The main aim of the study entitled ‘Humiliation at work and work engagement. Analysis of the role of organisational silence and organisation size’ was to determine how the feeling of humiliation experienced at work is related to the level of employee engagement, while taking into account the mediating role of organisational silence and the moderating role of organisation size. Despite being recognised as a dangerous phenomenon with negative consequences for employee health and organisational functioning, the issue of humiliation at work has remained under-researched. This study fills this gap by focusing on the impact of humiliation on engagement, a key positive organisational attitude associated with vigour, dedication and absorption in work. Based on the job demand-resource theory (JD-R), humiliation was treated as a job stressor that drains employee resources (including self-esteem and sense of safety), making it difficult to maintain high levels of energy and motivation at work. Hypotheses were formulated assuming that a stronger sense of humiliation correlates with lower work engagement and, at the same time, increases the tendency towards organisational silence, i.e. deliberately refraining from speaking out due to fear or a sense of powerlessness. The limited ability to freely express opinions and concerns may, in turn, translate into lower motivation and commitment to work, which is why it was predicted that organisational silence would be a mechanism mediating the negative effect of humiliation on engagement. In addition, the question was raised as to whether the size of the company (micro, small, medium, large) differentiates the described relationships, including the entire mediation process, for example due to the different communication climate and degree of formalisation of procedures in companies of different sizes.

The study was conducted using a questionnaire on a nationwide sample of 496 people employed in companies of various sizes. The participants (aged 18–65, 50% women) were selected via an online research panel, with a balanced participation of women and men and an even distribution of organisation size (micro, small, medium, large). Standardised questionnaires were used to measure key variables: feelings of humiliation at work (operationalised as the experience of being humiliated in the past and fear of humiliation), organisational silence (acquiescent, quiescent, prosocial and opportunistic) and work engagement (vigour, dedication and absorption). Statistical analyses were performed using Pearson's correlation and mediation and moderated mediation models implemented in macro PROCESS (model 4 for indirect effects, model 59 for moderated mediation). The use of model 59 made it possible to test the impact of organisation size on all mediation paths (effects a, b, c and c'). Potential confounding variables (age, total length of service, length of service in the current company) were controlled for in the analyses.

The results of the study confirmed that humiliation in the workplace is associated with lower employee engagement (but low and only in terms of dedication to work) and higher levels of silence. As predicted, the stronger the perceived humiliation, the more frequent the refraining from speaking up in all the distinguished forms of organisational silence. However, the negative relationship between humiliation and work engagement turned out to be weaker than expected – a statistically significant negative relationship was observed only in relation to the component of dedication to work (emotional engagement), while for vigour and absorption, the correlations with humiliation were insignificant. Mediation analyses partially confirmed the assumed mechanism: two strategies of silence – acquiescent (motivated by resignation) and quiescent (motivated by fear) – proved to be significant mediators of the relationship between humiliation and all dimensions of commitment. In other words, experiencing stronger humiliation led to an increase in these forms of silence, which in turn translated into a decrease in vigour, dedication and absorption. Prosocial silence did not play a significant role in this mechanism, and the mediating effect of opportunistic silence was limited – it occurred mainly for the work dedication component. Limited evidence of moderating effects related to organisation size was also found, although the moderated mediation indices were insignificant in each case. In the smallest companies (micro-enterprises), the positive relationship between the level of humiliation and the tendency to remain silent was strongest, suggesting that the lack of formal support channels in very small entities fosters a climate of silence in the face of acts of humiliation. The negative effect of employee silence on their engagement was observed in all company sizes, but the strength of this effect varied depending on the type of silence and the context. For example, opportunistic silence significantly reduced engagement levels in large companies more than in micro-enterprises. In contrast, acquiescent and quiescent silence reduced work engagement in all contexts, albeit slightly more in larger organisations than in smaller ones, indicating partial moderation without changing the direction of the relationship. Overall, the basic mediating mechanism proved to be similar in all organisational conditions – company size did not significantly moderate the total indirect effect.

The results obtained make an important contribution to both theory and practice. First, the study innovatively presents employee humiliation as a factor that reduces their dedication to work, broadening existing approaches. Secondly, it has been confirmed that humiliation at work is not solely an individual experience, but is embedded in a broader context of relationships and may manifest itself through an atmosphere of silence within the team. Thirdly, taking into account the size of the organisation, it was found that the negative effects of humiliation affect employees regardless of the scale of the company, but the smallest and largest

companies may require different prevention and intervention strategies – for example, creating formal channels for reporting problems in micro-enterprises and strengthening the sense of psychological security in large corporations. From a practical point of view, the results obtained can be used to develop more effective organisational policies to prevent employee humiliation and promote a culture of respect and open communication. Counteracting humiliation and breaking the climate of silence helps to maintain high employee engagement, which translates into their well-being and work efficiency. In summary, this study provides evidence that investing in employee dignity and enabling them to speak up is in the best interest of the organisation.