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## **Employee voice: bridging new terrains and disciplinary boundaries**

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### INTRODUCTION

Voice is a term that has been widely used in the practitioner and academic literature on human resource management (HRM), Organisational Behaviour (OB) and industrial relations in recent years. In their seminal work Freeman and Medoff (1984) associated voice with union monopoly representation and in particular with the role of unions articulating concerns on behalf of the collective. As such, union voice was viewed as an integral part of democratic representation in the workplace but which also could bring about benefits for employers. With the fall in union density and coverage, analysis of voice in workplaces has shifted to how workers communicate with managers and are able to express their concerns about their work situation without a union, and on the ways in which employees have a say over work tasks and organizational decision-making (Kochan et al 2019a). But researchers from different disciplinary perspectives often use voice in different ways. Some refer to involvement, others to participation, while yet others refer to empowerment or engagement as if they are interchangeable. As Kaufman (Chapter 2) makes clear, few appreciate the historical pedigree of employee voice, for instance the importance to which Karl Marx and Adam Smith attached interest in the ways and means through which labour expressed its voice. The deeper antecedents to voice have often been forgotten or eclipsed in a rush towards newer managerial fads, such as engagement or other equally abstract notions of labour offering discretionary effort.

This book presents analysis from various academic streams and disciplines that illuminate our understanding of employee voice from these different perspectives. The

following chapters show that research on employee voice has gone beyond union voice and non-union voice to build a wider and deeper knowledge base. As the introduction to the book, this chapter provides a guide to the debates about the different dimensions of employee voice and to the research findings in different areas. We review the meanings and purposes surrounding the definitions of voice; consider the role of key actors in the workplace; and evaluate the different forms and processes of voice in different spheres, contexts and organizational settings. We hope that the book will help the reader understand the debates associated with employee voice and appreciate the contribution of the different approaches to employee voice to help extend our understanding of what goes on in the workplaces that are at the heart of modern economies.

## DEFINING AND INTERPRETING EMPLOYEE VOICE

Because research and analysis have grown around the voice concept in a variety of disciplines, ‘employee voice’ has become an elastic term meaning different things to different policy, academic and practitioner actors (Poole, 1986; Sashkin, 1976; Strauss, 2006; Wilkinson et al., 2010; Budd et al., 2010, Kaufman 2015, Klaaas et al 2013, Wilkinson et al 2019). In the many disciplines that utilise the concept of voice, such as human resource management, political science, economics, organizational behaviour (OB), psychology or law, perspectives toward its interpretation differ. Scholars in one area often know little of the research or ideological approaches surrounding voice in other areas (Wilkinson and Fay, 2011).

At this point it is worth looking briefly at the two areas in which the issue of employee voice has found the most academic interest: organisational behaviour and employment relations. Morrison's (2011: 373) review of voice highlights three common threads running through the voice literature from an OB perspective on the subject:

*One important commonality is the idea of voice being an act of verbal expression, where a message is conveyed from a sender to a recipient. Second, voice is defined as discretionary behavior. Individuals choose whether or not to engage in this behavior at any particular moment in time, a choice that is affected by a variety of factors. A third commonality is the notion of voice being constructive in its intent. The objective is to bring about improvement and positive change, not simply to vent or complain.*

These assumptions about voice, considered from a managerial and OB-centric approach, focus on issues relating to individual and informal verbal communication that is constructive for management. Morrison explicitly rules out voice as a mechanism 'simply to vent or complain' and, therefore, excludes any conceptualisation of employee involvement and participation based on interests other than those of the employer. Thus, in excluding complaints, the OB perspective tends to leave out what many other perspectives (such as heterodox economics, sociology or IR) view as a key component of voice (Barry and Wilkinson 2015; Wilkinson and Barry 2016; Klaas et al 2012; Nechanska et al., 2019): the ability of workers to use voice to pursue their interests. The OB perspective looks at voice in terms of what motivates individual employees to speak up when they have opinions, concerns, ideas or suggestions rather than the power relationships within which such action is embedded. The predominant view of voice in OB is that it is a discretionary behaviour that is focussed on bringing about constructive change for the organisation or the work unit (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2014; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). In this stream of research, there is an underlying assumption that employees generally want to speak up, because there are issues that they care about, and that

management should value this voice because of its potential benefits for organizational performance and the potential risks of not addressing important issues or considering different viewpoints. The focus is on the micro-level factors that encourage or discourage voice, and voice is generally portrayed as an individual-level, discretionary, proactive behaviour (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998).

In contrast, the literature emerging from the employment relations approach, from which the editors of this volume all come, takes a significantly different approach to the extent that the terminology may be the same but, not only the theoretical lens but also the empirical phenomenon, is significantly different. While the OB perspective focuses on the individualised, informal and pro-social approaches, the employment relations approach is generally typified by a focus on formal structures for collective voice, where the interests of management and workers may be divergent. Take for example the work of Wilman and colleagues (2006) where they used the UK's Workplace Employment Relations Survey to map the current state of voice within the UK. Here, the presence or absence of at least one of seven particular mechanisms was seen as evidence of voice or alternatively silence. However, the extent to which these structures may have qualitatively delivered to workers effective voice does not form a central part of the analysis. Similarly, just because the structures are not present, does it follow that workers have no avenue to raise issues informally with management? Similar to the OB approach which finds its roots in individualised psychology, the employment relations approach to voice, with its roots in trade unionism and collective bargaining, is heavily shaped by this legacy. Take for example the phenomenon of "non-union employee representation schemes" which have attracted significant attention in the employment relations literature (Taras and Kaufman, 2006; Butler, 2009; Dundon and Gollan, 2007; Donaghey et al, 2012). The very label attached to such arrangements is based upon what they *are not*, rather than what they *actually do*. We believe it is demonstrative of the

employment relations approach where voice and representation are at times treated as synonymous. Marsden (2013:251) highlighted this and asserted that “the dichotomy between no voice and collective voice needs to be reviewed”.

In the first edition of this volume, as per the subject background of the editors, the content predominantly reflected industrial relations processes and outcomes of voice, drawing on distinctions of context, power and agency. However, to take account of a broader conceptualisation of voice, in this edition, we have sought to expand and include several chapters which reflect the OB approach (See Brinsfield and Edwards chapter 7, Gruman and Saks, chapter 23 and O’Shea and Murphy chapter 24) to ensure we incorporate this paradigm in the book. At the same time our book seeks to capture the wider disciplinary reach of voice which emanates from fields including into economics, sociology and law in addition to employment relations and organisational behaviour. An unfortunate by-product of the varied approaches has not just been a been a failure to accept and appreciate what other disciplines have to offer, or to consider other ways of understanding employee voice along with multiple contexts in which voice is managed but even to also engage actively across areas (Mowbray et al, 2015; Wilkinson et al, 2019).

All the perspectives require scrutiny. We note for example that economic perspectives often assume voice is about rational actors (employees, employers) making logical decisions in pursuit of a shared performance improvement goal (or economic rent exchange). Neo-classical economists have historically (and mistakenly) treated unions as a constraint disrupting a smooth and natural labour market (Minford, 1985). Of course such a perspective ignores the dynamics of power operating between the buyers and sellers of labour services, not to mention the role that collective voice structures play in redressing labour market inequalities, particularly trade unions but also other institutions such as civil society organisations and campaigning groups beyond the workplace setting (Piore and Safford, 2005; Heery et al, 2012;

Reinecke and Donaghey, 2015; Dundon et al, 2017). Legal scholars too often reduce worker voice debates to problems of statutory mandates or infringements on presupposed property rights enshrined in contract law. Importantly, workplace relations tend to dovetail simultaneously into economic, social and psychological paradigms, rendering the notion of a fixed legal contract little more than a figment in the minds of those concerned only with legal juridification (Kahn-Freund, 1977; Dundon and Gollan, 2007).

In addressing some of these single perspective limitations, the framework in Table 1.1 offers an inclusive structure to capture and assess multiple meanings of employee voice across disciplines. First, voice is an articulation of individual dissatisfaction or concern that aims to address a specific problem or issue with management. Voice may find expression in this way through a grievance procedure or speak-up programme. Second, and often at the same time as individual dissatisfaction, voice takes the form of collective organization, where it provides a countervailing source of power to management. Unionization and collective bargaining are exemplars of pluralist conceptualizations of collective worker voice (Turnbull, 2003). Table 1.1 also recognizes the role of voice as a contribution to management decision-making. Here the purpose is to gain employee input to improve work organization and efficiency more generally, perhaps through quality circles or team work, or by eliciting workforce engagement (Wilkinson et al., 2013). This perspective pervades much of the high performance work system (HPWS) literature, often premised on the view that what is good for the organization is good for the employee. In a similar vein, voice can be seen as an instrument for mutual gains, with productive collaboration between capital and labour increasing the long-term viability of an organization and economic well-being of employees (Kochan and Osterman, 1994; Kochan et al., 2019a). Examples of this notion are the US mutual gains idea, European systems of social dialogue and co-determination, and voluntary enterprise-level partnership agreements. A problem facing many organizations is that of reconciling traditional methods of providing a

voice for employees, such as collective bargaining and grievance procedures, with more consensual methods such as joint consultation, team working or problem-solving groups. The way employers deal with this issue reflects the purpose it sees in employee voice, which the extant literature has not explored in sufficient depth.

*Table 1.1 Multiple meanings of employee voice*

Voice as:	Purpose and articulation of voice	Mechanisms and practices for voice	Range of outcomes
Articulation of individual dissatisfaction	To rectify a problem with management or prevent deterioration in relations	Complaint to line manager  Grievance procedure	Exit–loyalty
Expression of collective organization	To provide a countervailing source of power to management	Union recognition  Collective bargaining  Industrial action	Partnership– Derecognition
Contribution to management decision-making	To seek improvements in work organization, quality and productivity	Upward problem-solving groups  Quality circles  Suggestion schemes  Attitude surveys  Self-managed teams	Identity and commitment– Disillusionment and apathy  Improved performance
Demonstration of mutuality and cooperative relations	To achieve long-term viability for organization and its employees	Partnership agreements.  Joint consultative committees  Works councils	Significant influence over management decisions– Marginalization and sweetheart deals

*Source:* Dundon et al., 2004: 1152

To attach a sufficiently wide but cogent meaning to the employee voice concept which covers the multiple situations in Table 1.1, we develop a broad and inclusive definition of employee voice as:

*“the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say, formally and/or informally, collectively and/or individually, potentially to influence organizational affairs relating to issues that affect their work, their interests, and the interests of managers and owners”.*

This definition combines a variety of voice mechanisms that analysts often group in separate boxes (for example, involvement or bargaining; formal or informal, union and non-union). It allows for employer implemented non-union employee representative (NER) systems as a collective form of voice, be it chosen to marginalize a union presence or to provide an alternative to union influence (Gall and Dundon, 2013) as well as union forms of voice. In general, employee voice is about how employees are able to have a say over work activities and decisions within the organizations in which they work, regardless of the institutional channel through which it operates – whether through individual communications, speak-up programmes, quality circles, team work, or collective negotiation (Freeman et al., 2007; Kochan et al. 2019a).

Utilising the above definition helps unpack the meaning to employee voice. Strauss (2006) argues that voice is a weaker concept than other related terms – such as participation – because voice does not denote influence or power-sharing and may thus be no more than ‘spitting in the wind’. But Strauss highlights a key element of voice as a defining concept. This is the act of trying to exert influence over management actions, even if desired worker outcomes are not achieved or realized. With these features in mind, the spotlight must also focus on

management in terms of what management seek from voice; how management facilitate and respond to worker voice; and the effects of worker voice on organisational decision-making. Central to this is that when workers voice, to what extent do management act? Harlos (2001) points out that some managements have ‘deaf-ear syndrome’, where worker exercise of voice becomes a process of little real impact as management pays little attention to resolving issues or changing action. This may be due to management feeling threatened or more fundamentally that what workers may seek is contrary to the interests of management and owners.

In terms of pursuing the interests of workers, diminishing union density in advanced economies has shifted the form of voice in most organizations and countries from collective and unionized channels of representation to direct and individualized mechanisms, some of which exist alongside unions as a dual method while others are exclusively non-union. The union-only form of voice has all but disappeared in countries where unions once dominated the space of representing worker concerns. In the 2000s, for example, only 5 per cent of British workplaces relied on union-only participation (Willman et al., 2009: 102) Similar trends are evident across much of the rest of Europe, America and Australia (Lewin, 2010; Gomez et al., 2010). In a world in which voice mechanisms go beyond the traditional union mechanism or in which union voice is understood as having a significantly different meaning, as in China (Chan, Chapter 30), there is need for more fine-grained and at times more qualitative analysis of how the different mechanisms actually function as well as looking for how those not provided with voice opportunities – e.g.. those in precarious and insure jobs or employees on the margins of the labour market - can make themselves heard (Gunawardana, 2014; Wilkinson et al, 2018). These dynamics create at least two voice gaps. The first is what is evident in much of the employment and industrial relations field For example, Freeman and Rogers (1999) measured how much voice workers indicated they “ought to have” on a variety of workplace issues, and how much influence respondents “actually had “on their jobs. They then derived a

“voice gap” estimate (see Kochan et al 2018). In addition to that gap, there is another gap : that between what people want to speak-up about, and what they actually speak-up about. In other words, the first gap is between ‘voice opportunity and influence’ and the second charts a gap between ‘silence and voice opportunity’. It is in this context of changing shapes and processes of work alongside changing forms of voice that this book is set.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

### **Theoretical Approaches to Voice**

The voice literature finds its roots in several theoretical and methodological paradigms. Part I (Perspectives and Theories of Voice) demonstrates the insight that we gain from complementary and competing approaches towards voice. Importantly, the idea of employees having a say and contributing to work decisions is not in itself new or novel. The recognition that workers tend to know better than managers how best to do a job or how to engage in customer relations existed long before the factory system and the Industrial Revolution. The history and trajectory of worker involvement in industry (voice) is comprehensively examined by Kaufman in Chapter 2, showing that early conceptualizations are central to contemporary developments in the employee voice space.

Allen (Chapter 3) points out that early human resource management (HRM) developments about voice tend to start with the work of Albert O. Hirschman. Hirschman’s (1970) classic study of how consumers in nationalized African Railways conceptualized ‘voice’ in the context of the ways in which organizations respond to decline in consumer

demand for their products. His definition of voice was ‘any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs’ (1970: 30). The point about voice is that its provision may secure general improvements. The absence of good exit options may force the discontented to take action within the organization, hence making voice more powerful (Dundon et al., 2004; Wilkinson et al., 2004). Freeman and Medoff (1984) developed the notion of employee voice in terms of industrial relations and human resource management. They argued that it made good sense for both employer and employee to have a voice mechanism. This had both a consensual and a conflictual potential. On the one hand, participation could lead to a beneficial impact on quality and productivity, whilst on the other it could deflect problems which otherwise might explode (Gollan and Wilkinson, 2007). Freeman and Medoff (1984) saw trade unions as the best agents to provide such voice as they were generally independent of the employer, which adds a degree of voice legitimacy. As Benson (2000: 453) notes, ‘for some commentators independent unions are the only source of genuine voice’.

The economics approach stemming from the work of Hirschman (1970) and Freeman and Medoff (1984) finds expression in transaction costs economics (TCE) (see Willman et al., Chapter 4). Here, voice is premised on an economic exchange that carries with it certain assumed costs and benefits. TCE assumes workers are like customers in a marketplace. If employees demand a voice and it is not heard, they exit the relationship. Likewise, managers (employers) may change preferences and opt for one particular voice arrangement over another, subject to cost implications. For example, managers may ‘make’ their own voice system (for example, non-union) rather than ‘buying’ an alternative from a contract supplier (for example, recognizing a trade union). In addition, a ‘hybrid’ dual union and non-union voice can emerge depending on the nature of the economic transaction, the type of workers, union power, management preference, or perception of risk. Using TCE to analyse voice trends, Gomez et al. (2010) show that some 30 to 40 per cent of organizations switched their voice regime

between 1980 and 1998, mostly toward non-union and dual hybrid variants over union-only channels of voice (see Willman et al., Chapter 4).

The political science literature, which often views voice in terms of rights, links voice to notions of industrial citizenship, legal protection or democratic humanism. The concept of industrial democracy, which draws from notions of industrial citizenship (cf. Webb and Webb, 1902), sees participation as a fundamental democratic right enabling workers to extend a degree of control over managerial decision-making in an organization (see Casey, Chapter 5). Some use the term organizational democracy (Harrison and Freeman, 2004) to describe a higher form of voice than individualistic channels of communication, and Patmore (Chapter 13) draws on human rights goals to contrast transnational laws for voice. This also brings in notions of free speech and human dignity (Budd, 2004). An important claim is that workplace democracy allows workers to develop skills and values that then have a role in broader society (see Patmore, Chapter 13).

Labour process theory (LPT – see Marks and Chillias, Chapter 6) offers another twist on the voice concept from a sociology of work approach.. LPT is less forgiving of the neutral nomenclature of the term ‘employee’ voice and instead prefers concepts of participation, representation and countervailing sources of power and collective worker mobilization against the inherent tensions of a capitalist economic system. Whereas other perspectives noted above have gravitated to Hirschman (1970) or Freeman and Medoff (1984) as initial anchor points against which to assess voice, at the heart of LPT is Braverman’s (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*. Ramsay’s (1977) ‘cycles of control’ thesis offers insights from this perspective. It views worker participation as a ruse employed by management threatened with union power to maintain its domination of workplaces – employee voice as a form of employer control, as it were. But, as Marks and Chillias observe, LPT has a more complex and nuanced analysis that considers the coexistence of consent and compliance as much as control.

Finally, there are analyses of voice rooted in work psychology and OB perspectives (see Brinsfield and Edwards , Chapter 7). Debates in this area connect voice practices with developments and outcomes such as employee engagement (see Gruman and Saks, Chapter 23), informal and individual appraisal (see O’Shea and Murphy, Chapter 24) or effects on individuals in their organisational setting (Klass, Chapter 31). Voice as engagement connects with better teamwork, individual job satisfaction or improved workforce commitment. The creation of semi-autonomous work groups gives workers a say in task allocation, scheduling, monitoring of attendance, flow and pace of production and even redesigning work roles and target setting, which raises questions about appraising and evaluating individual task performance (Wall and Martin, 1987; Morrison, 2011; Welbourne, 2011). These practices have a long pedigree in seeking to counter the degradation of work and employee alienation (Proctor and Mueller, 2000), with many schemes formed as part of a series of work psychology experiments in the 1960s and 1970s (for example, by the Tavistock Institute, QWL (quality of working life) programs in the USA and Sweden; see Berggren, 1993).

The above categorization of the diversity of analyses towards employee voice offers potential for greater theoretical specificity within the wide range of perspectives that shape understanding and can help identify conceptual overlap. An alternative way to view the different literatures is to relate them to a series of expected or indicative voice schemes that operate in practice. Table 1.2 presents such an analysis, tying each of the theoretical or disciplinary perspectives to the practices on which they largely focus, the preferred rationale for voice and desired form, all of which may be underpinned by an ideological or philosophical position shared by dominant actors or social groups concerned with employee voice.

*Table 1.2 Employee voice: theory, focus and philosophy*

<b>Theoretical strand</b>	<b>Indicative voice schemes</b>	<b>Voice rationale</b>	<b>Form of voice</b>	<b>Philosophy</b>
HRM / HPWS	Focus groups Open door policy	Organizational Performance	Individual	Managerial/unitarist: <i>Engender loyalty</i> <i>Enhance corporate performance</i>
Political science	Workers on boards Joint consultation	Citizenship	Representative	Legalistic: <i>Democracy</i> <i>Human rights-based</i>
TCE ( <i>economics</i> )	Dual (union and/or non-union) voice	Cost switching	Representative	Utilitarian: <i>Transaction efficacy</i>
LPT ( <i>sociology</i> )	Collective bargaining Works councils Partnership	Power and control	Collective	Pluralist-Radical: <i>Power-sharing</i> <i>Countervailing power</i>
OB ( <i>psychology</i> )	Teamworking Speak-up programmes	Job design improvements	Individuals and groups	Humanist/unitarist: <i>Engagement</i> <i>Commitment</i>

There is further scope for refinement and analysis regarding what any specific voice scheme or practice means to the actors involved, and whether various schemes can improve organizational effectiveness and employee well-being or allow workers to have a genuine say in organizational decisions. The way voice initiatives actually work may depend on whether participants perceive them as faddish or as being embedded within the organization (Cox et al., 2006). Clearly, forms of employee voice through participation can differ in regard to the scope of decisions, the amount of influence workers can exercise over management and the organizational level at which the decisions are made. Some forms are purposely designed to

give workers a voice but only a modest role in decision-making, while others are intended to give the workforce a more significant say in organizational governance.

### **Actors in Employee Voice**

Studies that examine the importance of voice outcomes and processes from the point of view of different actors include not only workers and employers but line managers, trade unions and other interest groups in society. This moves the voice literature from a simple worker–firm or labour–capital approach to incorporate a wider array of agents. The way actors interpret and affect voice – both as a process of engagement in the workplace and as an outcome of organizational performance – is important in shaping the psychological and economic well-being of employees and indeed the health of families as well as the quality of a country’s democratic process (Budd and Zagelmeyer, 2010). Thus the range of actors and their roles in affecting employee voice is of crucial importance, and several key groups can be observed as having a particular vested interest.

Most studies focus on managers as strategic policy actors operating within a framework of legislation or public policy prescriptions. This is important in the context of statutory regulation intent on extending employee voice (Hall and Purcell, 2012). In many European countries the state plays a much more active role on top of voluntary collective bargaining (Brewster et al, 2015). Thus, this role of public policy sets the framework for the level at which voice occurs and which actors are involved at the various levels. For example, to what extent do producer groups participate in national and transnational dialogue? Does organisational level voice take place through single or dual channels?

In terms of specific actors on whom there has been a focus in the voice research, first and foremost are employers (and managers) as a distinct group affecting voice processes and outcomes. However, as Kaufman (Chapter 2) points out, management as a distinct function is relatively new in modern business terms, emerging in the late 1800s and developing first in the USA around 1910 and shortly after in Britain, mostly in response to collective organization of labour. Until then management as a distinct discipline was mostly haphazard. Taylor's model of scientific management is even credited as promoting 'equal' voice between worker and manager (Kaufman, Chapter 2); albeit a somewhat twisted understanding of equality given Taylor's core separation between capital/management as those who conceive of the work to be done and labour (employees) as those who carry it out. The idea of voice in terms of the design of jobs or work task involvement was alien to early management theorists.

In addition to the emergence of organized labour pushing management to consider how best to give workers a voice, Holland (Chapter 8) explains a whole set of considerations shaping employer choice around voice. Economic competition and global patterns of restructuring – such as shifts into large-scale bureaucratic organizations at the turn of the twentieth century followed by decline in manufacturing to smaller, more flexible specialization and knowledge and service industries – all affect options for the form of voice that employers may find most appealing. Employers interested in paternalism, social welfare or HRM arrangements would tend to eschew the traditional collectivist adversarial model for direct communications of voice rather than negotiation and bargaining. However, as important as employers are in the voice debate, it is line managers who act as the agents of employers, and as Townsend and Mowbray (Chapter 9) remarks, line managers are the ones who may hear or not hear the employees' voices. Management and employers are far from homogeneous. While a chief executive or human resource function may give strategic direction, line managers form relationships at the workplace level that can frustrate, lubricate or bypass voice opportunities.

Trade unions have probably occupied the lion's share of interest around employee voice in the industrial relations literature. Kaine (Chapter 10) revisits Freeman and Medoff's contention that union voice is most effective given that unionization has all but collapsed in advanced countries (though it is developing from a government-dominated institution in China). Kaine argues that while union voice is often viewed in terms of the diminishing role of collective bargaining, this is only one form of union voice. The point is that unions have adapted and changed considerably. While some criticize Freeman and Medoff's view of collective union power as outdated or a narrow concept of union representation (Turnbull, 2003; Hirsch, 2004), forms of union voice have themselves changed (Heery, 2009; 2016), extending beyond the remit of collective bargaining to include articulation of worker concerns at multiple levels: individual, workplace, industry, national, transitional. Moreover, Kaine argues that what matters is what unions or workers qualitatively attain at a particular level and context. Therefore union voice is more nuanced, extends beyond pay and includes grievances, safety, training and workplace learning, among many other matters that have redefined the union voice agenda since Freeman and Medoff's contribution.

The decline of union voice in advanced countries raises a broad intellectual concern about how voice is affected in workplaces that do not have union recognition rights. Pohler et al and colleagues (Chapter 11) address a range of actor roles (unions, works councils, dispute resolution bodies) that can help fill the gap left by those missing employee voices.

In part because of union decline, and also as a result of employees lacking the opportunity for a formal agent to articulate their concerns, analysts have examined other societal agents who express voice for workers and marginalized groups. Piore and Safford (2006) argued that mission based organizations often substitute for unions in independent advocacy. Heery and Williams argue in this volume (Chapter 12) that Civil Society Organizations are based first and foremost on an 'expressive' purpose and identity – that is on celebrating factors such as age or

disability, sexual orientation or an ideological stance such as feminism. In contrast, trade unions have tended to portray a more ‘instrumental’ or ‘vested-interest’ logic toward benefits for members. However, CSOs are also highly diverse which reflects variations in how they support different employee concerns from beyond the workplace setting. Some are advocate bodies offering support and information, such as Citizen Advice agencies while other CSO seek to persuade corporations on areas of so-called “good practice” (e.g. Stonewall regarding equality and diversity policy), and a further category are seen as campaigning and social movement networks (e.g. living wage campaign groups) (Williams et al, 2011; Dundon et al, 2017). Yet despite the advocacy and voice provided, these organizations face both representation and legitimacy issues. In representative terms, they often lack democratic foundations and structures. Furthermore, they often seek solutions to issue-based agendas, rather than advocating specific occupational or sector/industry concerns of workers. There is a possibility of employer capture of initiatives, which may compromise the independence of representation for workers (Heery et al, 2012). Finally, there are issues that CSOs may crowd-out the space they seek to occupy when supporting employee voices, depending on the popularity of certain issues at a moment in time (Dundon et al, 2017).

### **Forms of Employee Voice**

Although in decline in most countries, union bargaining remains an important form of voice for millions of workers and employers around the world. Several chapters of the book re-evaluate unions as institutions of collective voice in a broader, more inclusive way than the labour relations literature has classically viewed them. In addition to collective bargaining (Doellgast and Benassi, Chapter 14) a range of voice forms includes such institutions as works councils (Nienhüser, Chapter 15) and joint consultative committees (Pyman, Chapter 16). In

contrast to collectivist forms there are individualized mechanisms such as individual and grievance voice discussed by Lewin (Chapter 17). O'Shea and Murphy (Chapter 24) complement the OB/organisational psychology paradigm on voice when examining the individual's willingness to express voice in both informal formal contexts, expressing voice in performance appraisal settings. Extending the performance debates about employee voice, Harley (Chapter 18) moves beyond the individual level to review bundles of HRM that make up High Performance Work Systems. The main aim of the HPWS approach to voice reflects management's desire to increase employee understanding and commitment and raise their contribution to the organization's bottom line. Thus, while some forms of voice in the HRM and HPWS space provide employees with new channels of communication and potential routes to influence issues of concern, facilitating employee voice does not involve any *de jure* sharing of authority or power. Moreover, in the absence of influence and power, any link between voice and the decision-making outcome is always tenuous at best. This is what Kaufman and Taras (2010) nicely suggest is 'voice without muscle'.

Practitioner research seems to indicate that employee voice is an important driver of engagement and the former is a necessary prerequisite (process) for the latter (outcome) (Macey and Schneider, 2008). But it has not been without criticism. As Luisa Kroll (2005) notes, when writing for *Forbes* and quoting Randall MacDonald of IBM: 'Soon we'll be talking about marrying all those employees to whom we're engaged.' Welbourne (2011) points out that the beauty of employee engagement is that it can be all things to all people and that most people think employee engagement sounds good. As she argues, employee engagement speaks to something most social scientists, employees and managers truly believe, and that is the fact that when employees go 'above and beyond' and are not robots just doing a simple, repetitive job, then organizations do better. Likewise, as Gruman and Saks (Chapter 23) point out, many of the best-known organizational disasters – the Columbia space shuttle tragedy or the BP

Deepwater drilling rig explosion – were connected to employee disengagement, situations when workers failed to report problems. Kenny, Wandekerckhove, and Irfan (chapter 25) look at whistleblowing and how whistleblowing is best conceived of as an escalating dynamic that can occur when voice mechanisms are not effective in bringing about change, or are unsafe for those who use them.

Other forms that are not as easily categorized as either collective or individual binaries but tend to dovetail with a more complex web of union and non-union, individual and collective or semi-collective group mechanisms include the likes of task involvement and teamworking (Proctor Benders and Ingvaldesen, Chapter 19), workplace partnership (Johnstone, Chapter 21), mutual gains voice (Avgar, Sekwao and Storm, Chapter 21), non-union employee representation (Dobbins and Dundon, Chapter 22), arrangements that seek to enhance employee engagement (Gruman and Saks, Chapter 23) and performance appraisal and voice (O’Shea and Murphy, Chapter 24).

It is important to note that the provision and practice of these different voice forms and mechanisms varies considerably across countries (Lansbury and Wailes, 2008). In European countries government policy and legislation provide for a statutory right to voice in certain areas and in both union and non-union establishments. But this is by no means typical. Other countries, including the USA and Australia, place much less emphasis on statutory provisions for employee voice with more emphasis on the freedom of managers and unions to establish their own preferred arrangements. In many organizations, the result is a mix of direct and indirect voice. It is also worth noting that depending on the societal regime within which employee voice is situated, the benefits tend to be seen from rather different perspectives. Thus, in liberal market economies, voice is seen in terms of contribution to profit and shareholder value at the organizational level and in customer service, and product quality and staff retention at the workplace level. Issues to do with worker commitment, job satisfaction and alignment

with organizational goals are often the proxies used to measure the success of employee voice schemes, but in themselves these may tell us little about the impact of particular schemes on the bottom line or the consolidation of management prerogative.

In coordinated market economies, the focus is longer term and more widely defined in terms of a range of stakeholder interests, including that of the government, employers, trade unions and workers. The focus is on peak level institutions and the role of state-government agencies. . In some of these situations the expectation is more likely to be of mutual gains, either at the level of the individual employing organization or more broadly in terms of citizenship and long-term social cohesion through complementary institutions (Wilkinson et al., 2010). Yet in other regulated regimes, as discussed by Chan in the context of China (Chapter 30), voice is less a process for workforce expression and representative dialogue, and can function more as a channel for macroeconomic management, affecting broader industrial strategy and labour market supply (rural to industrial-urban) migration. Moreover, as Budd and Zagelmeyer (2010) remind us, voice is not necessarily a private affair and it is not simply about improving economic performance of a firm but can shape wider socio-economic policy objectives.

### **Evaluating the Future of Employee Voice**

Most employees want the opportunity to have a say and to contribute to the work issues that matter to them (Bryson et al., 2006). There are a variety of practices that can be utilized to deal with this desire for voice. Evidence suggests that many of these practices reflect the history of an organization or workplace and consist of ad hoc adjustments to problems rather than a fine-tuned employee voice strategy, which can make employee voice fragile in terms of its structure and efficacy. There is, as Syed (Chapter 28) shows, need for a diversity voice agenda

given the many missing and neglected voices from parts of a labour force. The availability of social media, in turn, provides every worker with the opportunity to air his or her discontent, but potentially moves the discourse on workplace issues outside of the respective organization. Many groups of employees who do not use traditional voice opportunities or are not included in corporate employee surveys may not be included in management research either (Burns, Hyde, Killest, Poland, & Gray, 2014). For example, little is known on tendencies for voice and silence among employees with very little power (e.g., temporary workers, minority groups, working poor who might be too afraid to speak up) and those with comparably much power (e.g., experts who can change jobs easily and thus may not want the hassle of challenging inefficient or unethical circumstances). However, it might be that these employees have particularly valuable information (e.g., temps as they provide a view from ‘outside’, minority groups as they have diverse views, and experts due to their unique knowledge) or face challenges that require their involvement. There is also (see Thornthwaite et al., Chapter 29) need to supplement traditional voice practices such as face-to-face bargaining, consultation or involvement with social media and modern communication technology.

The operation of systems of voice and evaluation inevitably differs according to the power resources held by the respective actors within a firm, the size of the organization, and the constraints of particular legislative frameworks within a specific country (see Chan, Chapter 30) or across international borders (see González Menéndez and Martínez Lucio, Chapter 26). Small firms where family relations and close personal links exist between management and workers often override employment regulations and policies in determining channels of voice and their success or failure (Dundon and Wilkinson, 2018).

In some contexts, remaining silent can carry as much or more of a message than speaking out (see Brinsfield and Edwards, Chapter 7; Cullinane and Donaghey, Chapter 28). This is the ‘thunder in silence’ in the Chinese sage Lao-tzu’s philosophy about how to voice

discontent. But while ‘getting-back’ or protesting against employer actions by actively not offering ideas may carry the message of discontent, it does not offer the mechanism for finding solutions. Related debates include the idea of employee whistle-blowing as voice, especially given the growth in corporate and government scandals surrounding unethical business conduct – such as the information communicated by Edward Snowden concerning alleged unethical practices at the US National Security Agency (NSA) when he was working there as a contract employee. Therefore how voice is evaluated concerns not just the type of practices, its form and mechanism, or who the particular actors are. More important is the nature of the process, its intended purpose and meaning, and the ethical and moral fibre of those in positions of authority and the degree to which they are interested in power-sharing exercises that can effect change and enable a genuine say.

The role of the internet and its potential to “democratise” has certainly been an emerging feature within the field. Concerns about new technologies, including robotics and digital platforms, are reconfiguring work and management relationships with attendant implications for regulation, governance and voice (Thorntwaite et al, Chapter 29). The internet as a source for activism has been highlighted as having the potential to create solidarities (Greene et al, 2003; Fitzgerald et al, 2012; Frangi et al, 2019) but may also generate both counter mobilisation and reduce activity to “clicktivism” (Upchurch and Grassman, 2016). Voice arrangements across organisational boundaries and international borders are increasingly more complex and uneven, with calls for improved corporate governance given the power asymmetries in new sectors of employment activity, such as the gig-economy and globalised supply chain networks (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2014; Tassinari and Maccarone, 2019).

In Chapters 31 Klaas calls for greater focus and concern onto the effects of voice on both organisations and those who make them up. Interestingly, he puts forward an argument that a greater focus on the extent to which voice enables organisational level justice and balances the

interests of workers and employers as being a potential way of evaluating voice. While still focussed on the individual, such an approach may help to abate criticisms of the organisational behaviour approach as being overly focussed on “pro-social” voice (cf. Barry and Wilkinson, 2016). These matters are picked up in the final chapter when Kalfa and Budd (Chapter 29) considers a number of challenges: the conceptualization of voice, and in particular whether voice can have an intrinsic self-determination role or be expressive of aims and interests as outcomes. Future challenges include what happens when there is no voice (or voice is minimal): do employees suffer in silence or exit the relationship? Voice also has to be re-evaluated in relation to time and space so as to capture its relevance and substance in relation to different types of work, occupations and industries. Future issues in this regard include the changing role of government institutions and legislative regimes for voice, corporate governance and business ethics which affect both individual and collective rights for voice. Above all, the future of employee voice research is vibrant, challenging and intellectually stimulating with implications for policy, practice and theory.

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