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Employee Voice, Psychologisation and HRM

Michael Barry and Adrian Wilkinson

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Abstract

The "psychologisation" of the human resource management (HRM) and industrial relations (IR) has been a major topic of conversation in management journals, not least in HRMJ (Farndale et al., 2020). We contribute to this debate by focusing on employee voice as an important topic of scholarship, and by explaining how this topic has been psychologised over time. First, we review organisational behaviour (OB) voice literature from the 1980s onwards to show how OB voice has itself shifted, and narrowed, over time, making OB voice a more static phenomenon, and one that marginalises other perspectives and stakeholders. In our review we distinguish between what we call the "old" and "new" OB voice scholarship, the latter occurring from the mid-1990s onwards. We then review all voice publications across four major HR journals from 2000 onwards, to show how OB's psychologised conception of voice has influenced HR voice, and the implications of this for HRM.

Introduction

The provocation by John Godard (2014) argued that HRM "appears to have increasingly been taken over by industrial and organisational (I-O) psychology, and in the process increasingly associated with organisational behaviour, which has also been taken over by I-O psychology. Coupled with the narrowing and marginalisation of IR, this has meant an increasing 'psychologisation' not only of the study of HRM, but of the study of employment relations in general" (p. 1) (see also Godard, 2020).

We agree that OB has psychologised the study of voice as is evident in our analysis of voice publications across the major HR journals since 2000. Our analysis also reveals, contrary to Godard's assessment, a continuing strong influence of IR research in at least some of the major HR journals, producing two distinct effects; one a psychologisation of HR research on voice, and two, a greater polarisation of voice research between OB and IR.

To this point the psychologisation debate has taken place at the discipline level with contributors seeking to defend either an IR or OB perspective. (e.g. Troth & Guest, 2019; Budd, 2020; Kaufman, 2020). However, this level of debate is liable to generate heat not light; and gets bogged down in grand generalisation across disciplines. While seeking to defend OB against Godard's provocation, Troth and Guest (2019) nevertheless "acknowledge that *some* criticisms have validity with respect to some psychological HRM research. The danger [they argue] lies in general statements about all W/O psychological research" (p. 36). Boxall (2021) concurs that criticism of 'psychologisation', while partly hitting the mark, is over-generalised (p. 7).

We agree that a more specific focus is needed in order to have a meaningful debate. Employee voice is a suitable topic as it has featured prominently in the psychologisation debate to date. For example, Godard (2014, p. 8-9) specifically comments on Morrison's seminal (2011) voice paper in *The Academy of Management Annals* that purports to be an integrative review, but actually takes a purely OB perspective. He comments that: "First, one is struck by the number of variables identified, the arrows and boxes connecting them, and the lack of any effort to arrive at any deeper explanation for voice. Second, there is no identification of trade unions as a source of voice; indeed, the concept of voice in the figure appears to be entirely an individualistic one. Third, the sole motive identified for voice is 'to help the organization or work unit'… Apparently, neither interest conflicts nor injustice matter. This is only one illustration, but for anyone with an IR background it has to be an astonishing one, especially given that the topic is one that has long been central to IR as a field yet is now being psychologised". The topic of voice also features in the Troth and Guest (2019) rebuttal of the psychologisation claim where they give examples of authors who criticise W/O psychologists in HRM for adopting a *unitarist approach*, including the Barry and Wilkinson (2016) claim that the "OB conception of voice is narrow because OB researchers view employee behaviour from a unitarist lens in which what is good for the firm must be good for the worker" (p. 263).

Suffice to say there has been a huge growth in research on employee voice within HRM, IR and OB. However, these disciplines diverge significantly in how they conceptualise and study voice, and, as authors from different disciplines note, the research on voice remains largely within self-contained siloes (Kaufman, 2015; Pohler & Luchak, 2014; Knoll et al., 2016) (see Table 1). A lack of integration impedes progress toward a more comprehensive understanding of employee voice, and an appreciation of its different purposes, dimensions and manifestations (Wilkinson, Barry, & Morrison, 2020).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In this paper we trace the evolution of voice research, beginning in the 1970s and 80s when Hirschman's (1970) model of voice, exit and loyalty was commonly adopted across management disciplines, and there was a fair degree of commonality between the research agendas of IR, HRM and OB in regard to employee voice. Hirschman (1970) famously saw voice as a means to "escape an objectionable state of affairs" (p. 30), leading researchers from distinct disciplines at that time to agree that voice was as a means by which employees would remedy dissatisfaction. However, OB researchers began to substantially re-define voice from the 1990s as having the following key features: it was a discretionary behaviour of "generally satisfied individuals", seeking to speak up informally, in a constructive manner, to support organisational functioning (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 109; see also Van Dyne et al., 1995). With a focus on employees, including managers, rather than workers (as is more common in IR), this also tilted the focus of OB researchers away from voice being an expression of workers' interests as separate from management. The degree to which OB had moved voice down a different path became apparent when a leading OB voice scholar ruled out personal complaining as not being consistent with the (OB) voice construct (Morrison, 2014, p. 180).

OB voice scholarship has largely settled around the definition of voice behaviour provided by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) above, and that of Morrison (2014), as: *"discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organisational or unit functioning*" (p. 375). This has drawn criticism from non-OB researchers who argue that OB is preoccupied with the individual, informal and relational aspects of voice (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016), and that it lacks consideration of macro factors that impact voice, such as product and labour markets and legal regulations (Kaufman, 2015; Gilman et al., 2015; Ravenswood & Markey, 2017; Hickland et al., 2020). In saying this we do note that OB voice studies are predominantly, not exclusively, micro-oriented, and we acknowledge the sub-stream of OB organisational justice literature in this regard (e.g. Klaas et al., 2012). Critics of micro-focused OB voice research assert that it fails to appreciate fundamental power imbalances in employment relationships which often mean that employees lack capacity to voice when they might otherwise choose to do so (Allen, 2014; Dundon et al., 2004; Kaufman, 2015; Donaghey et al., 2011; Kaine, 2012, Kochan et al., 2019; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2018; Wilkinson, Donaghey, Dundon, & Freeman, 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2021). The very notion of having a choice to voice or remain silent, which is deeply ingrained in OB voice research, is highly contested in other areas of the social sciences occupied with work, most notably in IR and labour process research (Barry et al.,

2018; Nechanska et al., 2020). The growing and widespread acceptance within OB that voice is a pro-social behaviour has, we argue, contributed to two major developments that we explore in this paper. First, it has decisively moved OB away from its own prior voice scholarship that saw voice primarily as a remedy to dissatisfaction rather than a contribution to improved organisational functioning. Second, it has placed other streams of voice research – such as IR, HRM, and even the smaller OB organisational justice literature, with their respective foci of unions and institutional voice, grievance filing and due process, and correction of organisational wrongdoing – farther from what we argue is now the mainstream OB position.

In this paper we review all voice publications across the major HR journals in the last 20 years to justify this claim, and from there we make observations about the implications of the psychologisation of employee voice. From our review we make two main observations, first in noting there have been recent calls for greater integration of voice between disciplines – a point IR, HR and OB researchers appear to agree on (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 2020; Brinsfield, 2014) – and in this regard we argue that OB could learn as much from its own prior literature as from looking at voice scholarship in other disciplines. Second, judging by the extent to which voice publications in HR journals can been seen to have been influenced by the current, narrow, OB voice conception, we argue that the HR field is at risk of becoming dominated by the view that voice is about pro-social speaking up for the benefit of the organisation, rather than for employee's own interests, or to express dissatisfaction with current conditions.

The paper is organised as follows. We begin by setting out how we approached the research task, including how we categorised papers published in the major HR journals to view the question of psychologisation, and set out the results in two tables. Following on from that we consider the contribution of the OB voice research of the 1980s and early 1990s, to show that voice research was once relatively unified across the IR, HR and OB disciplines, before contrasting that with the OB research program that followed. In doing so we highlight Van Dyne and LePine's mid-to-late 1990s' work where they specifically define voice as promotive behaviour that emphasises expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize. Here, these authors de-legitimize the role of critical voice which, as seen in IR and HR research, has a role to play in its own right in promoting industrial democracy, and in partnership and consultation (Budd, 2004). Such promotive behaviours typically included making innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 109). We take

the work of these authors as the point of departure from what we call the "old" to the "new" OB voice research because it has been by far the most influential (and highly cited) work in developing a new conception of voice for OB. Before concluding we consider the implications of the psychologisation of voice research for the HR discipline.

Methodology

The purpose of our data collection is to show developments in the pattern of voice papers published in HR journals. We searched for "employee voice" either in the title or the key words in the four major HR journals (*Human Resource Management, Human Resource Management Journal, Human Resource Management Review* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management*). We did not search for other related concepts such as employee participation, engagement, empowerment, etc., as while some disciplines take a broad approach, others see these as distinct constructs and it would hence muddle the attempt to show the direction and extent of change in this area.

We included empirical, conceptual and review papers and identified 87 relevant papers in the period 2000 to 2020, but of these only 17 in the first decade, reflecting the sharp rise in interest in employee voice in the last 10 years in HR journals. We excluded only three from 90 first identified on the basis that while voice was in the key words, they were not papers about voice (Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006; Bretos et al., 2018; and Cooke et al., 2020). We decided to categorise the papers into either IR, HR or OB, or as hybrids, so as to be able to show the shifting centre of gravity in the field. Our categorisation results can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3 but the full tables of papers and categorisations are available.

We considered a variety of ways to determine the appropriate label. One is to look at the actual measure of voice used, if there is one clearly articulated, and this is easier in the quantitative papers. For example, the Van Dyne and LePine (1998) measure (the pure OB approach) was used not just by OB people but could be seen in other papers where authors were from a different intellectual tradition (e.g. Bell et al., 2011). So, this measure alone might not be enough to classify a work as predominantly OB. To further guide our categorisations, we also looked at definitions offered up-front or in literature reviews. These tended to reflect the dominant intellectual space in which authors operated and how they identified themselves. Again, this approach was not always conclusive as some authors advanced a broad definition of voice and then went on to use the Van

Dyne and LePine measure for their study (e.g. Benson & Brown, 2010). In one case, the Deery et al. (2013) paper uses Van Dyne and LePine but only as a measure, and not as the measure for voice. As it also concerns the effect of union citizenship behaviour on employee absence, we classified the paper as IR.

We also considered the authors' frame of reference, with IR and HRM papers taking a more pronounced pluralist perspective. We did see a variety of perspectives adopted but again not always consistently. For example, Shantz et al. (2013) adopt a pluralist, perhaps radical, stance to explore alienation and voice but use the Van Dyne and LePine scale. Finally, we also considered the actual process or content of the voice research. For example, some papers look at formal processes, such collective bargaining while others examine informal voice and constructive suggestions for change.

In almost all cases we were able to categorise papers as clearly within one discipline, or as a hybrid of two, but in the case of four papers we needed to look beyond definitions and content and categorise these according to what we considered as the overall intention of the paper. To give an illustration, one of these papers, the Nawakitphaitoon and Zhang (2020) paper, uses an OB definition of voice but focuses on representative employee voice in terms of the Chinese national trade union, and in this case we classify it as HRM/IR. Finally, we identified three papers which were conceptual review papers and were all published in HRMR. These papers were genuinely integrative, and so we did not classify them by discipline.

Another interesting complication in categorising voice research is that while OB and IR are more clearly defined positions, HRM is not and, furthermore, the central tendency in HRM in the USA is rather different to that in the UK, with UK HR research more influenced by IR traditions than in the USA. We have taken the non-US stance in relation to HRM, seeing HRM as being much more concerned than OB with systems and structures for voice whereas OB research has focused on the informal and individual identifying attitudes and perceptions and micro-level contextual (e.g. supervisor behaviour, team climate) enablers and inhibitors (Morrison, 2011). Conversely, we see IR voice research as more concerned with the structural enablers and inhibitors to voice, such as collective-level structures and systems that allow for employee input, with voice viewed as occurring via formal mechanisms such as unions or works councils, etc.. IR is explicitly pluralist with an assumption that voice is driven by conflicting interests between workers and management, with the motive for voice to be both expressive and corrective – driven by the employees' own interests,

regardless of what this means for the organisation. In contrast, OB researchers view relationships at work as largely non-adversarial, with interests that are generally aligned. They also assume the motives for voice to be promotive and/or improvement oriented, so as to bring about constructive change. With HR there is an assumption that good systems can create positive voice serving the interests of employers and employees, and less emphasis is placed on conflict (Wilkinson, Barry, & Morrison, 2020); neither is there always a clear frame of reference. OB studies tend to be quantitative, whereas IR and HRM are more mixed in their research design. In short, the three disciplines have rather different normative frameworks, they tend to look at different types or mechanisms of voice, and they also tend to use different methodologies to examine voice.

While our categorisations are judgements, we were anxious not to force research into boxes as to do so would miss importance nuances in the development of research. For example, it is intriguing to see how the influence of OB is not just evident in the number of what we categorise as OB papers, but also in the growth of other papers using OB definitions, ideas or constructs in their work. What this means is that there is both a galloping and creeping dynamic to OB psychologisation of voice. Thus, in the 2000-2010 period we could only identify one "OB" paper and one HRM/OB, but by the second decade, out of a total of 70 voice papers, we categorised 20 papers as OB, and another four as HR/OB, as they had a very strong OB dimension. This is compared with 10 IR papers and 22 HRM papers, as well as a large number of hybrids.

Notwithstanding that OB is the second largest category with only two fewer papers than HRM papers in dedicated HR journals, this still underestimates the influence of OB, as a number of papers categorised primarily as HRM had a distinct OB element. Specifically, we see the influence of dominant OB authors such as Van Dyne and LePine, and Morrison, whose definitions of voice as a non-required behaviour, and one that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge feature in one paper in 2000-2010, but in 28 papers published between 2011-2020.

To illustrate our argument about the influence of OB research on HRM voice publications let us take a paper from each of the three empirical HRM journals. Zhu & Akhtar (2019) see employee voice behaviour as the communication of constructive and challenging suggestions and ideas (Morrison, 2011). Their research, they conclude, addresses "the questions of what makes leaders more open to employee voice and when leader openness behavior has a greater or less effect on employee voice

behavior" (p. 2895). Drawing on goal orientation theory and the voice research, their study "reveals that leader trait learning orientation motivates leaders to be open to followers' ideas (i.e. managerial openness), and in turn increases employee voice behavior" (p. 2895). Additionally, their findings "further show that the effect of managerial openness on voice behavior is positive only among employees with a high felt obligation for constructive change. These findings have implications for organizations aiming to enhance their employees' voice behavior. Overall, organizations should consider trait learning orientation as a criterion when filling leadership positions and promote employees' felt obligation for constructive change" (p. 2895). These quotes show the strong orientation of this research towards micro-level, relational factors that are predominant in current OB research, leaving to one side issues such as power dynamics between employers and employees, as well as contextual factors such as workplace size, industry/sector customs and HR practices, unionisation, and regulatory context.

Ng & Lucianetti (2018) define voice as constructive, change-oriented communication intended to advance an organisation's interest (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). To encourage speaking up, perceived organisational embeddedness (POE) is seen as helpful; "encouraging increased POE may prompt employees to engage in voice despite the risks, as they may see the relationship as long term, comfortable, and secured enough to set their own learning goals (especially when they prefer stability), in turn enabling them to focus on the benefits rather than risks of speaking up" (Ng & Lucianetti, 2018, p. 1264). Their study therefore "highlights a psychological mechanism significant to future studies of voice: increased POE and LGO [learning goal orientation] collectively help to explain why increases in a sense of psychological attachment to an organization make some employees increasingly prone to speak out, even when doing so is socially risky" (p. 1264). Here, again, we see the influence of OB's focus on antecedents, including personal traits and orientations, of what is seen as an employee's discretionary decision to speak up or remain silent, and the perceived importance of individual, psychological safety. As noted above, this runs counter to the strong view in IR, and in labour process literature that employees are often collectively conditioned to seeing voice as futile.

Park and Nawakitphaitoon (2018) note that "Employee voice is a broad and complex construct, and each discipline has developed different conceptualizations of employee voice. For instance, HRM-employment relations researchers define employee voice as "an opportunity to have a say"' (p. 16). They then go on to follow the definition of Van Dyne and LePine (1998), noting that they

conceptualised voice as a promotive behaviour that emphasises expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticise. So, while these authors are very much aware of different approaches to voice, they adopt the Van Dyne and LePine approach and their focus is the quality of supervisor-subordinate relationships, as "an important contextual climate affecting employee voice by providing employees more opportunities to speak up, exchange information or ideas with their supervisors, and use more communication channels. This implies that training supervisors in good voice managing will promote communication within the organization" (p. 26). In this case, consistent with current OB, the notion of context is very much within the organisation, which is indicative of a much narrower perspective on context than is evident in other disciplines, and also in prior OB voice research.

We offer another observation on this. There is little here from IR, perhaps not surprisingly given the definition offered upfront. Zhu and Akhtar (2019) draw on no less 43 papers from OB or psychology journals and only three from HRM journals. Ng and Lucianetti (2018) cite 53 from OB or psychology and 20 from HR journals, and Park and Nawakitphaitoon (2018) cite 16 from OB and psychology with five from HRM and six from IR. We hasten to add that our goal here is not to criticise these papers in themselves, but merely to point out limitations inasmuch as a body of work that is focused narrowly on individual level behaviours is unable to address broader voice issues. The argument we are advancing here seems to us to be similar to the position of Boxall (2021) who advocates that HR adopt a pluralist and contextualised agenda. In doing so Boxall (2021, p. 3) specifically notes that "Where an academic conception of HRM ignores employee voice, including independent trade unions, or overlooks the agency of workers in advancing their own interests, the criticism of being unitarist does hit the mark (Boxall, 1996; Marchington & Grugulis, 2000)."

Considering all the above, our overall summary is that while voice has been a topic of interest to IR, HR and OB researchers for decades, that voice publications in HR journals have flourished since 2010, and that this growth has shown a distinct trend – notwithstanding a continued presence for IR research – toward an increasing influence of OB's new conception of voice (see below) in leading HR journals, leading to a psychologisation of HR voice.

INSERT TABLE 2 AND TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

The evolution of OB voice: from Hirschman to psychologisation

In addition to examining the impact of OB on HR voice research by reviewing voice publications in the major HR journals, we frame this paper's contribution to the psychologisation debate by also showing the extent to which OB voice has itself changed over time.

The old OB lens

Contrary to the current siloed nature of voice research, in the 1980s and early 90s OB voice research shared a number of similarities with research on voice in other fields (see Mowbray et al., 2015). The reason for this was the common adoption of Hirschman's Exit/Voice/Loyalty (EVL) model as a means to understand and develop voice. In the 1970s, researchers in IR (Freeman, 1976) and political science (Barry, 1974) began to apply Hirschman; and in the 1980s, Freeman and Medoff's (1984) seminal volume *What do Unions Do?* firmly embedded Hirschman's distinction between exit and voice in IR scholarship. Meanwhile, voice papers began to appear in OB and general management journals in the early 1980s, looking at, among other issues, absenteeism (Hammer et al., 1981), principled dissent (Graham, 1986) turnover (Spencer, 1986), and job stress (Mayes & Ganster, 1988). Despite its somewhat later take up, OB seemed a logical discipline to apply Hirschman's framework given OB's keen interest in these research topics. For example, there was a large OB literature on the measurement of the relationship between employee satisfaction and outcomes such as absenteeism or turnover (see Spencer 1986, p. 488). What Hirschman's EVL framework provided for the extant OB literature on absenteeism and turnover was an alternative model; one that proponents of the EVL framework asserted could explain why dissatisfied employees might remain present rather than absent (Hammer et al., 1981), and in the longer run, actually stay and voice rather than exit (Spencer, 1986).

Adopting Hirschman meant that researchers in OB, IR and HRM initially agreed (at least implicitly) on the key conceptual elements of voice. The most prominent of these was that voice arose in response to dissatisfaction, and that it represented an attempt to change a current situation before it further deteriorated. For Hirschman, voice was a political process through which the interests of customers, employees, and citizens were represented in their relationships with corporations, employers and governments. Hirschman's objective in theorising voice was to present a critique of economics (see Christiansen, 2010). Voice, as a political process, was to be contrasted with exit, which economics presented as the primary remedy for dissatisfaction in market relationships.

Exit not silence

The second critical proposition accepted across these disciplines was that voice was to be opposed by exit. This is in contrast to the current OB conceptualisation, where voice is opposed by silence. The implications of this are profound, and for HR this leaves out the role of voice in the critical matters of retention and turnover. In the old OB, voice and exit are established as two very distinct behaviours. Voice is to choose to stay and to seek a means of improving current dissatisfaction. Exit is to choose to withdraw entirely rather than to work towards improvement. An obvious limitation of the simple dichotomy between exit and voice is that it is both possible to stay and remain silent as well as it is possible to voice while exiting (Barry, 1974). To not voice is of course to remain silent. However, for Hirschman silence was not an end point or a behaviour in its own right. Rather, silence was a by-product of Hirschman's third category of response; that of loyalty. Loyal employees choose neither to voice nor to exit. Instead, their loyalty to the organisation prompts them to remain patient and quiet while experiencing dissatisfaction. In effect, their propensity to voice their current dissatisfaction is tempered by their underlying loyalty to the organisation.

Therefore, if exit and voice represented extreme alternatives to dissatisfaction, a further feature of Hirschman's model was that the choice between these two behaviours was mediated by the loyalty of the customer, citizen or employee. In Hirschman's model loyalty was both an affective state and a behaviour in its own right, and this was recognised in OB research (see Withey & Cooper, 1989). Loyalty might give a dissatisfied employee cause to wait patiently in the hope that things improve over time, rather than to exit. However, it is logical to assume that if an objectionable state were to become prolonged, or increase in intensity, this would erode loyalty to a point where the employee might consider other responses. The importance of loyalty is then that it added a dynamic component to the exit/voice formulation so that the model could anticipate change in employee affect and behaviour over time (a point recognised as a limitation in current OB research, see Baschur & Oc, 2015, and see below).

In developing the work of Hirschman, the OB voice literature of the 1980-mid-90s period also expanded on EVL by developing neglect (hence EVLN) as a fourth category (Rusbult et al., 1982). Compared to loyalty, in which employees remain quiet in the hope of improvement, neglect was a state where employees eventually lost hope of improvement. Neglectful behaviour is that through

which employees passively allow matters to get worse. With the EVLN framework, Farrell and Rusbult (1992) hypothesised that employee voicing and non-voicing behaviours were determined by two factors: employees' level of investment in their jobs, and the quality of other employment opportunities. Investments, such as length of time in employment, extent of firm specific skills, and even the quality of relationships with colleagues and supervisors were seen as important factors that would lead employees to respond to dissatisfaction by exhibiting loyalty or voice. Equally, where employees had superior employment opportunities it was hypothesised that employees would be more outspoken, in that they would be less fearful of any negative response to voicing. Moreover, their voice had greater potential to change the status quo. The logic of this proposition is, as Farrell and Rusbult (1992) point out, that "passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve should be more likely among employees who have low mobility and little power to bring about positive organizational change"(p. 213) (see also Allen and Tüselmann, 2009).

Cross-disciplinary alignment

A distinctive feature that emerged from this early voice scholarship – which later faded – was the intellectual alignment of voice scholarship across different disciplines as well as the apparent familiarity of voice researchers with voice research conducted in other disciplines. What is obvious from the work of authors such as Farrell and Rusbult (shown above; see also Farrell, 1983; Farrell & Rusbult, 1985), is that they saw voice to be a feature of the employment relationship, with its inherent contradictions and power imbalances between labour and capital. Voice and exit, and loyalty and neglect, were thus perceived as alternative mechanisms by which employees could do something (or nothing) about dissatisfying conditions that arose at work. During this era, OB voice researchers not only cited the work of researchers in other fields, they also incorporated that work in their own studies. For example, IR researchers at Cornell (Hammer et al., 1981), used Hirschman's EVL model in a paper published on satisfaction and absenteeism in the leading OB research outlet, the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Spencer's (1986) OB study on voice and turnover reviewed IR/HRM literature and included specific IR/HR measures such as unionisation and the amount of grievance filing. This study hypothesized an inverse relationship between turnover and the amount of voice opportunity that was provided by these well-known IR/HRM mechanisms. A clear aim of this study was to show whether firms instituting formal voice opportunities (those that are largely neglected in current OB voice studies) might lead otherwise silent employees away from forming an intention to leave. As noted above, the decision to replace exit with silence in the new OB

conceptualisation leaves out an entire sphere of HR research devoted to understanding the relationship between voice opportunities and retention and turnover (e.g. see Croucher et al., 2012).

Such awareness of other disciplines and what they could offer to provide a more rounded understanding of voice is in sharp contrast to contemporary voice research which exists in siloed and self-referential management sub-disciplines (Kaufman, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry, & Morrison, 2020). Even studies that claim to be integrative have not referenced research from other areas (see Mowbray et al., 2015, p. 383). Morrison's (2011) integrative review of voice for a management audience at once acknowledged a rich tradition of IR voice scholarship but also noted that it did not match "current [OB] conceptualisations"(p. 381) of voice and was therefore not included in her analysis. In her later review of voice and silence literature, Morrison (2014, p. 174) expressly acknowledged other work on voice, including formal and institutional voice mechanisms, but restricted her focus to only informal voice. Therefore, unlike prior OB research, current OB voice scholarship has neglected to incorporate IR and HR voice because OB researchers see these other disciplines are primarily interested in 'voice opportunities', such as unions, works councils, and company grievance systems, rather than the expression of voice (behaviour) itself. One obvious limitation of this simplistic dichotomy between voice opportunities and behaviours is that it denies the role of formal voice opportunities as mechanisms through which actual voice flows.

The New OB Lens

IR researchers have remarked on how OB changed its conceptualisation of voice in such a way that it has become divorced from research on voice in other fields (Mowbray et al., 2015; Holland et al., 2019). OB has also been critiqued by other voice researchers (Kaufman, 2015; Barry & Wilkinson, 2015; Donaghey et al., 2011) for its siloed approach to voice and silence. As noted above, these studies argue that OB voice research examines only the individual, relational and discretionary aspects of voice as if they operate in isolation from the employment relationship itself, as well as from broader influences such as labour and product markets, and political and regulatory norms and institutions. Such critique, however, hasn't explained how the current OB literature has become siloed from the earlier OB voice research of the 1980s and early 90s.

OB narrowed its conceptualisation of voice as it sought to identify (as it did in the work of Van Dyne and LePine) a valid voice construct. Earlier OB studies were unable to do this because of the

imprecision of Hirschman's theory, particularly in terms of the loyalty component.[i] When the early OB studies added neglect, this compounded the issue as it added another dimension incapable of measurement. As Rusbult and Lowery (1985) noted "Whereas exit and voice are readily distinguishable, it should be noted that loyalty and neglect, in their most extreme forms (i.e. total passivity) would be behaviorally indistinguishable" (p. 82). The current OB conceptualisation is not hindered by such messiness, because loyalty and neglect have been removed as distinct categories of employee voice behaviour in favour of the more general distinction between speaking up and remaining silent.

Voice as static behaviour

To the extent that loyalty and neglect served as mediators of exit and voice, they played an important role in our conceptual understanding of how employee behaviour might change over time. Dropping loyalty and neglect effectively made OB's study of voice static, with the current literature measuring only the factors that would lead employees to voice or remain silent at a point in time. As Bashshur and Oc (2015) argue in their meta review of voice literature, change has become the missing component of voice, and as such the current literature does not advance our understanding of how voicing can lead to improvement over time, or how the absence of voice can lead to further deterioration. Bashshur and Oc's call for voice research to return to the principles of Hirschman, and to measure change through longitudinal studies, echoes the intention of the earlier OB literature for research to "explore dynamic aspects of responding to job dissatisfaction, including the processes by which employees move from one mode of response to another, probable combinations of responses, and the intensification of responses over the course of an extended period of declining satisfaction." (Rusbult et al., 1988, p. 617). Thus, our contention here is that while critics outside OB have said that OB could learn from other disciplines, equally it seems OB could learn from prior research in its own discipline.

A new voice motivation

As OB moved away from viewing voice as a response to dissatisfaction and towards a view that voice was a discretionary behaviour engaged in by satisfied workers seeking to enhance organisational or work unit functioning, OB discarded the EVLN framework and focused instead on the extent to which employees might usefully voice to offer suggestions or opinions about work processes. The change marked a fundamental shift that created the conceptual space for OB researchers to begin to

psychologise voice as a form of organisational citizenship behaviour. Previously, voice was an expression of employees' interests, and a tool for employees to affect a change to current dissatisfying circumstances. In the new conceptualisation, however, voice was more of a tool for employers to elicit valuable information about ways in which current systems and work processes might be enhanced for greater work unit or organisational functioning.

Thus, the motives for voicing and remaining silent were now clearly distinguished from the earlier studies that focused on employee voicing behaviour as a response to dissatisfaction. The first sentence in the influential conceptual study of silence by Van Dyne et al. (2003) laid the case out as follows: "Employees often have ideas, information, and opinions for constructive ways to improve work and work organizations" (p. 1359). The point of the paper was to develop a conceptual framework to understand why at times employees would voice those ideas, information and opinions and at other times why they would intentionally withhold. This paper marked a key development to the extant OB silence literature, that would extend the concept of silence to include forms of organisational citizenship behaviour.

The re-focusing of OB away from dissatisfaction also reflected the fact that leading OB researchers (e.g. Van Dyne et al., 2003; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison, 2014) began to draw on other literatures such as communication studies, ethics, and issues selling to frame their views on voice and silence. These researchers utilised literature from communication studies that held that effective communication and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships required an awareness not only of what to express but also what information to withhold. Also, the extent of voice or silence might be related to the closeness of the voicing party and the intended recipient, such that the better the quality of the relationship the greater the opportunity for communication. They also noted that ethics research had established moral grounds for the concealment of certain types of information, such as to protect the reputation of the organisation. Moreover, from issue selling came the view that employees read the organisational context to determine what to say, what not to say, and when to voice or remain silent. A context might be either favourable or unfavourable to voice (see Milliken et al., 2003, p. 1455). These different literatures provided justification for the OB conceptualisation of silence (as well as voice) as an intentional behaviour and, also, both as forms of other-oriented (i.e. pro-social) behaviour.

Concerns and contradictions about the new OB lens

Much of the OB literature on voice examines antecedents that might lead employees to voice or remain silent, including such factors as employees' level of extraversion and managers' interpersonal behaviours that lead to perceptions of 'managerial openness', and which taken together enhance employees' willingness to voice (e.g. Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). However, the premise that employees intentionally voice or remain silent depending on certain antecedents also creates logical inconsistencies that reduce the persuasiveness of the conceptual framework. For example, management may indeed be open to the type of voice that is proposed by OB which is that which leads to improvement in unit or organisational functioning. However, employees may choose not to voice for the very same reasons. Thus, well established in the sociology of work, and labour process literatures, is that employees may retain rather than share knowledge about improved work processes to protect and promote their own interests against those of management (see for example the classic study by Roy, 1952; see also Graham, 1993; Thompson, 1989; Nechanska et al., 2020). One obvious reason for this is that workers may feel that their suggestions to improve work processes will lead to work intensification without corresponding increases in remuneration.

Employees may voice issues and concerns to management irrespective of the level of managerial openness if the issues at stake are of sufficient importance to fundamental employee interests. Employees may voice for example in opposition to management deciding unilaterally to not replace employees who leave, and hence require remaining employees to carry heavier workloads. Decisions such as this will clearly raise employees' concerns about organisation and work unit functioning, therefore satisfying the OB conceptualisation of voice. However, management may have little interest in those concerns because they perceive the financial imperative to pursue such cost-cutting measures to be more compelling. Even where employees have credible counter suggestions that may increase unit functioning without the need for reductions in staffing, management may still not be open to voice, having already accepted the logic of the financial case. The point of these simple examples is to highlight that fundamental differences of interest between workers and managers, (as recognised in IR, HR and earlier OB voice studies) may undermine the persuasiveness of OB's psychologised conception of voice and silence, which rests on an underlying belief in a unity of interest that aligns around employees offering voice as an extra-role behaviour in an effort to enhance organisational functioning.

These are important issues for HRM as it needs to decide how much to be influenced by these OB ideas and whether it accepts wholly the new paradigm or merely adopts components of it. Thus, for example, accepting the OB proposition that voice is individual, discretionary and constructive may limit the value of HR research to practice, because it places too much emphasis on the relational character of voice, by narrowly concentrating on the antecedents that drive some individuals to speak up because of personality differences and others to remain silent, as well as those that render some managers more or less receptive to employees speaking up. The danger of this is that less emphasis is placed on more traditional HR concerns such as the usefulness of instituting management-led formal and informal systems that promote voice such as climate surveys, speak up schemes, and workplace consultative committees. And, of course, we do not see this as an all or nothing approach in the choices faced. OB has much to offer in explaining individual and group voice behaviours. But if we look at voice more broadly and we think HRM scholars and practitioners are interested in broader structures for voice such as the Information and Consultation Directive for example, we then find OB voice cannot tell the whole story. It is not so much that OB is misguided, although there are scholars who make that claim, but that the OB conceptualisation only covers part of the totality of voice. By taking the stance that this component of voice (the informal, discretionary, individual, pro–social) is all there is in the world of voice we risk impoverishing both HR theory and practice.

Conclusion

This paper positions our analysis of voice research published in leading HR journals within a discussion of the debate concerning the psychologisation of HRM. We argued that a useful way to advance this debate is to discuss specific topic areas that extend across OB, HRM and IR, such as employee voice. We also contend that by only debating about whether psychologisation of HRM has taken place misses the point that the OB perspective on voice has itself changed over time. We have argued that by excavating prior research we can see that early OB and IR and HRM research had a number of similarities and common ground at least until the mid-1990s, but, whereas IR research has continued to follow Hirschman's conception of voice as a response to dissatisfaction, OB research has moved farther and farther away, in effect polarising IR and OB research and to a significant extent, dragging HR research with it. As we can see from our data, IR voice research retains a solid influence in leading HR journals. However, we also note that the majority of voice studies published in HR journals are now either explicitly, or at least heavily influenced by OB. Thus

while OB's pro-social conceptualisation of voice is the dominant discourse in OB and general management journals[ii], it is also highly influential in the major HRM outlets.

The consequence of the psychologisation of voice, through the mainstreaming of OB's current conception of voice across management research, is the neglect of the notion that voice is fundamentally about more than just speaking up when employees have something meaningful to contribute to improve the organisation. Such 'organisational voice' has real value, as demonstrated in OB research, because it can lead to improved decision making and less likelihood of errors. However, there are other values in voicing beyond these organisational imperatives, such as promoting employee interests even where these conflict with those of management. Such values are missing in current OB research which fixates on the personal and relational antecedents of the decision to voice or remain silent in the interests of the organisation, and overlooks the critical importance, as advanced by Hirschman, and developed in IR-HRM research AND in the earlier OB studies, that voice rests on a deeper set of influences embedded in the employment relationship, including the relative power of the employer and employee, the degree of loyalty of the worker to the organisation, and the extent to which the external labour market offers employees alternative employment opportunities. Unlike contemporary OB voice research, earlier OB studies also appreciated that speaking up was not an isolated decision taken at a point in time but, rather, that whether one voiced or not had further consequences for the employee's decision about how to participate in her/his work and, ultimately, whether to continue, or leave, his/her employment. In seeking to measure only the antecedents of speaking up or remaining silent, OB has not only psychologised voice, but also rendered voice a more static phenomenon. In effect this narrows the boundaries of voice and ignores the vital link between voice and intention to quit, and therefore between HR research interest in voice and employee retention/turnover.

What does this mean for the future of voice publications in HRM outlets? Firstly, we expect that IR voice studies will continue as unions, collective bargaining and consultation committees do not easily lend themselves to psychologisation. However, OB studies of voice seem to have increasing legitimacy within HRM, as we can see in the contrast between the two decades of our data collection. So, whereas previously some of these studies might not have been published in HRM journals, it appears that OB voice has become normalised within HRM. Moreover, as OB ideas increasingly appear within mainstream HRM outlets, so one might predict that we may end up with a bifurcated literature, especially polarised between IR and OB (or at least OB-influenced) voice. As

this bifurcation takes places it is not clear to us how HRM researchers will continue to protect their own intellectual space, leading us to wonder whether HR will continue to offer its own conception of employee voice as distinct from that of OB.

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[i] The question of whether loyalty was to be seen as an affective state or a behaviour in its own right made loyalty difficult to measure, and this was specifically debated by OB EVLN researchers (e.g. Withey & Cooper, 1992).

[ii] Taking for example what is widely regarded as the leading management journal, the *Academy of Management Journal,* over the last 10 years finds 11 papers published which have voice in the title and they all use or adapt either the Van Dyne and LePine (1998) definition or that of Morrison (2011) so OB is THE management perspective. These are as follows: Detert & Edmondson (2011); Liang et al., (2012); Burris (2012); McClean et al., (2013, 2018); Grant (2013); Fast et al., (2014); Liu et al., (2017); Burris & Kimmons, (2017); Hussain et al., (2019); Farh et al., (2020).