

CHAPTER 1

EMPLOYEE VOICE: CHARTING NEW TERRAIN

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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) and industrial relations in recent years. Freeman and Medoff (1984) associated voice with union representation and in particular with the role of unions articulating concerns on behalf of the collective. As union density has fallen in recent years, analysis of voice in workplaces has often focused on how workers express their concerns about their work situation without a union and the ways employees have a say over work tasks and organizational decision-making. 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. Few appreciate the historical pedigree of employee voice, where Karl Marx and Adam Smith, among others, expressed interest in the ways and means in which labour expressed its voice (see Kaufman, Chapter 2).

This book presents analysis from various academic streams and disciplines that illuminate our understanding of employee voice from these different perspectives. Ensuing 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 organisational settings. Hopefully, 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 our understanding what goes in the workplaces that are 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 somewhat different things to different policy, academic and practitioner actors (Poole, 1986; Sashkin, 1976; Strauss, 2006; Wilkinson et al 2010; Budd et al., 2010). In the many disciplines that cover voice such as human resource management, political science, organisational behaviour, psychology, law, and industrial relations, perspectives toward the concept differ. Scholars in one area often know little of the research or connotations or ideological baggage surrounding voice in other areas (Wilkinson and Fay 2011). For instance, Morrison’s (2011) review of the Organizational Behaviour (OB) approach to voice highlights three common threads running through the voice literature that fits OB but gives little attention to the industrial relations perspective on voice:

“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 common factors are central to voice from a managerial or OB-centric approach which focuses on issues about verbal communication chosen by an individual which is constructive to management. Management introduces voice mechanisms in organizations on managements’ terms, setting the parameters of what is and is not permissible voice according to employer interests (Donaghey et al, 2011). 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 or the performance of the organisation. Thus in excluding complaints, it leaves out what many other perspectives view as a key component of voice.

The framework in Table 1 offers an inclusive structure to capture and assess multiple interests and meaning to employee voice across disciplines. Here, voice is an articulation of *individual dissatisfaction or concern* with 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. Further, and often at the same time as individual dissatisfaction, voice takes the form of *collective organisation*, where voice provides a countervailing source of power to management. Unionisation and collective bargaining are exemplars of pluralist conceptualisations of collective worker voice (Turnbull, 2000). Table 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 organisation and efficiency more generally, perhaps through quality circles or team work, or 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 organisation is good for the employee. In a similar vein, voice can be seen as an instrument for *mutual gain*, with productive collaboration between capital and labour increasing the long-term viability of an organisation and economic well-being of employees (Kochan and Osterman, 1994). Examples of this notion are: the US mutual gains idea, European systems of social dialogue and co-determination, or voluntary enterprise-level partnership agreements. A problem facing many organisations is to reconcile 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 its sees in employee voice, which the extant literature has not explored in sufficient depth.

Table 1: Multiple purpose and 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 organisation	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 organisation, 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 co-operative relations	To achieve long-term viability for organisation and its employees	Partnership agreements Joint consultative committees Works councils	Significant influence over management decisions - Marginalisation and sweetheart deals

Source: Dundon et al, 2004: 1152

To attach a sufficiently wide but cogent meaning to the employee voice concept that covers the situations in table 1, we define employee voice as *the ways and means through which*

employees attempt to have a say and potentially influence organisational affairs about issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners. This definition combines a variety of voice mechanisms that analysts often group in separate boxes (e.g. involvement or bargaining; 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 marginalise a union presence or to provide an alternative to union influence (Dundon, 2002; Kaufman and Taras 2010) as well as union forms of voice. In economies where trade union membership and bargaining coverage is low and falling, as well as in economies such as that of China where the government established unions as transmission belts for national economic policies, employers generally expect unions to be more in tune with business objectives and use their say to support corporate or national goals. Some independent trade unions engage in dialogue at an enterprise level even in the most management-led interpretations of partnership in the hope that this will benefit their members (Rittau and Dundon, 2010; Johnstone et al, 2010). 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 speak-up programmes, quality circles, team work, or collective negotiation (Marchington, 2008; Freeman *et al*, 2007) .

Utilising the above definition helps unpack the meaning to employee voice. Strauss (2006) argues 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 realised. In a similar vein Harlos (2001) points out 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.

In recent years, falling union density in advanced economies has shifted the form of voice in most organisations and countries from collective and unionised channels of representation to direct and individualised 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, there is need for more fine-grained and at times more qualitative analysis of how the different mechanisms actually function.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Theoretical approaches to voice

The voice literature finds its roots in several theoretical and methodological paradigms. Section 1 (*Perspectives and Theories of Voice*) demonstrates the insight that we gain from complementary and competing approaches towards voice. Allen (Chapter 3) highlights that much of the early Human Resource Management (HRM) literature on voice finds its starting point in Albert O. Hirschman's work. Hirschman's (1970) classic study of how consumers in nationalised African Railways conceptualized 'voice' in the context of the ways in which organizations respond to decline in consumer demand for their products. His definition 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 image. 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 High Performance Work System literature has generated different insights into the role of employee voice in Human Resource Management (see Harley, Chapter 6). HPWS theory argues that informing and allowing employees input into work and business decisions can help create better decisions and improve understanding (Boxall and Purcell, 2003). This links to analysis which treats voice as a key ingredient in the creation of organizational commitment (Lewin and Mitchell, 1992; Pfeffer, 1998). It also overlaps with the OB related

discussions concerning the idea of employee engagement as something distinct to voice (Emmott, 2005; Welbourne, 2011) and has implications for the management of employee voice in organizations. Among the implications are that hierarchy and compliant rule-following are inappropriate for employees who are expected to expend discretionary effort. As Strauss (2006:778) observes, giving workers voice “provides a win-win solution to a central organizational problem - how to satisfy workers’ needs while simultaneously achieving organizational objectives”. However, theory and practice can diverge (Harley et al. 2005).

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. Many such claims are predicated on a positivistic and arguably misplaced method of seeking to validate worker intentions and behaviours through coefficient scores that are detached from context and place. 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’.

The political science literature, which often views voice in terms of rights, links voice to notions of industrial citizenship, legal protections or democratic humanism. The concept of industrial democracy, which draws from notions of industrial citizenship, sees participation as a fundamental democratic right for workers to extend a degree of control over managerial decision-making in an organization (see Foley, Chapter 5). Some use the term organisational democracy (Harrison and Freeman, 2004) as a higher form of voice compared to individualistic channels of communication. This also brings in notions of free speech and human dignity (Budd, 2004). An important claim is that workplace democracy allows for workers to develop skills and values, which then have a role in broader society (Foley and Polyani, 2006).

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 similar to customers in a market place. 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 (e.g. non-union) rather than 'buy' an alternative from a contract supplier (e.g. recognising a trade union). In addition, 'hybrid' dual union and non-union voice can emerge depending on the nature of the economic transaction, type of workers, union power, management preference, perception of risk. Using TCE to analyse voice trends, Willman et al (2003) and Gomez et al (2010) show that some 30 to 40% of organisations 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).

Labour Process Theory (LPT -- see Marks and Challis,) offers another twist on the voice concept. 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 on which to assess voice, at the heart of LPT is Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*. Ramsay's (1977) 'cycles of control' thesis offers insights from this perspective. It views worker participation as a ruse 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 Challis () discuss, LPT has more complex and nuanced analysis that considers the coexistence of consent, compliance as much as control.

Finally, there are analyses of voice rooted in work psychology and OB perspectives (see Brinsfield,). Debates in this area connect voice practices with developments and outcomes such employee engagement (see Grunman and Saks,). 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 ideally produce better engagement (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 (e.g. Tavistock Institute, QWL programs in the USA and Sweden, Beggren, 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 2 presents such an analysis that ties 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 among dominant actors or social groups concerned with employee voice.

Table 2: Employee voice: theory, focus and philosophy

<i>Theoretical strand</i>	<i>Indicative Voice Schemes</i>	<i>Voice Rationale</i>	<i>Form of Voice</i>	<i>Philosophy</i>
HRM / HPWS	Focus Groups; Open door policy;	Performance	Individual	Managerial/Unitarist: - Engender loyalty - Enhance performance
Political Science	Workers on boards; Joint Consultation;	Citizenship	Representative	Legalistic: - Democracy and rights-based
TCE	Dual (union and/or non-union) voice	Cost switching	Representative	Utilitarian: - Transaction efficacy
LPT	Collective bargaining; Works Councils; Partnership;	Power & Control	Collective	Pluralist: - Power-sharing - Countervailing power
OB	Teamworking; Speak-up programmes;	Job design	Individuals and groups	Humanist/Unitarist: - Engagement; - Commitment;

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 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 vested 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.

Most studies on managers as strategic policy actors operating within a framework of legislation or public policy prescriptions. Management plays a key part in adapting and interpreting legislation, corporate initiatives, consultancy panaceas and benchmark schemes to the workplace. This is important in the context of statutory regulation intent on extending employee voice. In many European countries the state plays a much more active role on top of voluntary collective bargaining. The way actors interpret and affect voice - both as a process of engagement in the workplace and as an outcome of organisational 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.

First and foremost are employers (and managers) as a distinct group affecting voice processes and outcomes. However, as Kaufman () points out, management as a distinct function is relatively new in modern business terms, emerging in the late 1800s and developed first in the US around 1910 and shortly after in Britain, mostly in response to collective organisation of labour. Until then management as a distinct discipline was mostly haphazard. Taylor's model of scientific management is even accredited as promoting 'equal' voice between worker and manager (Kaufman,); albeit equal in a somewhat twisted understanding as Taylor's core separation between capital/management who conceive of the work to be done, and labour (employee) doing it. The idea of voice in terms of the design of jobs or work tasks involvement was alien to early management theorists.

In addition to the emergence of organised labour pushing management to consider how best to give workers a voice, Holland () 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 organisations at the turn of the century followed by decline in manufacturing to smaller flexible specialisation 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 collectivist traditional adversarial model for direct communications of voice rather than negotiation and bargaining. However, as important as employer are in the voice debate, it is line managers who act as the agents of employers, and as Townsend () remarks, line managers are ones who may heard 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 mangers form relationships at the workplace level that may frustrate, lubricate or by-pass voice opportunities.

Trade unions have probably occupied the lion's share of interest around employee voice in the industrial relation literature. Kaine () revisits Freeman and Medoff's contention that union voice is most effective given that unionisation 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 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 to beyond (Heery, 2009) 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 recognitions rights. Pohler and Luchakr (Chapter 12) address a range of actor roles (unions, works councils, dispute resolution bodies) that can help fill the gap for those missing employee voices.

In part because of union decline, and also due to employees lacking the opportunity for a formal agent to articulate their concerns, analysts have examined other societal agents who express voice for workers and marginalised groups. Piore and Safford (2006) argued that mission based organisations often substitute for unions in independent advocacy. Similarly,

Heery et al (2011) highlight the growth of social movement forms of employee representation and argue in this volume that CSOs are based first and foremost on an ‘expressive’ identity – that is celebrating identity such as age, disability, gay or feminism for instance. 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 variation towards voice and representation, generally falling into one of advocacy, identity and issue-based movements in terms of supply of voice. Yet, despite the advocacy provided, these organisations face both representation and legitimacy issues. In representative terms, such organisations often lack democratic foundations. Furthermore, they often seek solutions to issue-based agenda, rather than advocating specific occupational or sector/industry concerns of workers. Finally, there is a possibility of employer capture of initiatives that may compromise the independence of representation.

Forms of Employee Voice

Although in decline in most countries, union bargaining is 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 (Dollesgast and Benassi, Chapter 14) a range of forms includes such institutions as Works Council (Nieuhauser, Chapter 15); Joint Consultative Committees (Pyman, Chapter 16). In contrast to collectivist forms are individualised mechanism: Individual and Grievance Voice (Lewin, Chapter 17). Other forms that are not as easily divided between collective and 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 and Benders, Chapter 18); Workplace Partnership (Johnstone, Chapter 19), Mutual Gains Voice (Avgar and Owens, Chapter 20) and Non-Union Employee Representation (Dobbins and Dundon, Chapter 21).

The analysis in these contributions discusses the broader changes in voice form from a variety of perspectives. We also see the growth and importance of *informal voice* that is ad hoc or non-programmed interactions between managers and their staff which provide opportunities for information-passing, consultation and the seeking of ideas (Marchington and Suter, 2013). Strauss (1998: 15) specifically defines informal involvement as ‘the day-to-day relations between supervisors and subordinates in which the latter are allowed substantial

input into decisions...a process which allows workers to exert some influence over their work and the conditions under which they work.’

It is important to note that the provision and practice of these different voice forms and mechanisms varies considerably across countries (Lansbury & Wailes, 2008). In European countries government policy and legislation provides for a statutory right to voice in certain areas and among both union and non-union establishments. But this is by no means typical. Other countries, including the USA or Australia, have much less emphasis on statutory provisions for employee voice with more emphasis on the preferences of managers and unions to establish their own 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 the 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 bottom-line or the consolidation of management prerogative. In co-ordinated 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 institution representation. In 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 (Wilkinson et al., 2010). As Budd and Zazgelmeyer (2010) remind us, voice is not necessarily a private affair and it is not simply about improving economic performance.

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 to deal with this desire for voice. Evidence suggests that many of these practices reflect the history of an organization or workplace and *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 are, as Syed (Chapter 26) shows, need for a diversity voice agenda given the many missing and

neglected voices from parts of a labour force. There is also (see Barnes et al, Chapter 27) need to supplement traditional voice practices such as face-to-face bargaining, consultation or involvement with using social media and modern communication technology as a form of voice. Future generations of workers will almost certainly use new systems of voice and participation, possibly in ways that managers may find alien. As Pyman *et al* (2006) have argued, a critical issue will be the configuration of multiple channels of voice and engagement rather than any single method, which technology will play a role in shaping. They conclude that the interaction and co-existence of multiple channels of voice and plurality of arrangements are most effective and legitimate from an employee's perspective in achieving organizational outcomes. Similarly, Handel and Levine (2004, p.14) point out that bundles should be more effective than the simple sum of effects for the individual practices, and hence the existence of voice schemes may tell us little about the quality of the process (Wilkinson and Fay, 2011).

The operation of systems of voice and evaluation invariably differ according to the power resources held by the respective actors within a firm, the size of the organisation, and upon constraints of particular legislative framework within a country (see Gollan et al, Chapter 22) or across international borders (see González-Menéndez and Martínez-Lucio, Chapter 23). Small firms where family relations and close personal links between management and workers often override employment regulations and policies in determining channels of voice and their success or failure (see Sameer and Özbilgin, Chapter 25).

Many firms have invested in programs to increase employee involvement or engagement. Practitioner research seems to indicate that employee voice is an important driver of engagement and the former is a necessary pre-requisite (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 the beauty of employee engagement is that it can be everything to everybody and 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 (Welborne, 2011). Likewise, as Gruman and Saks (Chapter 28) point out, many of the well-known organisational disasters - Columbia space tragedy or BP Deepwater drilling rig explosion – were connected to employee disengagement when workers failed to report problems. Still,

some argue that when employees do not speak-up and instead remain silent, this can be a type of protest in the form of active employee silence. In some contexts remaining silent can carry as much or more of a message as speaking-up. (see Brinsfield, Chapter 8; Cullinane and Donaghey, Chapter 24). 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 while working at the US National Security Agency (NSA) 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 that can affect change and enable a genuine say. These matters are picked up in the final chapter when 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 it be expressive of aims and interest as outcomes. Further 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 meaning of purpose surrounding types of work, occupations, and industries to have relevance and substance. Future issues in this regard include the changing role of government institutions and legislative regime 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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