The Façade of Voice Opportunity and Intragroup Conflict

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Abstract

The positive consequences of offering employees opportunities to express their opinions about the matters, concerns, and decisions related to their roles have been largely recognized (Bellavance, Landry, & Schiehll, 2013). These include a sense of ownership, inclusion, fairness of decisions, respect, and increased decisions acceptance by employees. However, rarely do any write about the potential negative outcomes of such organizational policies, specifically if they are deceitfully implemented. This research argues that under conditions where managers disregard the appropriate benefits of such policies, but implement them anyway for an apparent semblance of employee-consideration or due to organizational policy directives, this may lead their employees to be distrustful of such actions and consequently of the managers who implement them. This perceived deception of managers will lead to negative effects of these opportunities where employees are given a chance to voice their opinions, rather than foster positive benefits they have been designed for. In this research we studied the negative effects of such dubious implementation of this useful managerial strategy among the employees and managers of selected industries. We developed a survey to gather data from 317 respondents. Our findings suggest that the perceived negative effects of such mock opportunities results in employees' increasingly lowered participative behaviour in such opportunities and increasingly higher conflict within organization.

Kesempatan Mengeluarkan Pendapat di Permukaan dan Konflik Intrakelompok

Abstrak

Dampak positif memberikan kesempatan kepada para pegawai untuk mengekspresikan pendapat mereka mengenai hal-hal, kepedulian, dan keputusan terkait peran mereka telah diketahui secara luas (Bellavance, Landry, & Schiehll, 2013). Dampak tersebut meliputi rasa kepemilikan, merasa diikutsertakan, keadilan dalam keputusan, rasa hormat, dan meningkatnya penerimaan keputusan oleh para pegawai. Namun, jarang ada tulisan yang mengenai adanya potensi dampak negatif dari kebijakan ini, terutama apabila kebijakan itu diimplementasikan secara tidak jujur. Penelitian ini memberikan argumen bahwa apabila ada keadaan dimana para manajer tidak mempedulikan keuntungan yang tepat dari kebijakan tetapi tetap mengimplementasikan kebijakan demi tetap menampilkannya di permukaan saja, hal ini dapat membuat para pegawai merasa tidak percaya akan kebijakan ini dan pada akhirnya berdampak pada para manajer yang mengimplementasikan kebijakan ini. Pandangan bahwa para manajer melakukan penipuan akan mengarah pada dampak-dampak negatif dari kebijakan ini ini dimana para pegawai diberikan kesempatan untuk menyuarakan pendapatnya, bukan hanya fokus pada hal-hal positif dan keuntungan yang dihasilkan dari kebijakan ini. Pada penelitian ini, kami mempelajari dampak-dampak negatif dari implementasi yang tidak jelas dari strategi manajerial ini di antara para pegawai dan manajer dari industri-industri tertentu. Kami mengembangkan suatu survei untuk mengumpulkan data dari 317 responden. Temuan kami menyarankan bahwa dampak negatif yang dirasakan dari kebijakan yang dipermainkan menyebabkan semakin menurunnya keinginan para pegawai untuk berpartisipasi dalam kebijakan itu dan semakin tinggi terjadinya konflik di dalam organisasi.

1. Introduction

According to Markey *et al.* (2001) one of the most effective management tools for employee inclusion is offering them the opportunity to participate in the decision making process or express their views regarding issues related to the work environment. The literature is laden with the positive effects on employees of such managerial actions (Druckman & Wagner, 2016; Larrick, 2016; Smith, Wallace, Vandenberg, & Mondore, 2016). These benefits include but are not limited to a sense of ownership, inclusion, fairness of decisions, respect, and increased decisions acceptance by employees. Conversely few studies have researched the possibility of negative effects of providing such opportunities might have on employees. Even though these negative effects might be considered uncommon, they do exist (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012), and an increasing number of authors are advocating that these negative effects should be empirically tested (de Vries, Jehn, & Terwel, 2012; Jehn, 1995), which will benefit the researchers and practitioners alike. This research aims to develop an understanding of conditions under which such an opportunity may fail and rebound.

This research argues that whether offering employees such opportunities may result in positive or negative consequences will, in effect, depend upon the perception of employees as whether their views will be considered by the managers. The point worth noting here is that it does not matter if the managers actually will or will not consider employees' opinions; what matters is how the employees perceive their managers' intention to be. This paper posits that if employees hold positive perceptions about their supervisors' intentions, then offering them an opportunity to speak their views and concerns about work related issues will result in positive benefits. On the other hand, if the employees perceive their managers to be potentially deceiving in their use of such opportunities, and that they have no intention to actually consider the employees' viewpoints but are using these tactics as a farce and a façade of democratic leadership (Sagie and Aycan, 2003), then it will backfire with negative consequences. We further argue here that as a result of this negative perception, employees will be less likely to participate when feedback opportunities are provided, which will further lead to increase in conflicts and opposing encounters among employees, as well as between employees and their managers. By doing this, our research will serve to demonstrate that by providing employees opportunities to voice their concerns about issues related to organizational work, it can have negative consequences associated with them if not exacted properly in a perceptive manner.

Eliciting Employees' Voice. The reasons for organizations to introduce the tool of eliciting employees' viewpoints are because this strategy is effective in increasing employee morale (Morrison, 2014), their inclusion in the decision process (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016), ownership (Harrison, Singh, & Frawley, 2016), and decision acceptance (Friedrich, Griffith, & Mumford, 2016). Because of these, positive outcome organizations may include this strategy as a matter of the policy, to be implemented mandatorily by its managers and its team leaders.

The main reason for managers (and organizations) to honestly consider employees' input in a decision making process and to honour their inputs increases employee engagement (Kahn, 1990) (Knoll & Redman, 2015). Furthermore, perceived supervisory support is a major predictor of whether employees are engaged (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). Psychological safety occurs when employees have the latitude to express themselves and employ the self without the fear of negative consequences within a congenial environment of openness and supportive- ness (Weiss, Kolbe, Grote, Spahn, & Grande, 2016). Keeping employees engaged, through offering them an opportunity to speak up, is gaining popularity in organizations worldwide because it leads to increased business results (Nair & Salleh, 2015). The positive emotional state that arises because of employee engagement is called job satisfaction (Rizwan, Zain-Ul-Aabdeen, Khan, Rehman, & Khan, 2016). Implicit in this concept is the notion of the perceived managerial and organizational support for the wellbeing of their employees.

However, at times managers who have no intention of regarding their employees input but still provide their employees such opportunities. Their reasons are twofold. Either the managers have to comply with this strategy as a policy matter, or they want to appear to be democratic in their decision making while fostering autocratic tendencies (Terzi, 2011). Thus, offering employees to speak up is likely to have a positive effect, and in turn they implement the organizational policy, whether these managers actually consider these viewpoints or not. But it works both ways: even if managers are not interested in these views and concerns, but the employees deem them to be, then these opportunities will have positive effects; on the other hand, they will yield negative effects if the employees perceive their managers to be not interested in what they have to say, even though they may be. So it all comes down to the employees' perception about their managers' intentions in offering such opportunities to them.

One of the potential negative consequences of this negative perception is the withholding of ideas that may be useful to the organization or its processes. If employees start engaging in such behaviour, then the organization cannot benefit from their experiences, insight, ideas, or suggestions which could help improve the performance of the organization or that of its teams.

Our first hypothesis **(H1)** is based on this point: *the more negatively the employees perceive their managers' intentions to truly consider their views (Pseudo Voice), the more likely they will withhold from participating in these opportunities (Voice Behaviour).* That is, increased perception of pseudo voice will be negatively related with participatory voice behaviour.

Another potential negative effect of employees' decreased participation in voicing their opinions is that their organizations will ultimately lose valuable feedback that can be obtained from individual's with diverse backgrounds and experiences (Avery, McKay, Wilson, Volpone, & Killham, 2011; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). An increasing number of organizational studies are suggesting that organizations can benefit by tapping into the diversity of its employees (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Venkataramani, Zhou, Wang, Liao, & Shi, 2016). Employees are encouraged to think about organizational problems from their unique perspectives, education, experiences, and knowledge, and to find unique solutions to these organizational problems based on their diverse backgrounds and life experiences. Expressing this diversity positively influences the performance of individual employees in their groups and consequently the performance of the groups themselves (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004).

Conversely if employees lack the motivation to express their views regarding organizational issues because of their negative perception about their managers' intentions in considering these views, then the organization will lose out on the diversity of its employees. This will consequently result in the rise of conflicts within groups. De Jong, Dirks, and Gillespie (2016) explain that one of the main reasons for organizations malfunction is the decreased performance of employees and the increased dissatisfaction due to conflicts within subgroups of the organization. These undesirable characteristics of organizational atmosphere, such as decreased interpersonal trust between employees and lack of organizational commitment, result in non-productive work behaviour (Dar, 2010). This will, in turn, evoke deviant and aggressive behaviour (Hendel, Fish, & Galon, 2005), thus further fuelling the intergroup conflict. Hence, our second hypothesis states **(H2):** increased negative perception of the employees about their managers' intentions to truly consider their viewpoints (Reduced Voice behaviour due to Pseudo Voice) will lead to increased conflicts within groups.

2. Methods

Procedure and Samples. The survey instrument for this study was developed from the measures of the study. Upon development, it was then evaluated by an expert panel of eminent academicians from the field of psychology, organizational behaviour, and management.

After the approval of the expert panel the survey instrument was presented for data collection, it was sent to individuals of selected industries from our database which comprises of the emails, addresses, and phone numbers of organizations in the selected industries. The survey instrument was sent to 2000 email addresses from which 317 people responded. The response rate was 15.85%, and the sample included 297 males (88%) and 20 females (12%). The average age of the sample was 34.7 years (range = 22 to 61, SD=7.01), average education in years 15.2 years (SD=2.15), and average experience was 6.27 (SD=4.79).

Measures. Voice Opportunity was measured by a three-item scale developed by Lam *et al.* (2002) with reliability reported α =0.87. Managerial Disregard was measured by a five-item reverse coded measure developed by de Vries *et al.* (2012) with α =0.94. Voice behaviour was assessed by a 7-item measure developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998). Lastly the level of intragroup conflict was evaluated by a six-item scale developed by Jehn (1995).

3. Results

A moderated mediation model is used to test the hypotheses of this study. The relationship between voice opportunity (VO) and voice behaviour (VB) is being moderated by managerial disregards (MD). The interaction term between VO and MD is termed as pseudo voice (PV). The model further evaluates the mediating effects of VB between the relationship PV (VOxMD) and intragroup conflict.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics shows that the α coefficients for all the variables are above the acceptable level of 0.7. Both education and experience in years are used as control variables for the study as both display significant positive correlations with VB (r = 0.244, P<0.01; r = 0.119, P<0.05).

Hierarchical regressions were performed to test the relationship of the study in Table 2: Hierarchical regressions. Three models have been developed here. In these models the moderation effects of MD are tested on the relationship of VO and VB. In the first step of the model 1 direct relationships between the variables were tested resulting in significant beta values for both control and independent variables. In the second step of model 1 the interaction term Pseudo voice (VO x MD) was regressed with VB. Results show a significant negative relationship between PV and VB (β =-0.17, P = 0.01) hence providing evidence for acceptance of H1 (Figure 1).

In model 2 we evaluated the effects of VB on IC as whether the decrease in voice behaviour due to VO would lead to increased IC (Figure 2). Similar to model 1 in the first step the control variable, VO, MD, education

Table 1. **Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Education (in years)	15.20	2.15						
Experience (in years)	6.27	4.79	-0.137					
Voice opportunity	4.90	0.97	0.241**	0.031	(0.85)			
Managerial disregard	1.99	0.73	0.036	0.049	-0.413**	(0.91)		
Voice behavior	4.57	0.97	0.244**	0.119*	0.349**	-0.181*	(0.941)	
Intragroup conflict	2.38	0.85	-0.060	0.051	-0.349**	0.263**	-0.382**	(0.89)

Values in () show α coefficients
N = 317, * P<0.05; ** P<0.01

Table 2. **Hierarchical Regressions**

	Model 1 DV= VB		Model 2 DV= IC		Model 3 DV= IC
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1
Education level	0.18**		0.06		0.014
Organizational tenure	0.017**		0.008		0.018
Voice opportunity	0.31**		-0.23**		-0.28**
Managerial disregard	-0.28**		0.17*		0.19*
Pseudo voice (VO x MD)		-0.17**			
Voice behavior				-0.32**	
R^2	0.26**		0.25**		0.14**
ΔR^2		0.037*		0.063**	0.093**

N = 317, * P<0.05; ** P<0.01
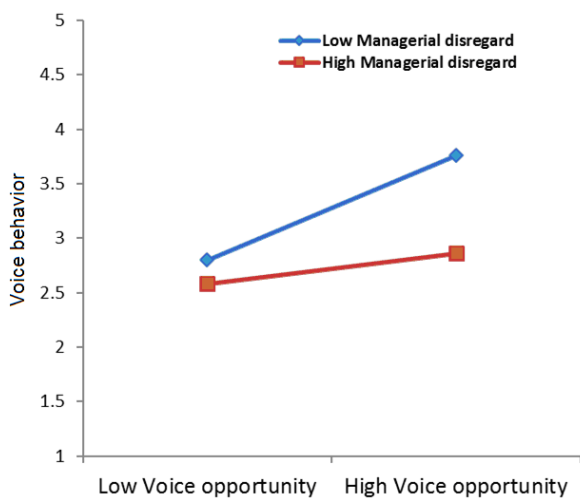Unstandardized β values are reported

Figure 1. Plot of Interaction Moderation for Model 1

and experience in years were regressed with IC. In step 2 the control variables and independent variable VB were regressed with a dependent variable IC resulting in a high significant negative relationship between VB and

IC (β =-0.32, P = 0.01) hence confirming our second hypothesis H2.

Lastly, the mediation analysis was conducted to evaluate the mediating effects of VB in the relationship between VO and IC. Model 3 was developed to assess the direct relationship between VO and IC. MD, education, and experience in years were the control variables, while VB was excluded to assess its medication effects. The results show a significant negative relationship between VO and IC (β =-0.28, P = 0.01), which implies that the decrease in VO would lead to an increase in IC. As mediation is a multi-step process in the first step, we established a significant negative relationship between the independent (VO) and dependent variable (IC). In the next step a significant relationship was also needed to be established between the independent variable (VO) and a mediating variable (VB). A significant positive effect has been established in model 1 with β = 0.31 and P = 0.01. Furthermore, a significant relationship is also required between the mediator (VB) and the dependent variable (IC), which was established in model 2 (β = 0.32, P = 0.01). Finally, the impact of the independent variable VO on the independent variable IC is diminished

or reduced when taking in consideration the effect of the mediator VB. For this study, this diminishing effect is evident from Sobel z = -2.77, p = 0.013 as well as from the reduced yet significant values of β = -0.23, P = 0.01.

Finally, the conditional indirect effect(s) of X (VO) on Y (IC) at values of the moderator (MD) through the SPSS process template developed by Hayes (2012) was assessed. Results show three levels of conditional indirect effects of voice opportunity on intragroup conflict with the mediating effects of VB at mean value of 4.90, one SD above mean 5.87 and one SD below mean 3.93. The effects were significant at P=0.05 at all three levels of means. From the analysis it is concluded that employees who have more opportunities to raise their voice and think that their suggestions are being regarded would show more VB which in turn would decrease IC. On the contrary if the employees think that if their opinions are disregarded would show more IC when the relation is mediated by VB.

4. Discussion

Managerial decision making essentially entails a deciding about work related issues and tasks. This is realized by managers in usually two styles of leadership: autocratic, where managers make decisions in an autonomous manner; or democratic, where managers seek input from their employees through consultation before making their decision. Managers are often encouraged to adopt the latter approach because of a number of benefits, such as higher morale and performance of employees and their increased decision acceptance, are associated with the consultative approach (Kennedy, 2015; Plunkett, 2004). Although the positive effects of soliciting with employees and encouraging their participation in the decision making process by providing them with a platform for voicing their views and gathering input are considerably researched through different studies, there is still a dearth of research on the potential negative benefits that may be associated with providing them with such opportunities to express their viewpoints.

This study contributes to the extant literature by researching these negative effects. Specifically, it illustrates that if employees are distrustful of their managers' intentions to fairly consider their input, then they will withhold from partaking in such occurrences. This reduced participative behaviour will in turn lead to the increase in intragroup conflict. While a number of qualitative studies have conjectured the negative effects of such managerial disregards (Sagie & Aycan, 2003; Torka, Van Woerkom, & Looise, 2008), this study is among the first to have qualitatively demonstrated the cause and effect of such behavioural withdrawal of employees (due to their perceived malicious managerial intentions) on the rise in conflicts within groups.

Hence, our work makes considerable contributions to both literature and managerial practice. The first of these is providing unique insight to researchers and practitioners by illustrating the relationship of decreased participative behaviour of employees due to their perceived managerial disregards of their viewpoints. Although the studies of Lam *et al.* (2002) and LePine and Van Dyne (1998) have elaborated a number of causes that influence the participation of employees on such occasions, this negative relationship was not considered.

Our research further contributes to work on conflicts within groups by demonstrating that withdrawn behaviour of employees can be one of the predictors of rise in intra-organizational conflicts. The works of Jehn and Mannix (2001) and Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999) as well as the literature on conflict within organizational groups put forth the number of determinants of such conflicts, for example group diversity, its atmosphere, and its values. But still the employee withdrawal factor, due to the perceived managerial disregard of their opinions, has not been researched as a possible predictor of intra-organizational conflicts. Furthermore, the findings of this research agree with Bryson, Charlwood, and Forth's (2006) work on managerial responsiveness and increase in employee productivity. That is, organizational policies should focus on increasing their managers' responsiveness towards their employees through soliciting their input regarding work related issues and then actually considering that input; this should, in turn, increase their productivity, motivational involvement, and lead to reduced organizational conflicts.

The findings of this work could be beneficial for practitioners as well. Not only does it reinforce the positive implications of allowing employees to speak up, but it also gives insight into conditions under which such constructive actions could backfire yielding negative consequences instead of the intended positive ones. If decision makers are perceived to be faking interest and to consider employees' viewpoints as pretence only, then such opportunities of allowing employees to speak up will backfire, along with afflicting the workgroups with its negative consequences.

Keeping in view that the desirable practice of allowing employees the opportunities to voice their concerns may backfire only because of their perception about managerial disregard, even though the managers may have sincere intentions, hence there may be a disconnection between the perceived and actual intentions of managers. Endreß (2016) and De Vries *et al.* (2012) also highlight this disconnection whereby employees perception may not be an accurate acumen of managerial intentions. Therefore, to counter this effect, we also surveyed managers thus allowing for a more accurate assessment of employee perception of and their managers actual intentions. What we found was

surprising. Our findings suggest that managers we studied were even shrewder, less likely to consider their employees viewpoints, and more frequently deceived their subordinates than the employees initially discerned. This further indicates that due to the deficit in perception, managers have some leeway of deceiving their employees.

If the management can keep up the façade of inconspicuously granting their employees some sort of influence, through offering them opportunities to provide their input but without actually considering them, then it can elicit the positive effects of this strategy. Managers in organizations, being human beings, may comprise of people who are characterized by dark personality traits, having malevolent qualities, and manipulative behavioural characteristics. These personality types include narcissists, psychopaths, and Machiavellians (Amernic & Craig, 2010). Such managers lack conscience, commitment to subordinates, and empathy. At the same time they have inflated sense of self importance, have strong need to be followed, are manipulative, and exploit subordinates to get what they want. These managers pretend to be interested in their subordinates' opinions and only use democratic tactics to deceive their employees into thinking that their opinions matter, while in actuality they disregard their employees' inputs. Thus, the tactics of offering employees the opportunities to speak up while disregarding what they say can become a useful tool for Machiavellian, psychopathic, and narcissistic managers to impose their views while maintaining the façade of democratic management.

But still, even though managers engage in this unscrupulous practice and potentially benefit from the positive outcomes of unethical tactics, their success will be impermanent. Sooner or later the employees will start to see through the recurrent use of this dishonest strategy. Then not only will the managers stop benefiting from the usefulness of it, but in fact the corresponding negative feelings will render potentially irreparable damage to the organization itself through manifesting into intra-organizational conflicts.

The other side of the picture is that the employees may be wrong in discerning their managers' intentions negatively. That is they may perceive their managers intentions to be unscrupulous, while the managers in actuality are willing to fairly work on their inputs. This finding of our study has further implications for the organizational practice of soliciting employees' input through offering them the occasions to speak up. It is not enough for managers to just construct such occasions whereby they gather employees' input, work on them, and may or may not implement them on merit. Subordinates may still carry negative perceptions of their managers' intentions if they are not aware of the transparency of the decisions made. To counter such potential negative perceptions from fostering due to lack of transparency

in the decision-making process, whereby employees are unaware of whether their input was considered or not, we propose that managers should provide constructive feedback to their subordinates on how their input has been used and explain the decision made in light of why their input was accepted or rejected. Providing such feedback will ensure the employees that their input has been actually considered and contributed to the decision made, or otherwise, on merit. Unless managers are able to convince their subordinates on the transparency of this practice of offering them voice opportunities, it may well blow up in their faces. Hence, organizations should take their policy implementation a step further by incorporating the feedbacks on inputs gathered as part of the broader mandate of this strategy.

Conclusively, we would like to reiterate the point that the successful implementation of this strategy will yield positive results for the organization. By offering employees the opportunity to provide input in the decision making as well as allowing them to voice their concerns, while simultaneously influencing their perception towards the positive through convincing them of the transparency of the process, organizations can create positive feelings in them as well as increasing their individual and collective functionality, thus benefiting the organization as a whole. Therefore, we advise for democratic leadership and decision making within organizations. In the same breath we warn against autocratic tactics veiled through the façade of democratic workings.

This research is among the first of its kind to have researched the potential negative effects of democratic organizational strategy of offering employees a platform for voicing their concerns and suggestions. We have shown through empirical methods how negative perceptions, merited or not, about managerial intentions in offering such opportunities to the employees can lead to damaging outcomes. We have established and tested some assumptions between the negative perceptions of managerial intentions and the increase in intragroup conflicts within organizations. We have argued that the associated negative effects of this strategy include feelings of deceit, betrayal, unfairness, and anger which lead to decreased participative behaviour of employees when such opportunities are offered to them. This withdrawn behaviour in turn fuels negative organizational atmosphere and increases intra-organizational conflicts.

For further research, it would be interesting to see how the different political systems and cultural values may affect these findings differently. For example, a comparative study on perceived negative perceptions of offering voice opportunities between democratic versus autocratic or communist countries would yield interesting insights and can further expand the implications of such democratic strategies in differing political contexts. Similarly, studying this concept in predominantly high power distance cultures

versus low power distance cultures could provide useful and different uses of these democratic organizational tactics suggesting different outcomes and uses in different cultural contexts.

5. Conclusion

Literature on offering employees voice opportunities predominantly consists of studies on the positive effects of this strategy. There are minimal or no studies which have researched the negative effects of these tactics resulting from the negative perceptions of employees about their organizations managerial intentions. This research demonstrates that the potential negative effects of voice opportunities actually do exist and can do organizations more irreparable harm than good if not implemented carefully. The pretence of managers of valuing employees' input could lead to negative perceptions which could lead to employees' withdrawal behaviour, thus resulting in intra-organizational conflicts. On the other hand, if managers are sincere in their implementation of voice opportunities and can convince the employees of the transparency of the process, then such actions could do wonders for the organizational wellbeing.

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