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Increasing Voice Behaviour and Job Engagement

Keywords: employee voice, voice behaviours, job engagement, emotional stability, perceived voice appreciation, job demands, job resources, social resources, promotive voice, prohibitive voice, work psychology

Overview

A new (2021) study looking at the relationships between:

- job engagement
- employee voice behaviour
- emotional stability
- perceived voice appreciation

has found that there is a positive correlation between employee voice behaviour and job engagement, which is supported by personal resources such as high emotional stability and perceived voice appreciation. When emotional stability decreases, these outcomes are weaker and less likely to occur.

Voice behaviour is an important aspect of organisational health and human capital. It is often employee voice (employees speaking up) that is an early sign of trouble in operations or the market, as it is the employees who have the direct day-to-day connection with customers. Employees are also a valuable source of innovation. Constructive voice is a voluntary sharing of information, ideas or opinions aimed at creating positive changes in the organisation's work processesⁱ. There are two main types of constructive voiceⁱⁱ:

1. Promotive – offering suggestions, encouraging novel ideas and advocating for the well-being of others.
2. Prohibitive – speaking against ineffective and harmful behaviour in the workplace to try to prevent it.

Both promotive and prohibitive voice are defined by employees' motivation to improve their organisation and the work environment. Seeking to change the status quo for everyone's benefit is a valuable mindset. Voice behaviour has been found to produce several positive outcomes, for instance:

- Higher performance evaluations and ratingsⁱⁱⁱ
- Greater job satisfaction^{iv}
- Higher commitment to remaining with the organisation long-term^v
- Higher levels of motivation

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Employee engagement

When employees help foster and maintain a supportive work climate by voicing their observations and reservations, they are also likely to be more involved in their jobs. Employee engagement tends to occur when workers invest themselves fully into an assigned work role^{vi}. Engagement is often displayed by:

- a) Sustained involvement in work tasks that demand stamina and effort.
- b) Cognitive or mental immersion in work tasks demonstrated by attention and increased focus.
- c) Emotional attachment to a work role that is meaningful.

The positive impact of voice on job engagement may also be reciprocal, such that higher levels of engagement could also increase voice behaviour.

Job resources vs job demands

Job engagement and employee voice are vulnerable to being influenced by a range of personal and professional resources. For example, job resources like:

- positive feedback
- autonomy
- rewards

all help employees sustain their efforts to achieve work goals, reduce job demands and expand personal growth^{vii}. The following resources also provide ways for employees to foster meaningful social resources and withstand any fears created by the social risks of using voice (i.e. social rejection):
such as^{viii}:

1. Perceived voice appreciation – the extent to which employees view their voice contributions to the organisation as supported and valued by supervisors and co-workers.
2. Emotional stability – an employee's ability to process and control their emotional responses whilst maintaining a level mood, even when they are confronted with upsetting information.

In contrast, job demands such as:

- time pressure
- work-related conflict
- work overload

often use up an employee's resources, due to the physical, emotional and psychological costs they carry. These can all negatively impact their ability to engage in voice behaviours and remain engaged at work.

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Previous research

Previous research^{ix} looking at the relationships between voice, job engagement and emotional stability and their outcomes has found that:

- Exercising voice can be risky when challenging the status quo by questioning the organisation's practices or the opinions of supervisors or co-workers.
- Many employees decide against using voice because they are afraid of creating social conflict with co-workers or receiving negative evaluations from supervisors^x.
- Job engagement increases the number of organisational opportunities employees have to use voice^{xi}.
- Proactive behaviour, like voice, causes positive changes in all three areas of job engagement:
 - emotional attachment
 - physical involvement
 - mental immersion^{xii}
- Using voice helps employees to achieve higher social status, which is reflected by increased respect from colleagues and supervisors^{xiii}.
- Low emotional stability is predictive of distress and anxiety^{xiv}.
- High emotional stability tends to result in employees' perceiving their work environments as favourable and less threatening, even when the work is demanding or stressful^{xv}.

A new study

A new (2021) study by researchers from Freie Universität Berlin and Leipzig University in Germany has looked at the relationship between:

- employee voice behaviour
- job engagement
- emotional stability
- perceived voice appreciation.

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Findings

The study found that employees who use voice more often tend to display higher levels of job engagement over time. This positive relationship is moderated by perceived voice appreciation. When employees feel appreciated by co-workers and supervisors for speaking up, they tend to contribute more effort and remain connected to the organisation.

The study also found that:

- The positive association between employee voice, job engagement and perceived voice appreciation is stronger when emotional stability and emotion regulation capability is high, and weaker when emotional stability is low.
- There is a positive reciprocal relationship between job engagement and personal resources such as perceived voice appreciation or emotional stability.
- Higher levels of emotional stability help employees focus on the positive potential outcomes of using voice, instead of being intimidated by potentially negative consequences.

Positive behaviours that benefit the organisation, such as voice and job engagement, are more common when employees feel that their contributions are valued by leaders and co-workers.

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Review

1. Research Quality – 4/5 Researchers conducted a longitudinal study over four months. Participants (614) reported on personal voice behaviours at work in the public administration, healthcare and manufacturing sectors.
2. Confidence – 4/5 Results about emotional stability and its impact on employees' coping skills is in line with other findings.
3. Usefulness – 3/5 This study is useful to employees and leaders who want to understand the benefits of voice behaviours and job engagement, including how they are impacted by a lack or an abundance of resources.
4. Comments – Voice behaviour is becoming increasingly recognised as a critical indicator of organisational health.

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