New Trajectories in Worker Voice: Integrating and Applying Contemporary Challenges in the Organization of Work

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Abstract (200 words)

This article aims at encouraging a debate on the proposed transactive relationship between voice and contemporary social, economic, and technological (SET) developments. Specifically, we propose that SET developments change how work is approached, organized, and designed, and that these changes challenge employee rights, roles, and responsibilities. How employees deal with these challenges affects their well-being and health, and whether organizations and societies can develop sustainably. While voice is a way for employees to have a say in these developments, we argue that SET changes can be times in which voice is threatened. Moreover, we propose that SET changes urge us to question and re-shape our understanding of voice. We propose that a functional conceptualization of voice provides opportunities to integrate existing approaches which are often scattered across disciplines, and is inclusive to new opportunities and constraints that come with SET developments. Using examples of two meta-trends, we illustrate how SET changes challenge traditional conceptualizations of voice and identify 'new trajectories' to expand more inclusive forms of voice and more useful research paradigms. These meta-trends are _digitalization_ (including new business models and employment forms, alternative/flexible work arrangements, technology-mediated communication) and _diversification_ (including internationalization and marginalised and minority groups).

Communication and the flow of information are central to effective management (Drucker, 1967; Keyton, 2017). Securing the information flow from managers to subordinates is prominent in management research, which can subsequently counsel on organisational policy and practice enactment (e.g., Tourish, Craig, & Amernic, 2010). The emphasis on downward information is not surprising given that those at higher levels of an organization make important decisions and guide those below them in a hierarchy. Whether employees at lower levels in the organizational hierarchy express voice or withhold opinions, ideas, and concerns has historically received less attention in management literatures (Tourish et al., 2010). This imbalance has turned out to be detrimental as poor upward communication and ineffective social dialogue hamper sustainable organizational development and have been subject of wider societal debates about human dignity and worker rights (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Budd 2004; Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

The special issue posits that, time and again, social, economic, and technological (SET) developments disrupt existing patterns and norms for how work is approached, organized, and designed, and that these changes require inclusion of various voices from all levels of the organizational and societal hierarchy. We propose that SET disruptions often – at least temporarily - engender silence rather than voice, and that such disruptions urge scholars and practitioners to re-consider how voice is understood and implemented (Donaghey et al, 2011; Kaufman, 2015). In the wake of the industrial age, for example, voice (mostly in its collective form through unions) was needed to secure basic worker rights such as health and safety, hours of work and protection against despotism (Kaufman, 2014). In the 1960s and 70s, voice (as a promotive way to include employees' ideas) gained attention as competitive advantages were secured by companies founded on continuous improvement (Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1990). In the so-called knowledge economy, which became prominent since the 1980s, management concepts such as empowerment, teamwork, lean production, and total quality emphasize knowledge-sharing and creation as the central driver of corporate

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performance (Fay & Sonnentag, 2012). These tasks remain relevant today, but the recent transformations of work add a number of new challenges around equity, transparency, sustainability and well-being through voice and inclusion. Among these challenges, we argue that two meta-trends are particularly relevant, namely *digitalization* and *diversification*.

Digitalization denotes the transformation of societies and organizations through the use of digital technologies (Hanelt, Bohnsack, Marz, & Marante, 2020). By providing the means to immediate and almost unlimited information, digital technologies enable newer forms of business arrangements (e.g., digital platform-based businesses) and more flexible work arrangements (e.g., home and remote working, virtual teams) (Spreitzer, Cameron, & Garrett, 2017). Among the consequences of digitalization are the reduction of the limiting factors of space and time and blurred boundaries between organizations, market and organizations, and between work and private lives (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016).

Alongside digital transformation is *diversification,* an umbrella term for the range of developments that result in a more diverse workforce than has been the case hitherto. One such development is the greater internationalization of business activities which is visible in multinational companies and markets, an internationally mobile work force visible in expatriates and culturally diverse teams, and outsourcing and off-shoring of production and services. A key driver of diversification is the tendency to acknowledge diversity with respect to, for example, gender, ethnicity, religion, and employment schemes (e.g., agency sub-contracting), and the greater role of minority and marginalized groups in the labour market.

The above two meta-trends provide opportunities and constraints for employee well-being and health, and for employees' abilities to participate and thus co-shape the developments they are affected by. The use of digital technologies in communication, for example, tends to substitute face-to-face communication by technology-mediated communication (e.g., messenger tools or videoconferencing) which often trails the former in terms of richness and intimacy. While reliance on technology-mediated communication may

make voice less likely, digitalization also provides new communication channels (e.g., social media) and patterns (e.g., less hierarchical and restricted access to higher-ups) which might facilitate voice (Conway et al., 2019; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Diversification, in turn, provides opportunities to access more heterogeneous voices but, at the same time, potentially splits the workforce and creates marginalized groups with little power relying on fragile participation schemes. Notably, as in every transformational period, some factors get more attention and others get less.

It seems to be the case that current discourses on digitalization and diversification focus on their potential and apply a rather narrow view on the consequences for work, employee health and participation, and the future of employment (Frey & Osbourne, 2017; Wilkinson & Barry, 2020). Moreover, it seems to be the case that existing conceptualizations of voice – both in terms of research and practical implementation – are of limited use when it comes to providing the means to have a say regarding which technological opportunities and diversification revolutionise or fundamentally alter business models and work arrangements. This is particularly concerning as human factors including the agency of labour along with management choices remain critical to decision-making and flatter structures and an emphasis on empowerment potentially shift responsibilities for well-being and employability from the corporation to the individual employees themselves (Knoll, Wegge, Unterrainer, Silva & Jønsson, 2016). Growing rates of work-related psychological impairment suggest that employees suffer from the consequences of these developments but lack the opportunity to effect change (Allard-Poesi & Hollett-Haudebert, 2017; Kalmoe, Chapman, Gold, & Giedinghagen, 2019; Psychogios, Nyfoudi, Theodorakopoulos, Szamosi, & Prouska, 2017).

The special issue that this article precedes provides a forum for elaborating on the role of voice in understanding and dealing with current social, economic, and technological developments (SET). Our article, which provides a frame for the special issue, has three objectives. We start by discussing key reasons for why voice remains a contested and

ambiguous issue in many workplaces and in the various disciplines that examine voice. We suggest that a functional conceptualization of voice allows for the integration of the existing yet scattered approaches to voice and can be a starting point to develop forms of voice that suit new opportunities and constraints that come with SET developments. Our approach is thus transactional whereby changes in the circumstances of work require changes in voice which, in turn, affect the circumstances in which work is conducted. The second objective of the article is to elaborate on the role of voice in the two meta-trends of social, economic, and technological developments, namely *digitalization* and *diversification*. We argue that these trends affect work and workers in a way that urge us to re-consider existing voice practices and identify new trajectories. The third objective is to discuss how the articles of the special issue position voice within current SET developments and identify new voice trajectories for the future work.

Research on Voice and Silence at Work: A Tale of Conceptual Ambiguity

During recent years, failure of constructive voice has received widespread attention and entered public discourse. Whistle-blowers have inspired social movements (e.g., #MeToo movement) and demonstrations (e.g., Black Lives Matter) from their leaking of information to external institutions about corporate malpractice and industry cultures that tolerated or even facilitated mistreatment (Ewing & Bowley, 2015; House, Watt, & Williams, 2004; Prasad, 2018). Whistle-blowing is indicative of voice failure as it often represents a heavy burden for people whose voice was constrained by internal structures and norms and who see it as the last option to address issues of concern (Vandekerckhove & Phillips, 2019). Public policy and regulatory enactments in multiple countries protect whistle-blowers, but they may step in too late neglecting the long suffering of those who finally speak up and the many who quit without blowing the whistle (Hirschman, 1970; Vandekerckhove, 2021). Moreover, while cases of whistle-blowing are comparably seldom, survey results suggest that considerable numbers of employees think they cannot raise issues at work (Edmondson, 2019). Thus,

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research and practical action are needed to identify ways to overcome silence at earlier stages and break down barriers for voice. Such knowledge does not only reduce the necessity that whistle-blowers risk their careers and occasionally their lives to protect others from harm, but also increase chances that the multiple perspectives are considered at work which contributes to employees', organizations', and societies' adaptability and development.

Research from a range of cognate academic disciplines (e.g., organisational behaviour, HRM, industrial relations, organizational psychology, law and economics) offers considerable knowledge on preconditions and effects of voice and silence (for recent reviews, see Chamberlin et al., 2017; Collinson, 2006; Kaufman, 2015; Morrison, 2014; van Dyne, Cummings, & MacLean Parks, 1995; Wilkinson, Barry, & Morrison, 2020, Wilkinson, Donaghey, Dundon and Freeman 2020). Reasons for voice and silence have been identified at multiple levels (e.g. the person, work group, work design, organization, industry and society), taking into account that the levels overlap and interact (Knoll et al., 2016). For example, employees' fear to address critical issues might stem from individual dispositions, fear of managerial reprisals and compromised future career pathways in organizations or even industries, professional and societal cultural socialization, and even evolutionary preparedness (Cross & Dundon, 2019; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Nechanska et al., 2020). Employees' perceptions of futility of voice, in turn, may stem from individual disengagement, lacking managerial openness and responsiveness to voice, experiences with manipulated and selective information flows to workers (and their elected representatives) as a way of controlling the voice agenda, organizational norms which view worker participation as undesirable obstructions of effective work processes, alienating work designs, and precarious or dehumanising employment schemes (Donaghey et al., 2011; Ehrenreich, 2001; Grant & Parker, 2009; Harlos, 2001; Kaufman, 2014; MacMahon et al., 2018; Nechanska et al, 2020; Woodcock, 2017). Decisions that hides information from superiors, to give a third example, may stem from a conscious rationale to not contribute ideas as a form of resistance

to 'get-back' at management for some perceived injustice or disagreement over contested issues, or as a resistance when in dispute with management (Collinson, 2006; Connelly et al., 2019; van den Broek & Dundon, 2012).

Given the considerable body of knowledge that is available on voice and – to a lesser extent – silence in organizations, it is surprising that highly-visible (and the many discreet) cases depicting employee silence are still present today. One reason for this shortcoming is that tenacious ambiguities and misunderstandings hamper progress in knowledge development and its application. Different academic disciplines have separate ontological foundations which mean their interpretations about the core purposes of giving employee a voice are variable, such that the same terms can be used to refer to quite diverse things, and different terms elsewhere may deal with very similar practices (Dundon et al., 2004; Wilkinson et al., 2020a). Other reasons are lacking conceptual and measurement clarity regarding voice, silence, and their relationship, the manifold ways in which voice and silence may manifest at work, and how voice and silence are to be assessed (Knoll et al., 2016; Sherf et al., 2021). Finally, understanding voice and silence can be ambiguous within organizations themselves, where there are often tensions between managers and employees with respect to what voice and silence mean, how much of each is good for the organization, and what the intentions behind both of them are (Cunha, Simpson, Clegg, & Rego, 2018). An unfortunate by-product of the difficulties to integrate existing research is the limited responsiveness when it comes to adapting voice research and practices to new developments in the ways work is approached, designed, and organized (Kochan, Riordan, Kowalski, Khan, & Yang, 2019; Nechanska et al, 2020; Wilkinson, Barry & Morrison, 2020a).

To release the potential of the heterogeneous voice literature to address enduring, contemporary, and future challenges at work, we suggest applying an inclusive approach which functionally integrates scattered approaches to voice and silence (Morrison, 2014; Mowbray, Wilkinson & Tse, 2015; Knoll et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2019; Nechanska et

al., 2020). We argue for a broad definition of employee voice, as "the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say, formally and/or informally, collectively and/or individually, potentially to influence organizational affairs relating to issues that affect their work, their interests, and the interests of managers and owners" (Wilkinson et al 2020, p. 5). We refer to this definition as functional, because it focuses on outcomes (i.e., having a say) as the deciding criterion which provides inclusiveness with respect to levels of origin and occurrence, and allows to bridge disciplines (Knoll et al., 2016; Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). For example, the different methods by which employees express their voice may be situated at the macro-level, including regulatory frameworks across national and transnational spaces, with wider societal and policy implications; and the zeitgeist (i.e., a specific mood or a time in history and place) which determine organisational policy and subsequent worker behavior as emphasized in the industrial relations, labour process theory and critical management studies literatures. At the meso-level, the definition allows a consideration of voice systems and opportunities that exist in organisations, as well as the moderating role of policy actors who can affect voice efficacy as emphasized in collective labour and employment studies traditions. At the micro-level, in turn, motivators and inhibitors behind the utilisation of voice can be integrated which are positioned in individual and team-level dispositions, attitudes and perceptions, emotions and beliefs which are the focus of disciplines such as industrial and organizational psychology.

Voice and Contemporary Social, Economic, and Technological (SET) Challenges: A Fragile Transactive Relationship

Societal, economic, and technological developments change how work is approached and can be designed and organized with widespread consequences for employees at different hierarchical levels, for organizations and for societies as a whole. Indeed, employees have an ambiguous role in this transformation of work. On the one hand, they are seen as a liability limiting the assumingly unlimited potential of digital technologies and boundaryless

economies. On the other hand, human qualities are essential when it comes to linking technical devices, providing and interpreting data, easing social tensions, and correcting errors. We have only begun to understand how this situation may affect employee well-being, health, and learning, the functioning of organizations, and communities. As the work- and non-work related effects of current SET developments cannot always be anticipated from or controlled by management or political decision-makers, employee voice will be essential as a corrective against potentially detrimental developments, and/or a facilitator of sustainable psychological, social, and economic development.

In the following, we discuss how two meta-trends that societies, organizations, and eventually employees currently face – _digitalization_ and _diversification_ – relate to voice. Arguably, the relationship between voice and these developments is transactive, in a way that certain manifestations of digitalization and diversification facilitate and/or restrict employees' opportunities to have a say, but also that engaging in voice can have an influence on the effects these (and other) developments have on employees and sustainable organizational and societal development.

Digitalization and its effects on business models, employment schemes, work arrangements, and communication

The application of digital technologies influence communication directly, but also indirectly by changing how work is organized within teams and organizations, and by facilitating new business models and non-standard forms of employment (NSFE). We discuss how these changes may affect employee motivations to voice and their capacities to articulate issues of concern.

Technology-mediated communication and new voice opportunities through social media

Employees' communication with each other and with their supervisors is likely to change when mediated by digital technology, and digital technologies provide new communication channels which might extend the spectrum of voice opportunities (Knoll,

Feldt, & Zacher, 2021). When employees communicate via digital technologies such as video-call, e-mail, chat, social media and the like, they may exchange different information or communicate in a different way compared to face-to-face communication. Research on media effects on communication started with deficit models suggesting that computer-mediated communication (CMC; as was the dominant term) provided less social cues and less social presence (Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016). As these deficits interfere with or hamper important antecedents of voice including opportunities to build trust, shared understanding, and intimate relationships within work groups, a negative effect on knowledge sharing could be expected. However, research findings were often inconsistent and did not match field observations (Purvanova, 2014). These ambiguities have been attributed to the fact that the underlaying research often drew upon artificial designs comparing CMC discussions and decision-making with their face-to-face equivalents and lacked timeliness (i.e., did not use more advanced technologies which are already widespread in practice) (Landers & Marin, 2021).

Some researchers suggested that inconsistent effects are caused by overly narrow conceptualizations of technological influence (Landers & Marin, 2021). According to representatives of sociomaterial approaches (Orlikowski & Scott, 2016), comparing direct person-to-person dialogue with computer-facilitated communication is not appropriate, because the same technologies are often used in different ways. Sociomaterial approaches are supposed to be able to consider the often transactive nature of technology use. Instead of thinking of clearly defined technologies which are used by employees in clearly defined ways, sociomaterial approaches suggest that technologies provide opportunities and constraints which are specific for specific user groups (Leonardi, 2011). Instead of trying to identify a direct effect of certain technologies on voice, research thus needs to consider how a technologies afford and constrain motivators and inhibit voice (Knoll, Feldt, & Zacher, 2021).

Digitalization not only transforms the way we communicate at work, it also adds communication channels including enterprise and internet social media networks, with CEOs apparently signalling they are directly approachable via Email. The availability of internet social media provides every worker with opportunities to air his or her discontent and new avenues to engage and communicate with union members and to increase solidarity (Kerr & Waddington, 2014; Moore & Taylor, 2016). However, this potentially moves the discourse on workplace issues outside of the respective organization (Conway et al., 2019; Klaas et al., 2012). Moreover, while the internet could facilitate activism and solidarities (Greene et al., 2003; Fitzgerald et al., 2012; Frangi et al., 2019), it could also generate counter mobilisation (as it has been done by Amazon to prevent unionization in the US; Streitfeld, 2021) and reduce activity to "clicktivism" (Upchurch & Grassman, 2016).

Social media can also have an impact on worker voice. Employees who publicly criticise their employing organisation also present the potential to harm the organisation's reputation (Thompson, McDonald & O'Connor, 2020; Thornthwaite, MacMillan & Barnes, 2020). Hence, organisations have become increasingly concerned with developing a code of conduct to protect the organisation against what is considered inappropriate use of social media by employees (Thornthwaite, 2016; Banghart, Etter & Stohl, 2018), which could potentially limit what employees are able to voice on when using this channel. In addition, many organizations introduce enterprise social networks (Leonardi, & Vaast, 2017). Their use as a significant forum to express collective voice, thus far, appears limited (Barnes, Belnave, Thornthwaite & Manning, 2019; Rego et al., 2016). Enterprise social media seems to be the most advantageous to constructive and supportive forms of voice, where internal social media forums can be used by employees to offer suggestions and ideas for improvements (Martin, Parry & Flowers, 2015). Additional research will be needed to identify how it provides opportunities for voice (Ellmer & Reichel, 2020; Parry, Martin & Dromey, 2019) that are beneficial for employees and organisations alike.

Technology-enabled work arrangements

Besides directly affecting voice, the application of digital technologies has more distal, indirect effects. Specifically, digital technologies enable new work arrangements which provide temporal and spatial flexibility (Spreitzer et al., 2017) which has implications for voice. For example, working remotely or in virtual teams and thus mainly communicating via e-mail, chat, and teleconferencing can interfere with processes which are important for knowledge sharing and integration (e.g., information exchange frequency, spreading of local information, information interpretation and integration; Allen et al., 2015; Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Working remotely and telecommuting has also been associated with lower identification and lacking opportunities to build trustful relationships and psychological safety within teams and with supervisors (Marlowe et al., 2017; Purvanova, 2014; Walther, 2011).

Blurred boundaries and fragile participation in new sectors and business models and non-standard forms of employment

The changes that follow from digitalization do not only affect work design, processes, and structures within organizations, they also facilitate the emergence of new employment patterns, new business models, and even new sectors. Thus there has been an expansion in the number of non-standard jobs (NSFE; Grimshaw et al., 2017), including temporary, fixed-term, casual, part-time, agency and outsourced contracting or seasonal work, but also self-employment, such as freelance or gig-economy work, which may rely on small number of clients. Independent contractors often find work via digital labour platforms (Berg et al., 2018; Eurofound, 2017).

The rise of NSFE and associated precarious working conditions pose some unsolved issues regarding employee voice and silence. *Temporary workers and people in agency-mediated employment*, for example, are proposed to have less access to and more concerns to use voice opportunities due to their work precarity and fragmented work patterns (Dundon et

al., 2020). Due to their uncertain employment, speaking up may be considered a risky behavior for atypical workers, who instead may resort to neglect or silence (Jansen, Akkerman & Vandaele, 2017). Besides, temporary workers are often socially isolated from the core workers, and with this lack of social embeddedness in the organisation, are less likely to share knowledge or express their ideas or concerns (Mitlacher, 2008). In study of atypical workers in Netherlands, Sluiter, Manevska, and Akkerman (2020) found a number of barriers to worker voice for temporary staff and freelancers, including employment uncertainty, lack of social embeddedness and precarious conditions, i.e. where there was a lack of voice entitlement. Given the short-term nature of many temporary jobs, Rybnikova (2016) found that this contributed to the low status and power of temporary agency workers, resulting in deprived voice opportunities and this group of workers often choosing silence over voice. Arguably, some individuals who occupy NSFE positions can have high skill and labour scarcity, so they have a degree of labour market power, although these may be the minority.

Gig and digital platform work feature as particular aspects of NSFE (Watson, Kister, Graham, & Sinclair, 2021), with distinct challenges to current and future voice. While the platform providers (such as Uber, M-Turk, TaskRabbait) claim this arrangement ensures greater flexibility, autonomy and an opportunity to make money (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016), the growing work precarity and employment fragmentation (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2013, Wood et al., 2019) raises concerns regarding their opportunity to express voice (Healy et al., 2017). Under some systems, employer-employee relationships (and thus potential voice opportunities) may be mediated by the technology itself, with workers rarely if ever actually speaking directly with a human manager (Inversi, Buckley & Dundon, 2017). Notably, the platform economy and the way "in which digital platforms act as a form of 'internalised offshoring'" (Findlay & Thompson, 2017, p132) is by no means homogeneous, and differ in the areas they span, where they offer their work, and where they recruit their employees. Crowdworking tasks channelled via internet platforms, for example, can involve highly

skilled and professional workers located anywhere around the globe, in areas such as software programming. Conversely, similar digital labour platforms (DLP) may involve low paid and low skilled micro tasks, such as those offered through the likes of Mechanical Turk (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2014). Some platform providers such as Uber and Deliveroo regulate and distribute work tasks through a digital application, although the nature of labour is executed in a specific (local) space (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2014).

Furthermore, employees in NSFE often work in sectors which are (so far) less associated with institutional voice opportunities (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011), characterized by relatively low union membership (Sluiter et al., 2020), and with some employers who are actively hostile to union representation (Gall & Dundon, 2013)

On the other hand, the gig economy may attract workers with a different attachments to work that does not match institutional voice arrangements. This might affect the operation of informal versus formal voice channels in these sectors and their potential to facilitate or suppress each other. We do not know, yet, whether the organising structure for voice is best operated via individual, organizational, institutional or other collective arrangements in newer work regimes such as the gig economy.

Research suggests that limited access to traditional voice opportunities, in combination with working conditions in NSFE (Muntaner, 2018) has led to new forms of collective action and mobilization as a means to voice grievances to redress a lack of rights (Johnston & Land-Kazlauskas, 2018; Tassinari & Maccarrone, 2019). Specifically, new digital media provide opportunities to overcome local restrictions and were used by NSFE workers and gig workers globally to organize union influence, strikes, and spontaneous collective action. One such example is the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain

(IWGB), the first organic, bottom-up trade union to be formed since the 19th Century, specifically for riders in Deliveroo and to challenge the lack of universal employment rights.

Diversification

Employee voice is important for tapping into the potential of an increasingly diverse workforce and to recognize the needs of minority individuals and groups (Wilkinson *et al.*, 2018). As business activities become more international, voice research needs to consider international differences in both societal and workplace cultures, as well as differences in national legislation which affect voice opportunities (Knoll et al., 2021; Kwon & Farndale, 2020; Szabo et al., 2002).

Diversity and inclusiveness of minority individuals and groups

Minority groups become more prevalent in a time of growing workforce diversification (e.g., through globalization and immigration, open innovation and boundary spanning business models) and greater sensitivity to diverse ways of life (e.g., with respect to gender, race, sexuality). While members of minority groups might have particularly valuable information (e.g., temps as they provide a view from 'outside', minority groups as they have diverse views, and experts due to their unique knowledge), research suggests that their voices may be missing or muted in the workplace. (Trau, Härtel & Härtel, 2013). For example, there can be a blinding spiral as some groups of employees who do not use traditional voice opportunities, or are not included in corporate employee surveys, are excluded (Burns, Hyde, Killett, Poland, & Gray, 2014; Trau et al., 2013). Thus, there is a need to consider how the propensity to voice may be shaped by ethnicity and race, gender, sexuality, minority status, and organisational factors (Gunawardana, 2014). Here we refer to some key patterns and explanations for the neglect of minority worker voices.

A number of disciplines provide potential reasons for why members of minority groups lack voice opportunities and engage in self-censorship. Social psychological theories on conformity and majority influence, for example, suggest that groups tend towards

homogeneity and cohesion which makes the expression of diverging viewpoints less likely (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Janis, 1972). This might be an explanation for Ross's (2003) observation that in a start-up company that valued flat hierarchies and 'authenticity', older workers felt isolated and suffered in silence due to their difficulties to match the hours of their younger colleagues. Similar experiences might be made by females in male-dominated jobs, for example in Silicon Valley (Mundy, 2017).

Another explanation draws upon political scientist Noelle-Neumann (1974). She coined the term spiral of silence to denote a process in which members of a community who hold a minority opinion feel insecure and thus withhold information, while members who hold a majority opinion feel secure and thus express their views more willingly. As a consequence the minority opinion becomes further marginalized. Bowen and Blackmon (2003) applied the concept to employees with a *sexual orientation* that diverges from the mainstream. They found that employees who withhold information on their sexual orientation also tended to withhold their views on other topics. McNulty, McPhail, Inversi, Dundon and Nechanska (2018) examined LGBT voice networks in the context of expatriation and found that many workers opted for silence, either to protect themselves from harm or mistreatment when being relocated to a hostile LGBT cultural environment, or because they felt that speaking-up was futile due to shallow voice mechanisms.

Using Aristotelian philosophy to theorize on those employee groups more likely to participate in decision-making, Timming (2015) suggests that those employees considered to have "excellence" will be able to participate in decision making. This includes employees with high educational qualifications such as investment bankers and top technical experts. People who would be considered blue collar workers, are in lower or less powerful positions in the organizational hierarchy or work in stigmatized or gendered jobs, tend to have constrained or at best fragmented access to voice opportunities (Ashford & Kreiner, 1999; Cooper et al., in this issue; Ehrenreich, 2001; Donovan et al., 2016; Dundon et al., 2020;

MacMahon et al., 2018; Starzyk & Sonnentag, 2019). This is particularly the case when individuals believe that social hierarchies are justified, leading to those individuals with higher status and power, to voice more than those with lower power status, or who are subject to precarious NSFE experience (Islam & Zyphur, 2005). Migrant workers are often in positions of low power (Wright & Clibborn, 2020), impacting their ability to voice. A study of elderly-care workers in Sweden (Behtoui, Boréus, Neergaard & Yazdanpanah, 2017) showed that workers born in Asia, Latin America or Africa were less likely to perceive a positive climate for voice within their organization.

Globalization and cultural influences

As it is a general tendency in many disciplines including management science and psychology (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), most of the extant literature on voice comes from Western countries (Freeman, Boxall, & Haynes, 2007; Morrison, 2014). The neglect of voice research in other regions has at least two kinds of effects. First, we do not know how employees from neglected regions approach voice. Second, we assume that what we learn from studying Western and in part Confucian Asian workers can be generalized to voice patterns in neglected regions. Only recently has this neglect issue been acknowledged (Knoll et al., 2021; Kwon & Farndale, 2020; Wilkinson et al. 2020c), and here we mention some key issues which deserve further elaboration.

Culture is typically defined as a set of shared beliefs, values, norms and practices that are transmitted through institutions, learnt during socialization, and which can guide and justify both individual and collective principles and behavioural attitudes (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Schein, 2017). It is likely that a national or societal culture can influence how people behave at work. However, the effects are not straightforward. Societal culture affects individual beliefs, but also the shape of organizations' structures and processes, and the selection of managers – all of which have potential influence on voice and voice opportunities (Kwon & Farndale, 2020; Tsui et al., 2007). Most studies that tried to explain

the influence of culture on organizational behaviour relied on samples from rather few countries – often comparing typical Western and non-Western countries. For example, Park and Kim (2016) show how Korean workers react to adverse circumstances during their work tasks because of their desire to save both their own face and that of their colleague in a negative situation. Such studies (see also Wang et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020) can be informative but are limited in their explanatory power, because they do not give explanatory detail about different cultural variables and can also be prone to very unique contextual conditions (Spector et al., 2015; Tsui et al., 2007). In one of the few studies that draws on a considerable number of country samples, Knoll et al. (2021) found employee silence motives positively related to the power distance cultural dimension and negatively related to institutional collectivism and uncertainty avoidance. They did not find relationships between silence and assertiveness or in-group collectivism.

Societal culture might not be the single or most important factor to look at when elaborating on the effects of internationalization on voice (Dickson et al., 2004). For example, some countries also have specific traditions regarding employee participation which is secured by laws in the more coordinated and regulated countries (Szabo et al., 2002). Labour market institutions and social welfare systems which provide some protection for people who lose their job because they spoke up or tried to form a union are also likely to affect voice tendencies (Freeman & Medoff, 1980).

Besides a lack of knowledge on how voice is approached in other regions and a lack of knowledge on influence factors at the macro-level, a Western-centric approach to voice may also bias theoretical concepts and empirical measures. For example, the Western-centric approach has led to a narrow conceptualization of the voice construct from assertiveness-centered perspectives, that do not necessarily incorporate more nuanced or less confrontational behaviors evident in other non-Western cultures (Matsunga, 2015). For those immersed in Western cultures acting in a similar way regardless of context can be seen as a

sign of integrity, whereas, for other cultures such as the Japanese acting more adaptively in different contexts is a better indicator of social competence. (Kim, 2002; Kitayama & Markus, 1999). So, the current emphasis on direct and assertive expressions of voice may way be a reflection of Western values and low assertiveness might not be a generalizable indicator for cultures where voice is less likely to occur or is missing. Knoll et al. (2021) did not report a relationship between the cultural dimension of assertiveness and employee silence in a large international study. Such bias might be overcome with measures that consider different mechanisms to include worker voices has the aim of influencing management in decisions (Matsunga, 2015).

In sum, attempts to understand potential international differences in voice tendencies and opportunities need to consider that these differences (or similarities) may be the result of several factors, some of which have their roots in the societal culture; others in legislation, traditional norms and the socio-economic situation in which employees work and organizations operate. The latter can be increasingly more important given the growth in the outsourcing of work, facilitated on a global scale through technologies and supply chain structures, concentrating work in low-cost geographies which often have restricting configurations regarding worker voice and try to marginalize unions (Harvey, 2006). Ambiguities and barriers for voice also exist if employment schemes cross national borders and there are power asymmetries between corporations and governments (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Howcroft, 2014; Donaghey, Reinecke, Niforou & Lawson, 2013; Reinecke and Dongahey 2020). In this regard, Marchington and Dundon (2017) addressed the interaction of multi-level actors and institutional forces of influence, including employer associations, community organisations and NGOs, trade unions, management consultancies, and various state regulatory bodies that influence the spaces for fair voice.

Advancing new voice trajectories: Articles in the special issue

The articles that are included in this special issue apply a broad range of theories (e.g., conservation of resource theory, self-determination theory) and methodologies (e.g., time-lagged survey studies, interviews, focus groups, national survey data) to provide fresh insights into contemporary social, economic and technological developments affecting voice.

In the first article from Cooper et al. (this issue) question how gender influences work experiences and how these outcomes have been documented. They argue that there is limited knowledge concerning the gendered dimensions of voice. They contextualise work and gender across different levels affecting identities, including those of the individual, the social, and organisational policies, contrasting labour market segmentations, to assess how gender is related with voice. The data is used to test a new multi-level framework and their findings do not show any significant individual-level differences with regard to the voice outcomes for men and women. However, voice is found to diminish for both men and women who work in specific gendered employment roles and work settings (e.g in female-dominated sectors).

Focusing on gig workers, the next paper by Kougiannou and Mendonça examines how voice mechanisms can be utilized to mobilize against employer silence. Rather than using the term employee voice that we typically associate with standard employees, they use the concepts 'worker silence' and 'worker voice', and examine the trajectories of worker voice for localised gig workers working for an online food delivery platform in a UK city. Their qualitative study finds that algorithmic management techniques used to manage workers contributes to the managerial silencing of worker voice. However, not all workers were passive recipients and given the lack of direct voice channels, the online courier drivers formed a food courier network, which used various trajectories to voice. Importantly, their findings illustrate how, particularly within the platform economy, technology can be used to limit direct channels of voice, which has implications not only on the workers who have limited opportunities to raise concerns, but also the platform companies who miss out on

valuable input from their workers that could help with improving their organization. At the same time, however, they also show how technology, including social media, could effectively be used to create new collective channels of voice. Their paper provides important insights on how NSFE workers who have limited opportunities for direct voice can improve their voice opportunities and outcomes through solidarity and more indirect forms of voice.

The third paper in this issue, from Della Torre et al, provides research on small-to-medium sized enterprises (SMEs) that address debates about employee voice connectivity to firm innovation. The analysis addresses the potential impacts on firm-level innovation by examining both direct and indirect employee voice mechanisms that are specific to SMEs, using a large dataset of over 17,890 European firms. The data advances a re-conceptualisation of direct voice that might be more typical in SMEs, by incorporating verbal dialogue with written forms of communication. The findings show that as firm size increases, then indirect voice mechanisms have a stronger association with higher innovative outcomes. The implications of the study may resonate with more pluralistic approaches towards voice that engage with theories of HRM that capture specifically applicable policy prescriptions for SME settings.

Röllmann, Weiss and Zacher's paper in this issue, drawing from Cangiano & Parker's (2016) dual-pathway model of proactive behaviour, acknowledge the ambiguous nature of voice, and propose that voice might have energy-generating and resource-depleting effects. Moreover, they suggest that job insecurity, a common context condition for many employees in new employment schemes, members of marginalized groups, and employees who work in organizations that are hostile towards voice, moderates the effects of voice on well-being. In their two-wave study of 733 full-time employees in Germany, the authors found that voice predicted vigour (characterized by higher levels of emotional energy and mental resilience at work), but not fatigue (a state characterized by strain and lacking energy). Moreover, the stimulating effect of voice was not influenced by the level of job insecurity but the

relationship between voice and fatigue, in contrast, was affected by employees' experience of job insecurity. Specifically, when job insecurity was high (low), voice was related to increased (reduced) fatigue. Although effects were small, these findings indicate that when working under conditions of job insecurity – which are associated with many of the societal, economic, and technological developments that we described above – voice can take an additional toll on employees' well-being which eventually may prevent employees from engaging in voice.

In sum the articles published in this special issue draw our attention to the widening reach of research being conducted concerning employee voice including a variety of theories and methodologies. While contributing to academic knowledge , they also open up new areas for future research around the social, economic, and technological (re)configurations affecting work and worker voices at multiple levels. In addition the insights provided can help inform policy and practice in developing more effective voice for the benefit of workers, organisations and society.

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