivariate linear regression was calculated to predict employee silence based on three aspects of organizational cynicism. As expected, organizational cynicism significantly predicted employee silence—it explained a significant proportion of variance in employee silence scores, $R^2 = .25$, $F(3, 216) = 23.98$, $p < .001$. Each of the aspect of organizational cynicism was differently related to employee cynicism. Cognitive cynicism: $b = -.25$ [95% CI: $-.52, -.01$], $\beta = -.20$, $t(216) = -1.86$, $p = .064$, VIF = 3.42; affective cynicism: $b = .71$ [95% CI: $.46, .95$], $\beta = .67$, $t(216) = 5.78$, $p < .001$, VIF = 3.86 and behavioral cynicism: $b = -.02$ [95% CI: $-.26, .21$], $\beta = -.02$, $t(216) = -.21$, $p = .831$, VIF = 2.93.

In verifying Hypotheses 1 and 2, it was found that out of the three aspects of organizational cynicism only affective cynicism significantly predicts employee silence. Though the three aspects of organizational cynicism are highly correlated, VIF value (< 4) does allow to treat them—according to the theoretical assumptions—as separate variables. Nevertheless, it must be noted that participants were confronted with the scale consisted of three subscales, accompanied by one instruction.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data for the study were collected from 102 adults (including 72 women) aged 22 to 57 years ($M = 35.47$, $SD = 8.88$) working in public and private organizations in Poland. The average job seniority was 12.92 years ($SD = 8.84$). The participants had been working at their current place of employment for a minimum one month and a maximum of 33 years.

The survey was anonymous and voluntary. A part of it was conducted individually: The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire in paper and pencil format. Other respondents were recruited online by using snowball method. The participants were asked to complete questionnaires related to organizational cynicism and negative gossip about a supervisor.

Measures

Organizational cynicism was measured with the instrument described in Study 1. Measurement reliability estimated for the cognitive cynicism in the current study was $\alpha = 0.86$, for affective cynicism α was 0.90 and for behavioral cynicism it was 0.76.

To measure **negative gossip about a supervisor** a subscale of Work Gossip Scale developed by Brady et al. (2017) was used. It consists of five items preceded with the instruction: “The following questions are about workplace conversations in which you talked about your supervisor when he/she was not present to hear what was said” and the question: “In the last month, how often did you...” to which participants answered on a 7-point scale: 1 (*never*), 2 (*once a month*), 3 (*2–3 times a month*), 4 (*once a week*), 5 (*2–3 times a week*), 6 (*once a day*), 7 (*more than once*

a day). An example scale item is "...asked a work colleague if they have a negative impression of something that your supervisor has done". The scale was translated into Polish and then back-translated and this version was compared with the original scale to eliminate any inconsistencies. Measurement reliability estimated for the subscale in the current study was $\alpha = 0.94$.

Results

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the variables examined in Study 2. Observations with missing data were not included in the analyses.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Variables Under Study (Study 2)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	
1. NGS	3.53	1.50	(0.94)			
2. Cognitive cynicism	3.38	1.03	0.61**	(0.85)		
3. Affective cynicism	2.95	1.18	0.50**	0.74**	(0.89)	
4. Behavioural cynicism	3.42	1.02	0.59**	0.82**	0.78**	(0.75)

Note. $N = 102$. On the diagonal in brackets the Cronbach's alpha coefficients are given. NGS = negative gossip about a supervisor.

** $p < .001$.

A multivariate linear regression was calculated to predict negative gossip about supervisor based on three aspects of organizational cynicism. As expected, organizational cynicism significantly predicted negative gossip about supervisor—it explained a significant proportion of variance in negative gossip about supervisor scores, $R^2 = .40$, $F(3, 98) = 22.02$, $p < .001$. Each aspect of organizational cynicism was differently related to negative gossip about the supervisor. Cognitive cynicism: $b = .55$ [95% CI: .13, .97], $\beta = .38$, $t(98) = 2.63$, $p < .010$, VIF = 3.44; affective cynicism: $b = -.02$ [95% CI: $-.35, .31$], $\beta = -.01$, $t(98) = -.12$, $p = .897$, VIF = 2.85 and behavioral cynicism: $b = .43$ [95% CI: $-.02, .88$], $\beta = -.02$, $t(98) = 1.88$, $p = .062$, VIF = 4.03

In confirming Hypotheses 3 and 4, it was found that out of the three aspects of organizational cynicism, only cognitive cynicism significantly predicts employee silence. VIF value for behavioral cynicism only slightly exceeds acceptable value (4.03), thus, similarly to Study 1, also in this instance the three aspects may be treated as separate variables. And once more, it must be noted that only one component—

cognitive cynicism—out of the three components that build predictive model, is significantly related to gossip.

STUDY 3

To complete Study 1 and Study 2 using a different method, Study 3 was conducted. In Study 3 the hypothesis that organizational cynicism is positively related to employee silence and to negative gossip about a supervisor was examined (Hypotheses 1 and 3). Studies 1 and 2 corroborated the assumption that silence is predicted by affective cynicism and gossip is predicted by cognitive cynicism. In these studies, measurement of organizational cynicism occurred through using a scale towards which the participants responded. In Study 3, organizational cynicism was manipulated by assigning participants to one of the three experimental conditions: (1) cognitive cynicism as a response to inconsistency between authorities' declarations and decisions, (2) affective cynicism as a response to inconsistency between authorities' declarations and decisions, and (3) consistency of authorities' declarations and organizational practices. In Study 3 it was expected that the tendency to gossip would be highest in a condition of cognitive cynicism in comparison to two other groups. It was also expected that the tendency to remain silent would be higher in the condition of affective cynicism in comparison to two other groups. Silence is measured here in terms of a dimension, one end of which is withdrawal from speaking, while the other end is willingness to express one's opinion.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The data for the study were collected from 150 persons (including 75 women). The average age was about 42 years ($M = 41.70$, $SD = 13.32$). 40 of the participants declared primary education, 61 secondary education and 49 higher education.

Participants were recruited from an online survey panel managed by the PBS research agency in Poland. The survey was anonymous and voluntary. Participants were informed that at any stage of the study they could withdraw from participation. First, the participants who had been randomly assigned to one of the three groups answered questions about gender, age and education. Afterwards, they were given the basic information on the study and asked to imagine being employed in a com-

pany. Two-thirds of them read a description of managers' inconsistent behaviors (the core text) and for half of this group the text was commented with cognitive cynicism remarks and for the other half with affective cynicism remarks. The remaining part of the participants (one-third) read about consistent behaviors of the managers. After reading the scenario, participants rated their propensity to gossip negatively about a supervisor and their propensity to remain silent.

Experimental Manipulation

The core text for cognitive cynicism and affective cynicism versions was as follows:

The managers of Company ZYT declare that in their attitude towards employees they are guided by trust and responsibility for their welfare, and this is often emphasized in meetings with employees. At the same time, when you request equipment, you are required to go through a multi-step approval process before you can receive it (e.g., a laptop). Your daily experience at ZYT is filling out tables that report your every action, number of visits, and time spent talking to customers. Recently, your request for an additional monitor and ergonomic chair (standing uselessly in the office while you work from home due to COVID-19 pandemic) was denied, even though it would have made your job much easier.

The two last sentences of the cognitive cynicism scenario were as follows:

Based on these experiences, you conclude that ZYT executives declare one thing and do another, and that the policies, goals, and actual practices of the executives seem to have little in common. You often wonder if what management announces will actually be implemented.

The two last sentences of the affective cynicism scenario were as follows:

You feel irritated and annoyed when thinking about the managers in your organization. These are not the only negative emotions you feel when thinking about the people who run the company. Often these thoughts are accompanied by tension and anxiety.

The content of the consistency scenario was as follows:

The managers of Company ZYT declare that in their attitude towards employees they are guided by trust and responsibility for their welfare, and this is often emphasized in meetings with employees. When you are in need of equipment

you have a quick path to access it: you report to the IT department, where the purchase (e.g., a laptop) is made according to the necessary specifications for you, without additional approvals from your superiors. The way you achieve your job-related goals is up to you, and you are not expected to fill out tables reporting your every action. Recently, in a situation where you are working from home due to COVID-19 pandemic, you were given permission to take an extra monitor and an ergonomic chair out of the office, which make your work much easier, but would have been useless in the office anyway.

Measures

Negative gossip about a supervisor was measured with the instrument described in Study 2. The introduction to the scale was as follows:

The statements below refer to discussing with co-workers the behavior and decisions of superiors and the actions of colleagues who are not present during these discussions. Imagining that you are an employee of ZYT, determine the probability on a 5-point scale (1 – never, 2 – incidentally, 3 – rarely, 4 – often, 5 – very often) that...

Measurement reliability estimated for the subscale in the current study was $\alpha = 0.84$.

In order to measure **employee silence**, three items were developed that addressed staying silent or speaking up when faced with observed irregularities across the organization, within the department and related to the job. They were preceded by the instruction:

The following questions relate to your willingness to express your opinion about situations in your ZYT company that are objectionable to you, for example, when co-workers or associates or managers act in an inappropriate, inefficient, or immoral way in your opinion.

The statements differed in indicating the context of the observed irregularities: “If I observe irregularities affecting (the entire organization/department/my work) in a conversation with the person in charge....” The respondents had five options to complete this statement: “1 means that you would keep quiet and say nothing, 2 means that it would be very difficult for you to express your opinion, 3 means that it would be difficult for you to express your opinion but you would do it, 4 means that you would express your opinion, 5 means that it would be very easy for you to express your opinion.” The three items were reversed and combined to form a single

measure of employee silence. Measurement reliability estimated for the indicator of employee silence was $\alpha = 0.83$.

Results

Observations with missing data were not included in the analyses. The results were submitted to three (cognitive cynicism vs affective cynicism vs consistency) ANOVA for negative gossip about a supervisor and employee silence. The descriptive statistics are presented in Tables 3 and 4. The analysis showed the effect of experimental manipulation in negative gossip about a supervisor: $F(2,147) = 6.81$, $p < .001$. Bonferroni post hoc test indicates a significant difference between a means of cognitive cynicism and consistency groups with means respectively 2.82 ($SD = .77$) and 2.24 ($SD = .83$), $p < .001$. The analysis did not show the effect of experimental manipulation in employee silence. Thus, this study confirmed the relation between organizational cynicism and gossip, revealing the role of cognitive cynicism in this relationship (Hypotheses 3 and 4) but failed to show that people are more reluctant to talk about observed irregularities in organizations towards which they are cynical.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations for Variables Under Study (Study 3)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2
1. NGS	2.56	0.82	(0.83)	
2. Employee silence	3.49	0.79	-0.13	(0.82)

Note. $N = 150$. On the diagonal in brackets the Cronbach's alpha coefficients are given. NGS = negative gossip about a supervisor.

Table 4

Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) for Negative Gossip About a Supervisor and Employee Silence in Three Conditions—Cognitive Cynicism, Affective Cynicism and Consistency (Study 3)

Variable	Cognitive cynicism	Affective cynicism	Consistency
1. NGS	2.82 _a (.77)	2.62 _a (.77)	2.24 _e (.83)
2. Employee silence	3.47 _a (.75)	3.58 _a (.77)	3.43 _a (.85)

Note. $N = 150$. NGS = negative gossip about a supervisor; a, e subscripts indicate differences between means (Bonferroni test).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to check if organizational cynicism is connected with employee silence and gossip as the “onstage” and “offstage” manifestations of organizational communication. The link between organizational cynicism and employee silence was confirmed in the first study, whose results showed a significant relationship between affective organizational cynicism and employee silence. It was predicted that negative gossip about a supervisor would be linked to organizational cynicism. That was indeed confirmed in the second study, in which the significant predictive power of cognitive cynicism was revealed. This justified the expectation built on the assumption that gossiping serves not only maintaining the bonds (Dunbar, 2004) but also acquiring and sharing information (Dores Cruz et al., 2020; Emler, 1994).

The third study partially confirmed hypotheses about the relationship between organizational cynicism and the “onstage” and “offstage” communication. Organizational cynicism was positively related to negative gossip about a supervisor, but not to employee silence. At least two explanations could be offered for this result. First, evoking negative emotions towards imagined authorities in imagined situations (the affective cynicism scenario) failed, so the link between affective aspects of cynicism and employee silence could have not been shown. Second, the three items scale aimed to measure employee silence in the third study represented dimension with silence and voice as the opposites, while in the first study rationales for silence were measured. If this could be the case, then it would serve as an argument for treating voice and silence as separate phenomena. So far discussion on this has not brought an unequivocal settlement (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne, 2003).

Though not all expectations were confirmed in the three studies, they nevertheless have their value in concentrating on the link between organizational cynicism and communication. Particularly, the studies provide arguments in favour of analysing communication from the “onstage” and “offstage” perspective. As early as Weber writings about bureaucracy (1968) and Crozier (1964) critical analysis of bureaucracy in French organization, the distinction between what people say publicly, in the light of rules and procedures, and what information is shared behind the scenes, has become a measure of effective managerial influence in organization. Organizational cynicism strengthens the division between the “onstage” and “offstage” communication by intensifying both employee silence and gossip. Still, further research of an experimental nature is necessary because of the need to establish the relationship between organizational cynicism and silence. This can be done if organizational silence is treated as a separate phenomenon from voice.

The important limitation of the research presented in this paper is the lack of objective references for individual assessment of contradiction between the actions and the decisions of authorities. For this reason, it is impossible to draw fully valid conclusions. A partial transcendence of this limitation would be to include a measure of organizational climate in its aspect of employees' shared beliefs about these declaration—decision contradictions. This would require comparisons to be made between organizations, selected in such a way that the specifics of a given company's operations do not significantly alter the nature of the relationship between assessment of contradictions and communication (as might be the case with a company operating in a highly volatile business environment). Another, more objectivized measure of contradiction could be its assessment through analysis of archival data, considering changes over time.

However, it should be borne in mind that the subjective factor of assessing contradictions between what authorities declare and what they do plays an important role in the relationship between this assessment and communication. Therefore, accounting for individual differences in future studies would provide an opportunity to answer the question of who is more likely to perceive contradictions and respond to them by increasing behind-the-scenes gossip and silence in more formalized situations. Picking up this research thread may prove particularly valuable in the context of research on the paradox in organizations, which emphasizes that contradictions are inevitable (Carmine & Smith, 2021). On this basis, it can be concluded that the tension between expectations (based on the declarations made) and reality will manifest itself in onstage and offstage communication. The practical application of this conclusion would not so much be to change the situation—because it is unavoidable—but in its awareness, from which greater rationality in decision-making can result. The conclusions of the research presented also confirm the practical importance of access to information in an organization. Its absence in a situation of perceived inconsistency blocks organizational participation, can be associated with the belief that promises are not kept, and ultimately lead to a desire to leave the organization.

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