Employee Voice Behaviour: A Framework for Eminent Exploration

Thuraisyah Jaaffar[1,2], Naresh Kumar Samy[1*]

[1] Faculty of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan
[2] Malaysian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship and Business, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan

Corresponding Author: naresh@umk.edu.my

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Abstract: *Employee voice behaviour is studied continuously on a broad spectrum of disciplines that enroots a dynamism that entails positive vibes in the literature. The multiperspective views resulted in the attractive, diverse conceptualisation of employee voice behaviour. Previous studies have remarked that psychological mechanisms are essential in establishing a solid bond between leadership and voice behaviour—besides reluctance to speak up despite having the opportunity linked to organisational mishaps. Voice behaviour has been the primary entrance to the new idea development for many organisations. Providing a secure channel for the employee to voice their opinions is challenging, whereby they might receive pressure from the collective voice in the workplace. However, to some extent, the voice behaviour among employees remains to be discussed as it provides opinions and has become the key to job performance and business sustainability. In acknowledging the importance of having employees who fearlessly voice their dissatisfaction and propose actions, empowering leadership besides leader-member exchange practices are also in the limelight. The forte of psychological safety and intrinsic motivation should gradually explore in unison. Indeed continuous investigation from different contexts is vital. A conceptual framework and research ideas are both outlined in this paper for passionate researchers on employee voice behaviours integrating the critical contributors.*

Keywords: Empowering leadership, intrinsic motivation, psychological safety, voice behaviour

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1. Introduction

In realising the pressing need for constant innovation, organisations have acknowledged that reliance on employees' opinions is vital for their growth and development while pursuing businesses in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world. Expressing statements concerning the organisation's processes allows for improving the organisation itself. These days, voicing out should be inevitably being practised, and it is likely the most significant factor for the employee to remain in focus while handling the competitive environment (Hsiung, 2012; Su, Liu & Hanson-Rasmussen, 2017). Many organisations have depicted that the employees are the primary reason they can adapt to change swiftly. Employees who refuse to express their concerns about work-related or any organisational glitches to respective superiors will create difficulties for the management team to benefit from opportunities for earlier error detection, offer remedies, and avoid further workplace hitches (Kim & Ishikawa, 2021; Knoll

& van Dick, 2013; Morrison, 2014). Besides, the management team probably mislays critical information that may help them make healthier decisions, improve performance, and upsurge organisational efficiency (Allen, Yoerger, Lehman-Willenbrock & Jones, 2015; Hussain, Shu, Tangirala, & Ekkirala, 2019; Wei, Zhang, & Chen, 2015). Perhaps these will knock down their ongoing successes too. Thus, organisations need to recognise the necessary measures to nurture employees' engagement in valiantly voicing their concerns while performing their job duties, fulfilling stakeholders' promises, and attaining their mission.

Scholars who deeply study organisational issues denote that voice behaviour has developed into a significant research curiosity. Voice behaviour stands for voicing concerns, ideas, and opinions for the organisation's enhancement (Morrison, 2014). Speech is a tool for positive change-oriented communication, as Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) argue, and as a result, it can elevate otherwise deplorable conditions. Van Dyne and LePine (1998) divided voice behaviour into two categories: those that promote and those that prevent. Voice behaviour that promotes employee proposals for enhancing work processes in an organisation is called "promotional voice behaviour" that must be constantly encouraged (Kakkar, Tangirala, Srivastava, & Kamdar, 2016). Occasionally misjudged that promotive voice as a threat to the authority of the organisation's management since it gives options to change the employees' status quo (Chen, Wang, & Lee, 2018; Lu & Lu, 2020; Ilyas, Abid, Ashfaq, Ali, & Ali, 2021; Morrison, 2014)

In contrast, prohibitive voice behaviour explains the employees' address the potential harm that might occur because of the practices in the workplace. Promotive voice behaviour is future-oriented and involves proactive expression. In contrast, the prohibitive voice behaviour entails future and past orientation. Behaviour that goes outside the scope of the primary position defines as voice-related, in which individuals act beyond the job description and are critical for organisational innovation, performance improvement, and errors prevention (Van Dyne & LePine,1998; Morrison, 2014). Contradicting in-role behaviour, which is the responsibilities towards the assigned role and failing to comply with in-role behaviour, will cause fewer organisational recompenses and adverse monetary penalties (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

Earlier pragmatic research has pointed out that leadership is critical in enabling employees to prudently voice their opinions (Jada & Mukhopadhyay, 2019; Hsiung, 2012; Yan, 2018). Despite these voice-related research achievements, the underlying psychological mechanisms in leadership that influence employees' voice behaviour need further attention (Engemann & Scott, 2020; Morrison, 2014; Lam, Lee, Taylor & Zhao, 2018). Ultimately, one of the present aims of this paper is to propose the mediating role of psychological safety and intrinsic motivation in envisaging employees' voice behaviour. First, drawing from the well-established social exchange theory (Blau,1964), the reciprocation process among leader-member is expected to bring behavioural outcomes that benefit the organisations. From this view, employees perceived the excellent treatment received from the organisations made them reciprocate with kind actions, for instance, speaking out the organisational concern. Employees believe that feeling safe and assurance of the situational environment dramatically impacts the employee choice to voice. Accordingly, employers play a crucial role in providing employees with emotional protection. Employees' psychological security relates to their perception of being comfortable displaying and employing themselves, deprived of fearing adverse effects on their self-image, status, or career. (Kahn, 1990, p.708). This interplay between leadership and voice behaviour has to be supported empirically, and there is a considerable demand for this evidence. As an essential dimension of organisational citizenship behaviour, voice behaviour is known for the substantial risk that it carries end to end. The work-related issues are often a threat to higher management. Intrinsically motivated employees love engaging with

a task for their own good instead of wondering for external outcomes or rewards such as cash (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Preceding studies have shown a positive association between employees' intrinsic motivation and various employee outcomes. Thus, it is vital to determine whether empowering leadership can influence employees' voice behaviour through intrinsic motivation.

2.   Hypotheses and Model Formation

2.1   Link between empowering leadership and voice behaviour

The empowering leadership practices have drawn scholars' attention to organisational behaviour research (Chow, 2018; Jada & Mukhopadhyay, 2019). Drawing from the empowerment process definition, the fundamental underlying of understanding the empowering leadership is a process that involves identifying conditions that promote powerlessness and removing these conditions through the use of the formal and informal methods, according to Conger and Kanungo (1988). Empowering leadership, described by Zhang and Zhou (2014), is simple and easy to understand. It reads as "the extent to which supervisors express confidence in their employees' abilities, emphasise the significance of their employees' work, involve their employees in decision-making, and reduce or remove bureaucratic constraints on their employees" (p. 150). Empowering leadership focuses on flattening the organisation, investing in the leader/follower relationship, removing barriers, and extending power to subordinates, as noted in the present and past pieces of literature (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). In response, empowering leadership has been shown to induce employee motivation, a sense of ownership, and engagement (Lee. Willis & Tian, 2018; Meng & Sun, 2019).

Empirical studies have shown that a few examples of empowering leadership are leading by example, participatory decision-making, mentoring, informing and expressing concern, and developing the subordinates' self-leadership skills. These indirectly can lead to favourable employee outcomes, such as increased performance and a high confidence level to convey the upward message to the attention of the managerial team. Employees are more likely to raise their issues with a person who has the authority to act if they want to propose improvements in the workplace. According to Liu et al. (2021), the primary focus of employee voice is the person's immediate supervisor. Empowering leadership has four components: (1) improving the purpose of work, (2) encouraging involvement in decision making, (3) expressing confidence in high performance, and (4) offering autonomy from bureaucratic limitations (Ahearne Mathieu Rapp, 2005).

A leader plays a major key factor in influencing the employee's work behaviour. It implies by providing understanding to the employee that their work is essential. They have a crucial role in the organisation's success and in raising employees' self-esteem and a sense of purpose in their job. On the other hand, empowered leaders promote employees' ability to do their responsibilities by successfully expressing confidence in an excellent performance. Employees' belief in their abilities rises as bosses give them more authority (Ahearne et al., 2005). They help leaders feel liberated from bureaucratic restraints by giving staff a sense of agency. Leaders who grasp more freedom to make decisions create a climate in which their people believe they can make a difference in their performance under any circumstance.

Leaders who embrace empowering leadership style play a significant role in influencing voice behaviour within their organisation. They are likely to actively direct their concern to a specific mark with the formal authority to act upon proposed changes (Amundsen & Martisen, 2014).

Also, there are suggestions for a positive proposition on empowering leadership with employee in-role and extra-role behaviours (Auh et al., 2014; Humborstad, Nerstad, & Dysvik, 2014; Jada & Mukhopadhyay, 2019; Kim & Ishikawa, 2021). Therefore, it is benign to hypothesise a positive relationship between empowering leadership and employee voice behaviour based on the argument. Thus, in a hypothetical statement, it is read as H1: Empowering leadership is positively related to voice behaviour.

2.2 Leader-member exchange and voice behaviour

The significantly used Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory by Graen and Uhl Bien (1995) focuses on the multispectrum association between the leader and the subordinate. Katz and Kahn (1978) suggest that interpersonal relationships are unavoidable in organisations whereby such relationship is essential to achieve goals, effectiveness, and coordination in the working environment (Ferris et al., 2009). Grounded on the dyadic social exchange, the eminence of the working relationship between leader and members is prognostic of the outcome in different levels of analysis (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Furthermore, as LMX is the relationship between leader and subordinate, each individual is expected to offer something valuable, and the exchange should be equitable to both. In the same vein, Xerri (2014) suggested that fundamentally Social Exchange Theory (SET) describe the interaction of leaders and subordinate and the reasons for differences in the influences of LMX quality on the individual outcome. Furthermore, SET propagate that high-quality LMX promotes higher performance and more extra-role behaviour (Hsiung, 2012; Martin et al., 2016). Such behaviour allows employees to pay back support and respect from their leaders (Carnevale, Huang, Crede, Harms, & Uhl-Bien, 2017; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

Voice behaviour is a voluntary communication of work-related ideas and concerns to promote positive change. Employees' expressions of concepts and relations to their direct supervisor can contest the status quo (Liu et al., 2021). For this reason, voice behaviour known has an inherent risk. Before an employee engages in a specific action, they mentally examine their work environment and evaluate the possible consequences. The behaviour of a person's immediate supervisor has a considerable impact on whether or not an employee will speak up when they have potentially vital information to convey (Carnevale et al., 2017; Morrison, 2014). LMX influences workers' sentiments of duty and reciprocity. Future research expects to uncover substantial connections between LMX and voice behaviour built on the theoretical underpinnings and empirical shreds of evidence for the linkage (Hsiung, 2012; Liu, Wang, Geng & Wang, 2021). Hypothesis 2, therefore, is understood as: There is a positive association between leader-member exchange and voice conduct.

2.3 Mediating effects of psychological safety

Clark (2020) gives a simplified expression of psychological safety as a state of feeling included, safe to learn, secure to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo without fear of being embarrassed, ostracised, or reprimanded. Kahn (1990) postulates that a higher level of psychological safety helps in improving employee engagement since they feel comfortable and no risk is detected. Furthermore, according to Schein, Bennis, and Blake's (1965) study on organisational change, psychological safety is an atmosphere where one may take risks while feeling secure and capable of adjusting to change. Psychological safety consistently plays an essential role in facilitating ideas and activities in an organisation, especially in team-level phenomena (Edmonson & Lei, 2014). In the healthcare setting, psychological safety promotes patient safety by allowing employees to partake in quality enhancement efforts and motivating them to report errors (O'Donovan; De Brun & McAuliffe, 2021). When team members proactively provide suggestions for organisational improvement, they consider the possible

consequences they might face. They often thought their offer might be judged or misinterpreted as those around them.

However, according to Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes and Wierba (1997), in some cases, an employee makes an incorrect evaluation of whether it is safe to speak up. Employees believe that speaking up is meaningless when safe and encouraged (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). According to Morrison (2014), managers' views and behaviours significantly influence employee involvement in voice behaviour or choose not to engage. If employees perceive a pleasant organisational climate, they are more likely to participate in voice behaviour. Additionally, the working environment is critical in contributing to employees' willingness to speak up about what they feel needs attention. For example, a leader who demonstrates openness and accessibility character would most likely aid in the development of the employees' psychological safety (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). It enables the leader to communicate with and listen to the employees' views and deliver positive comments to motivate them. Employees must also convince that speaking their opinions will not have a detrimental impact. According to research on organisational culture, effective cultural practices in the organisation stem from the regulations established and the excellent leadership displayed (Schein, 2010). Based on the previous studies, the leader-voice relationship mediated by psychological safety was significant (Liu, Song, Li, & Liao, 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Therefore, the following proposition is made H3: psychological safety positively intercedes the relationship between empowering leadership and voice behaviour.

LMX theory (Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995) proclaims that organisational leaders and their respective subordinates are tightly linked. According to Katz and Kahn (1978), connections inside organisations are inescapable and essential to meet their goals, be productive, and function in concert (Carnevale et al., 2017). The trust and freedom offered to employees in high LMX relationships make them more willing to share their ideas and put in the time and effort necessary to solve the business's challenges. The leader must create a secure atmosphere for employees to speak up about their mental state in terms of dyadic relationships. To the previous study, psychological safety dyadic relationships and teams lead to more outstanding voice behaviour and reduce silence among employees (Bienefeld & Grote, 2014; Brinsfield, 2013; Xue, Li, Liang &Li, 2020). Tynan (2005) discovered that employees with high psychological safety were more inclined to express disagreement, provide open criticism, and point out faults to their supervisors. Hypothesis 4, therefore, is understood as H4: psychological safety facilitates the relationship between leader-member exchange and voice behaviour.

2.4   The mediating effect of intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation is people's inherent importance in various activities that give novelty and challenge (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is a state of mental set in which an individual is interested in performing a task and purely engages in it for the sake of the job itself and the happiness attached to it (Conchie, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory indicates that autonomy, competence, and relatedness promote intrinsic motivation, enabling positive attitudes and well-being amongst employees (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation has emerged as a significant determinant in innovative work behaviour as a motivational concept.

Distributing authority to every member of the organisation, including them in decision-making, and demonstrating confidence in employees' capacity to undertake challenging tasks, is a strategic orientation of leaders in superior empowerment (Ahearne et al., 2005). Thus, from the theory, intrinsic motivation can be motivated by leaders who hold up on sharing power

behaviour. Specifically, empowering leadership facilitates followers' self-leadership with the entrustment of decision-making, information sharing, encouraging personal initiative, self-defined goal focus, and inspiring and inclusive autonomy support process. When employees are encouraged to autonomously self-manage their work and be accountable for work outcomes in their organisation, they are more likely to foster intrinsic motivation and favourable organisational citizenship behaviour. As a proactive and challenging behaviour, a culture that roots voice behaviour can offer opportunities for employees to demonstrate their abilities and generate novelty.

In addition, voice behaviour and other forms of constructive deviance exist within the intrinsic drive (Vadera, Pratt, & Mishra, 2013). Furthermore, empirical research shows that intrinsic motivation and voice behaviour correlates directly and indirectly (Conchie, 2013; Wu, Wu, Wen, Cai, & Li, 2019). Thus, the hypothesis statement is H5: Intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and voice behaviour.

Previous research has shown that LMX has a significant impact on several business outcomes (Erdogan & Liden, 2002; Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Studies on the mediating mechanism between LMX and employee voice have been few and far between (Wang, Gan, & Wu, 2016). Workers who are "firmly attached" feel compelled to reciprocate the kind treatment they received from the organisation, suggesting that the pleasant working environment has boosted their drive. The excellent quality of LMX makes it easier to realise voice behaviour since it is an extra-role behaviour (Song, Wu, Hao, Lu, Zhang, & Liu, 2017). Workers in high-quality LMX relationships have more access to knowledge and the backing of their leader, which encourages them to speak out about issues. As a result, the following hypothesis sounds relevant H6: intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between leader-member exchange and voice behaviour.

3. Methodology

Literature on employee voice behaviour, leadership, and psychological factors gathered to coin hypotheses and future research directions. The body of knowledge in this field is extensive, yet concepts are fragmented and still evolving. This paper offers a guide for future research, including quantitative and qualitative analyses, using quantifiable and unquantifiable methods in business and non-business situations. This study seeks to build on previous organisational behaviour research from empirical findings.

4. Conclusion

The research in voice behaviour has sought vigorous attention from the researchers. The previous literature proposes empowering leadership and LMX as the leading factors influencing employee voice behaviour. Meanwhile, psychological safety and intrinsic motivation are the mediating mechanisms for employee voice behaviour. Redundantly it is noticed that voice is frequently associated with its risks. It is more evident to a climate in the workplace that does not appear to be supportive or safe for employees to take the initiative. However, if the organisation overlooks the potential and efforts of its employees, it would stifle the organisation's growth and ultimately affect employees' well-being. The framework illustrated in Figure 1 summarises the hypotheses described earlier. It incorporates five primary variables. The framework is likely to induce scientific inquiry that helps to enrich the body of knowledge about employee voice behaviour from different organisational climates and cultures. Further exploration of formal and informal employee voice behaviours will be another

outstanding contribution to future studies. In short, the following are the proposed hypotheses for the model expressed in Figure 1:

H1: There is a positive relationship between empowering leadership and psychological safety.

H2: There is a positive relationship between empowering leadership and intrinsic motivation.

H3: Empowering leadership is positively related to voice behaviour.

H4: There is a positive relationship between leader-member exchange and psychological safety.

H5: There is a positive relationship between leader-member exchange and intrinsic motivation.

H6: There is a positive association between leader-member exchange and voice behaviour.

$H7_a$: Psychological safety positively intercedes the relationship between empowering leadership and voice behaviour.

$H7_b$: Psychological safety facilitates the relationship between leader-member exchange and voice behaviour.

$H8_a$: Intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between empowering leadership and voice behaviour

$H8_b$: Intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between a leader-member exchange and voice behaviour.
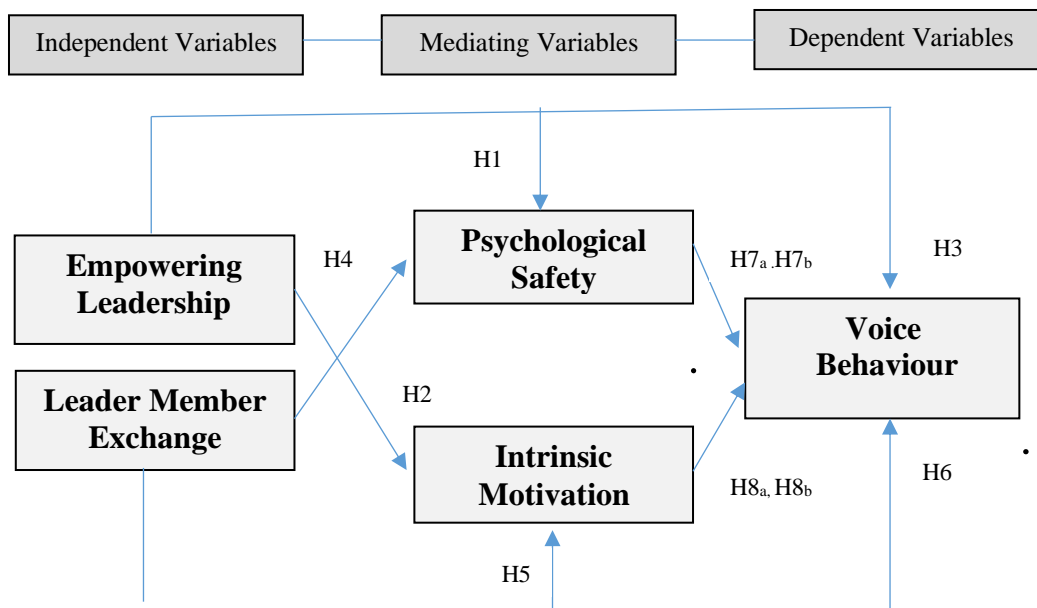

Figure 1: Framework for Scientific Inquiry

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