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**REVIEW ARTICLE**

# The role of contextual voice efficacy on employee voice and silence

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Email: [adrian.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:adrian.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au)**Abstract**

Given recent studies have begun to question the siloed nature of employee voice research this paper attempts to theorise the boundaries between Organisational Behavior (OB), Human Resource Management (HRM) and Industrial and Employment Relations (I/ER) voice. Researchers examine specific organisational contexts that may influence employees' voice behavior, with OB researchers paying particular attention to the micro contextual influences of leadership behavior and psychological safety climate on individual voice behavior; HR researchers emphasizing the meso role of HR practices that may facilitate employee voice; and I/ER researchers focusing more on how macro institutional supports such as unions and collective bargaining can protect employees and facilitate voice. The paper proposes a model of "contextual voice efficacy" as a bridge between these disparate literatures, and develops propositions as to how OB, HR and I/ER voice mechanisms can combine together in a single model.

**KEYWORDS**

consultation, employee involvement, employee voice, participation, review

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds focus their attention on specific organisational contexts that may influence employees' voice (EV) behavior (Wilkinson, Barry, & Morrison, 2020). Organisational Behavior (OB)

**Abbreviations:** CVE, contextual voice efficacy; EV, employee voice; HRM, Human Resource Management; I/ER, Industrial/Employment Relations; LPT, labor process theory; OB, Organisational Behavior.

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researchers focus on the contextual influences of leadership behavior and psychological safety climate on voice (Morrison, 2011, 2014). Human Resource Management (HRM) researchers emphasize the role of HR functions and management practices that may facilitate employee voice (e.g., Wilkinson et al., 2013). Meanwhile, Industrial/Employment Relations I/ER researchers focus on how institutional supports such as collective bargaining and legislation can safeguard employees' rights and provide opportunities to voice (e.g., Freeman & Medoff, 1984). These differences in emphasis themselves reflect differences, respectively, in individual, organisational and institutional levels of analysis.

EV is conceptualised by the bulk of OB literature as a behavior that "is constructive and intended to contribute positively to the organisation" (Van Dyne et al., 2003, pp. 1360–1361), with a smaller OB literature focusing on justice-based voice aimed at correcting wrongdoing (see Klaas et al., 2012). A central focus of the dominant OB stream has been to understand the group (e.g., managers' openness) and individual (e.g., prosocial motives) antecedents of workers' decision to voice or remain silent in instances where they have meaningful ideas and suggestions for work-related improvement (Van Dyne et al., 2003, p. 1361; Morrison, 2014).

Empirical research in OB has mainly focused on how organisational and group contexts shape employees' psychological safety, which in turn influences EV behaviors (Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010; Liang et al., 2012). This research, however, rarely seeks to explain the apparent contradiction that employees sometimes voice out in a confrontational way (see Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014 for an exception, and where this type of voice is referred to as "destructive"), even when the context is unsafe or unfriendly to employee voice (Lebel & Patil, 2018; Li et al., 2020). Equally, there is also a growing recognition that employees' co-operative voice can be driven not only by pro-social or pro-organisation motives, but also by their concerns about fairness in the organisation and their own self-interests (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Klass, Olson-Buchanan, & Ward, 2012; Xu et al., 2020).

Drawing from the HR and I/ER literatures allows us to understanding how systems and structures, as well as OB group and organisational contexts, impact voice. In doing so we combine individual (OB), organisational (OB and HR) and institutional (I/ER) levels of analysis to problematize the notion of context by offering an expanded perspective and fine-grained model of different contextual factors that shape the processes through which EV motives are translated into different forms of voice behaviors. We incorporate three voice motives into our proposed model: the pro-organisation motives of co-operatively changing the status quo for the benefits of the organisation (Morrison, 2011, 2014; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), the justice-based motives of correcting unfairness and mistreatment in the workplace (Klass et al., 2012), and the self-interest motives of overcoming obstacles to achieving personally relevant outcomes (Milliken et al., 2003). We introduce the construct of contextual voice efficacy (CVE)– defined as the extent to which organisational context allows for voice to be heard and acted upon, potentially through changes in organisational policies and practices.

We posit that contexts providing strong CVE lead employees to engage in cooperative voice, such as offering suggestions about organisational practices (Morrison, 2011, 2014). By contrast, when employees experience weak CVE, their pro-organisation voice motives may result in silence and their justice-based and self-interest voice motives may lead to conflictual voice (e.g., Miceli & Near, 1992). We further identify four types of contextual voice mechanisms: management-led formal voice mechanisms (e.g., grievance procedures, suggestion schemes), management-led informal voice mechanisms (e.g., managerial openness that produces a receptive voice climate), employee-led formal voice mechanisms (e.g., work councils and trade unions), and employee-led informal voice mechanism (e.g., online social sharing groups and web-based chatting groups). We argue that these various voice mechanisms can either enhance or suppress employees' CVE, which in turn determines how various voice motives lead to co-operative voice, silence, or conflictual voice. The theoretical model and the associated propositions developed in this paper allow us to open a new avenue of voice research in three ways. First, the construct of CVE allows a sharper focus on how context shapes employee choices to engage in co-operative voice, or voice to express their opposition/resistance to managerial, or simply to remain silent. Second, our proposed model incorporates three distinctive voice motives (i.e. pro-organisation, justice-based, and self-interest motives) to provide a more complete picture, in which different and contrasting motives are translated into different forms of voice in different contexts. Third, in line with earlier critiques of the siloed nature of voice research (see Kaufman, 2015), the model proposed in this paper

is integrative and combines individual (OB), organisational (OB and HR) and institutional (I/ER) levels of analysis to include not just the OB voice literature's focus on the contextual influence of socio-relational factors (such as leadership styles and group climates), but also incorporates insights from other bodies of literature, such as the impacts of structural (e.g. HR policies), institutional (e.g. collective voice mechanisms), and socio-cultural (e.g. social media) contexts to understand EV behaviors.

## 1.1 | Pro-organisation, justice-based, and self-interest voice motives

OB research has been largely based on the assumption that the primary motive of voice behavior is constructive and prosocial (Van Dyne et al., 2003; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). As a result, in OB research, voice is seen as an expression of the desire of individual employees to communicate information and ideas to management for the benefit of the organisation. An underlying theme of "what is good for the firm must be good for the worker" (Klaas et al., 2012, pp. 327–328) is evident and hence there is limited consideration of how the employment relationship creates a power imbalance between workers and management that can limit the capacity of workers to engage in meaningful voice (see Nechanska et al., 2020).

Two meta reviews of the voice literature, however, have questioned this pro-organisation assumption. Klass et al.'s (2012) review pays more attention to voice that is intended to alter and correct unfair organisational practices. They argued that this type of voice is largely driven by justice-based motives. Bashshur and Oc's (2015) review, on the other hand, shows that instrumental and self-focused motives are important drivers of employee voice, such as concerns about individuals' workload allocation, pay increment, and promotion opportunities. Supporting these views, research on voice in the HRM and I/ER literatures have offered insights into the wide-ranging motives of voice in the workplace (eg Dundon et al., 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2018).

With the decline of unionism as a primary voice mechanism from the 1980s onwards, HR became interested in management-led voice forms such as team briefings, town hall meetings, problem-solving schemes, newsletters, and engagement/attitude surveys (Marchington, 2007). Like OB researchers, HRM researchers acknowledge the co-operative and pro-organisation aspects of voice, but, importantly, they also place considerable emphasis on voice driven by individuals' fairness concerns and self-interests in pursuing better treatment in the workplace.

The mainstream I/ER literature also diverges from the OB voice literature in placing great importance on how to channel and deal with discontent through the provision of voice opportunities (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). This research has remained largely consistent with the definition that Hirschman (1970, p. 30) used for voice as "an attempt at all to change, rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs". In adapting Hirschman's principles for an I/ER audience, Freeman and Medoff (1984) promoted collective voice via trade unions because unions can provide a strong vehicle for employees to voice their grievances—which are considered inevitable given the underlying conflict embedded in the employment relationship—and have legitimacy because they are independent of the employer.

I/ER, HRM and organisational justice researchers therefore focus on voice behavior that is primarily driven by employees' justice-based, self-interest, and self-determination voice motives (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Budd, 2004; Klass et al., 2012). They take a broad definition of employee voice as concerned with worker as well as organisational interests and define 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 organisational affairs relating to issues that affect their work, their interests, and the interests of managers and owners" (Wilkinson, Dundon, et al., 2020:5).

Despite this unity, we note that there are important distinctions between, and even within, these disciplines. At one end of the I/ER spectrum, voice is informed by Labor Process Theory (LPT) as exemplified by Nechanska et al. (2020), with management seen as being less concerned with garnering ideas and feedback and more interested in systematic silencing and control (see also Chillas & Marks, 2020; Donaghey et al., 2011). This, more "critical" perspective, is less common in the North American literature research where voice has strong roots in the

benevolent/paternalistic traditions of welfare capitalism, wherein voice also contributes to the success of the organisation (e.g. Kaufman, 2014). In contrast, UK/European I/ER research is grounded in a more pluralistic tradition, and is informed by a history of class-based workplace conflict (Brewster et al., 2019). I/ER researchers are, however, unified in seeing the employment relationship as having an inherent power imbalance favoring management, with voice a means by which employees can not only express their interests but also contest managerial dominance (Dundon et al., 2022).

Organisational justice literature also suggests that unfair organisational practices tend to induce employees' stronger feelings of uncertainty and threat of their personal control over their goal attainments (e.g., Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005). In addition, I/ER and HRM studies have demonstrated that employees' grievances are often the result of management restrictions on individual autonomy and freedom to pursue justified personal interests (e.g., Budd, 2004). Employees are motivated to gain a certain degree of control over the processes and means for their personal goal attainment (Barrick et al., 2013). Voice behavior can be seen as part of this endeavour and as a self-control initiative rooted in concepts of industrial citizenship. Although most OB studies focus on pro-social or pro-organisation voice motives, some explain how individuals' experienced sense of self-control would also influence their pro-organisational voice behavior (Kassing, 2002; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012; Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010).

Therefore, unlike pro-organisation voice motives, justice-based and self-interest voice motives may not only lead to constructive or co-operative voice but may also result in more resistant and conflictual forms of voice as a means to regain personal control and contest managerial dominance, as evidenced in the HRM, I/ER and organisational justice literatures (e.g., Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Klass et al., 2012; Marchington, 2007). There is, however, a need to develop a theoretical model that depicts when these various voice motives are translated into employees' co-operative voice, silence, or conflictual voice. We posit that organisational contexts shape these processes, and in the following sections we develop such a model.

## 2 | CONTEXTUAL VOICE EFFICACY AND VOICE

Since upward voice challenges the status quo and the power base of managers, it carries a certain degree of personal risk (Ashford et al., 1998; Morrison & Milliken, 2000) and as a result, psychological safety plays a central role for OB researchers to theorise and predict when employees tend to speak up or decide to remain silent (Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010; Liang et al., 2012). Managerial behavior such as their openness to voice and social contexts such as organisational climates have been identified as the key contextual factors that give rise to employees' feelings of psychological safety (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Detert & Treviño, 2010; Detert & Burris, 2007; Kassing, 2002; Li et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2017; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012; Xu et al., 2020).

However psychological safety is not sufficient to explain the outcomes of a range of voice motives, that include justice-based and self-interest motives, as well as pro-organisation motives. Thus, whereas employees motivated by pro-organisation motives may simply remain silent if they perceive voice to be too risky in the specific organisational context (see Morrison, 2014), employees driven instead by strong justice-based and self-interest voice motives are more likely to choose not to be silent but instead to engage in confrontational forms of voicing even in an unfavorable and unsafe climate (e.g., Miceli et al., 2008).

OB researchers Maynes and Podsakoff (2014:90) recognised the need to move beyond looking at voice motivated by positive attributes, (eg "improvement oriented, intended to benefit the organisation, altruistically motivated"), to include also what they called "negative attributes ... (e.g., hinders rather than helps, antagonistic toward the organisation)." Maynes and Podsakoff (2014:87–88) specifically argued that "the narrow focus of past [OB] research may have precluded investigations into other types of voice" and, accordingly, they expanded voice behaviors to include what they labeled "destructive" voice.

While we agree with the wider scope of voice behaviors adopted by these authors, we do not adopt the standard OB terms of constructive and destructive voice as these words are loaded and carry strong pejorative connotations.

These authors specifically include making critical comments about organisational practices and policies as part of their definition of “destructive voice”,<sup>1</sup> and we would note that an I/ER or LPT perspective would not see such voice as destructive. Consistent with the call by Delbridge and Keenoy (2010) for HRM to engage more openly and critically with managerial language and assumptions, we also note that these OB terms reflect a strongly unitarist perspective on the employment relationship which disguises tendencies toward managerialism. Indeed, the term “destructive” is suggestive of voicing that is concerned with or motivated by a desire to cause (organisational) harm. But the type of voice envisaged could also be concerned with a desire to prevent harm (for example through actions such as whistleblowing). Similarly, adversarial collective bargaining might also be seen in this light as an example of destructive voice, but in many liberal market economies, collective bargaining and associated industrial action has a long history not driven primarily by a desire to cause (organisational) harm rather by a pragmatic strategy intended to achieve and defend workers' interests (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020). Hence, we replace the terms constructive and destructive with the terms co-operative and conflictual voice in this paper and in our model.

To have a more complete understanding of how contexts shape employee voice, we need to (1) include co-operative voice, conflictual voice, and silence in a single model; (2) identify a new underlying mechanism in the link between contextual characteristics and employee voice behavior; and (3) expand our conceptual scope of voice contexts that may shape employee voice behaviors. In the rest of this section we will propose a new construct of CVE and discuss how CVE shapes the effects of voice motives on voice outcomes.

## 2.1 | Co-operative voice, conflictual voice, and silence

Co-operative voices are those aimed to help the organisation improve its functioning and practices, and includes challenging voice and supportive voice (Burriss, 2012), and promotive voice and prohibitive voice (Liang et al., 2012). Conflictual voice refers to the voice behavior that aims to resist organisational hegemony (e.g., adversarial collective bargaining with management and whistle blowing) (see Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Miceli et al., 2008). Silence is defined as employees' withholding their views and opinions about critical issues and problems from those who can effectively resolve these issues and problems (Milliken et al., 2003). Silence is distinct from cooperative or conflictual voice as it reflects employees' failure to voice even though they have important information to convey (Morrison, 2014). Employees with strong voice motives may choose to express co-operative or conflictual voice or they may also suppress their voice motives to remain silent under certain circumstances. Therefore, it is important to treat co-operative voice, conflictual voice, and silence as distinct voice behaviors when we consider the contextual influence on EV.

## 2.2 | Contextual voice efficacy

In addition to psychological safety, individuals' voice efficacy—the extent to which individuals believe that their voice would lead to desirable outcomes—is another critical element of the decision calculus of voice (Morrison, 2014). Yet, most empirical studies in the field of OB focus on the relationships between voice and efficacy-related cognitions at the individual level such as probability of success (Ashford et al., 1998), sense of control (e.g., Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008, 2012), and voice futility (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Morrison et al. (2011) were the first to operationalise voice efficacy at the group level. These authors proposed the construct of collective voice efficacy—shared belief about the group's capability to voice, and showed that collective voice efficacy strengthened the positive effects of employees' group identification on their voice behavior. More recently, Lebel and Patil (2018) demonstrated that individual-level voice efficacy driven by prosocial motivation is positively related to voice. Although OB researchers acknowledge that voice efficacy is largely shaped by contextual constraints (Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000), there is so far no systematic discussion depicting how this individual voice efficacy is linked with specific contextual characteristics such as voice systems or structures.

By contrast, I/ER and HRM research has provided more insights into how certain contexts give rise to EV efficacy (Budd et al., 2022; Kaufman, 2015; Prouska et al., 2022). In the HRM literature, management-led grievance systems and participative management schemes are shown to potentially increase employees' belief that their voice will change the status quo (Gollan, 2007; Zhou et al., 2019). In I/ER, researchers are more explicitly oriented toward the efficacy of collective voice, seeing institutions (such as trade unions and works councils) as critical to voice being heard and that employees will be protected if their voice is not welcomed (Brewster et al., 2015; Freeman & Medoff, 1984). As noted above, there are also differences within disciplines, and some I/ER researchers adopt a more critical perspective on voice than others, especially within the labor process tradition where notions of control and resistance are central, while others see voice as part of an ongoing tension between conflict and cooperation with the employment relationship.

To capture the processes through which contextual characteristics shape EV or choice of voice behaviors, we propose the construct of CVE which we define as the extent to which organisational context allows for voice to be heard and acted upon, potentially through changes in organisational policies and practices. CVE is distinct from individual voice efficacy (Lebel & Patil, 2018; Morrison et al., 2011). While CVE captures individuals' assessments of and beliefs about voice effectiveness in specific organisational contexts, individual voice efficacy is determined by individual characteristics and experiences irrespective of contextual influences. CVE is also conceptually different from the construct of implicit voice beliefs, which refer to a set of socially acquired beliefs about what makes voice risky or inappropriate in organisational hierarchies (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Individuals develop relatively stable implicit voice beliefs over time through their life experience and vicarious learning. CVE, by contrast, is context specific. Whereas OB voice looks at the work group or organisation as the context we (informed also by I/ER and HRM) look at the role played by voice systems and structures as critical contextual elements.

We propose that CVE may directly influence EV behavior and may determine how pro-organisation, justice-based, and self-interest voice motives are translated into co-operative voice, silence, or conflictual voice. A high level of CVE manifests in employees' beliefs that their organisational contexts are conducive to effective voice. When employees believe that their voice may make a difference, they are likely to engage in more co-operative voice and less likely to remain silent or express conflicting voice, no matter whether they are driven by pro-organisation, justice-based, or self-interest voice motives. They feel that the organisation is interested in what they have to say and prepared to act rather than ignore, and this creates the appropriate context for all types of voice.

By contrast, when employees believe that their voice is likely to be met with resistance, they may respond with silence or even conflictual voice to realise their motives. In other words, a lower level of CVE may not only suppress co-operative voice and generate silence, but also induce a higher level of conflictual voice. At one end the spectrum this could include strongly conflictual actions that are oppositional to management (see eg Dundon & Dobbins, 2015; Van den Broek & Dundon, 2012) while more moderate conflictual voice might include pragmatic response to employer (in)action and recalcitrance with workers deciding to assert their power through their union to address grievances or pursue collective interests (Doellgast & Benassi, 2020; Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

The above argumentation leads to our first proposition:

**Proposition 1.** *CVE is positively related to co-operative voice, but negatively related to silence and conflictual voice.*

Our theoretical model further suggests that CVE plays a critical role in shaping the link between voice motives and employee voice, but its moderating role on the effects of pro-organisation voice motives may be different from that on the effects of justice-based and self-interest voice motives. Past OB research at the individual level has suggested that employees driven by strong pro-organisation voice motives are more likely to voice out issues that are constructive to the organisation. We argue that CVE is a critical condition that regulates the impact of pro-organisation motives on co-operative voice. CVE reflects employees' beliefs as to whether their voice will be heard and acted upon in the organisational context. When the context induces a high level of efficacy, we expect that pro-organisation voice motives tend to lead to co-operative voice because voicing employees may have high

expectations that their voice may contribute to improvement of organisational functioning. By contrast, if employees do not think that their voice behavior will make any difference in the context, they may simply suppress their co-operative and prosocial tendencies, and choose to remain silent (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). We thus develop the following proposition:

**Proposition 2a.** *Pro-organisational voice motives are more likely to produce co-operative voice when employees experience a higher level of CVE; yet more likely to result in silence when employees experience a lower level of CVE.*

As we argued earlier, the logic for psychological safety widely adopted in the OB literature may fall short in predicting employees' reactions if their voice driven by justice-based or self-interest motives is blocked by the organisation. Our model and the construct of CVE provide more precise predictions of EV behavior driven by these motives. Although I/ER studies have generally assumed that voice is dissenting and antagonistic to the organisation or management, these assumptions may also fall short as it is possible that when employees have high CVE they may choose to engage in co-operative voice (e.g., input into how organisations can address employees' interests by improving organisational processes) rather than conflictual voice. Also, when employees believe that expressing issues related to organisational fairness and personal interests can influence organisational practices, they are more likely to be motivated to voice such issues co-operatively.

HRM and I/ER literatures have indeed documented that when progressive management practices can strengthen employees' sense of efficacy, individual and collective voice tends to be more cooperative. The Kaiser Permanente Labor Management Partnership is an example of a sustained labor management partnership that covers some 100,000 employees, 10 different national unions, and 26 local unions in health care (Kochan et al., 2009). The partnership helped turn around Kaiser Permanente and integrated their partnership into the standard operating model for delivering health care by engaging teams of employees, supervisors, and physicians in team-based continuous improvement processes, and by including protocols for managing technological change with direct involvement and voice of employees and union representatives (Kochan et al., 2009).

By contrast, when employees' CVE is low, they are less likely to believe that their voice associated with organisational fairness and personal interests will be heard by management or can make a difference; and rather than addressing such matters through co-operative voice, they may choose to remain silent, or to resort to conflictual forms of voice as a means of self-determination (Budd, 2014). For example, workers who voice informally may later decide to involve their union in more formal and conflictual voicing in cases where their employer is unwilling to respond to their concerns (see Gunningham, 2008; Gunningham, N., & Sinclair, D. 2009 in relation to voicing health and safety concerns). Hence, justice-based and self-interest motives may result in co-operative voice when CVE is high, but silence or conflictual voice when contextual voice efficacy is low. Thus, we develop the following proposition.

**Proposition 2b.** *Justice-based and self-interest voice motives are more likely to produce co-operative voice when employees experience a higher level of CVE; yet more likely to lead to silence or conflictual voice when employees experience a lower level of CVE.*

### 3 | SOURCE OF CONTEXTUAL VOICE EFFICACY

So what contextual characteristics help generate CVE? Social information processing theory suggests that contextual factors provide employees with information cues about what behaviors are appropriate and lead to effective outcomes in specific organisational contexts (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Most OB studies have focused on safety climate and leadership behavior (Morrison, 2011, 2014) whereas HRM researchers focus more on organisational policies and management practices that affect employee voice (e.g., Dundon et al., 2022) and I/ER researchers place more emphasis on broader institutional and legal settings that facilitate collective voice (e.g., Hickland et al., 2020;



TABLE 1 Typology of contextual voice mechanisms.

	Management-led	Employee-led
Formal voice channeling	Grievance system	Work councils
	Suggestion schemes	Collective bargaining
	High involvement HR systems	Unions
Informal voice channeling	Culture	Informal social rumination groups
	Managerial openness	Dissidents groups
	Organisational support	Web-based chatting groups

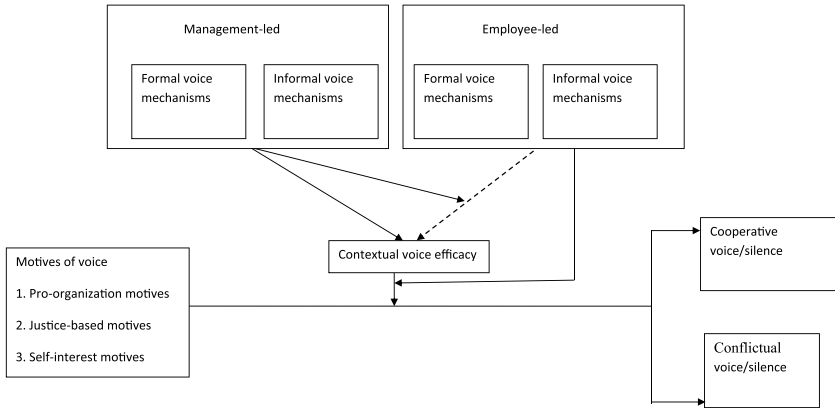


FIGURE 1 Contextual influence on co-operative voice and conflictual voice. The dash line indicate that we do not expect employee-led formal voice mechanisms and employee-led informal voice mechanisms to have main effects on contextual voice efficacy.

Kaufman, 2015). Drawing from these various streams of research, we propose four organisational voice mechanisms that form the key contextual characteristics shaping employees' CVE, along the dimensions of formal versus informal voice mechanisms and management-led versus employee-led voice mechanisms (Table 1).

Management-led formal voice mechanisms are those organisational policies and practices, such as suggestion schemes and employee involvement programs, that encourage employees to voice. Management-led informal voice mechanisms refer to managers' behaviors and attitudes toward employee voice during workplace interactions. These managerial behaviors and attitudes are usually not formalised by organisational policies and rules yet may exert substantial influence on employees' experienced voice utility. Employee-led formal voice mechanisms are institutionalised entities, such as trade unions and work councils. Finally, employee-led informal voice mechanisms, such as online discussion platforms and social media, are operated by employees (sometimes outside the organisation) and serve as a channel for employees to voice work-related concerns. Based on this typology of contextual voice mechanisms, we develop an integrative multi-level model of contextual influence, shown in Figure 1.

Morrison and Milliken (2000) suggest that organisational structure and policy may influence how employees assess the extent to which voice is welcome and effective in the specific organisational context. Some formal mechanisms and practices such as grievance systems, speak up schemes, and quality circles provide employees with a legitimised voicing opportunity to potentially influence or contest management decisions. Whereas earlier I/ER research on voice has tended to categorise all such non-union schemes as premised on the motive of union avoidance and largely ineffectual, such claims now appear overly simplistic (see, Bryson, 2004) and there has been greater interest in the array of voice structures which organisations establish (Chamberlin et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019). These management-led formal voice mechanisms have been shown to increase employees' belief that their voice will

change the status quo and thus fulfil their desire for self-control (Gollan, 2007). By contrast, some organisations may focus on top-down communication, leaving employees less likely to develop the belief that their voice will make any difference. Taken together, we expect that:

**Proposition 3.** *The presence of management-led formal voice mechanisms increases employees' CVE.*

Theoretical and empirical works on voice have predominantly focused on how managerial behavior shapes employee voice (Morrison, 2014; Morrison & Milliken, 2000) by signaling to employees the potential reactions from managers. For example, if managers demonstrate openness toward voice, employees are more likely to believe that voice will make a difference (e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007; Fast et al., 2014). By contrast, if managers constantly resist employee voice and refute employee suggestions, employees are more likely to see voice as futile. Managers' discouraging behaviors may cause employees to experience a low level of CVE. We therefore develop the following proposition.

**Proposition 4.** *The presence of management-led informal voice mechanisms increases employees' CVE.*

We also expect a joint effect of management-led formal and informal voice mechanisms on employees' CVE. In Morrison and Milliken's (2000) theoretical framework of organisational silence, organisational policies or structures (formal) and managerial practices (informal) jointly predict employees' engagement in voice behavior through changing their beliefs in the utility of voice. Indirect evidence has supported this reasoning. Huang, et al. (2005) examined the joint effect of participative climate and formalised employee involvement on organisational silence and found that the negative relationship between participative climate and organisational silence is stronger in organisational units with more formalised employee involvement schemes than those with fewer formalised involvement schemes. The authors regard participative climate as the result of managerial behaviors that are open to voice—a form of management-led informal voice mechanism; and formalised employee involvement as the outcome of organisational policies—a form of management-led formal voice mechanism. Although Huang et al. (2005) only tested the joint effect of these two voice mechanisms on organisational silence, implicit in Morrison and Milliken's (2000) model is the idea that these voice mechanisms should influence EV-related efficacy. We therefore expect a similar joint effect of both mechanisms on employee contextual voice efficacy.

**Proposition 5.** *Management-led formal and informal voice mechanisms interactively predict employee's CVE, in that the positive relationship between management-led formal voice mechanisms on CVE is strong when management-led informal voice mechanisms are more rather than less effective.*

While OB voice literature has paid scant attention to the other two voice mechanisms: the employee-led formal and informal voice mechanisms, the former has been extensively studied in the I/ER literature in terms of institutionalised collective voice mechanisms such as unions and work councils (eg Brewster et al., 2015; Freeman & Medoff, 1984). However, the latter has, until recently, drawn far less attention in the voice literature. Examples of informal employee-led voice mechanisms include web-chatting platforms and social media, which enable employees to express their views and opinions quickly to a wider audience (Ellmer & Reichel, 2021; Khan et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2015; Thornthwaite et al., 2020).

We propose that these two employee-led voice mechanisms may influence employees' CVE indirectly, depending on the effectiveness of management-led voice mechanisms. Put differently, trade unions or other forms of employee-led formal voice mechanisms may play a substitution role in the effect of management-led (formal or informal) voice mechanisms (Bryson, 2004). In the presence of effective management-led formal or informal voice mechanisms, employees tend to have a high level of CVE irrespective of the presence of effective employee-led voice mechanisms, because management-led voice mechanisms allow employees to gain a sense of control through voicing. By contrast, in the absence of effective management-led formal/informal voice mechanisms, the presence of effective employee-led formal voice mechanisms should play a critical role in enhancing employees' CVE. This

is because, in such a situation employees may still exert influence on management practices through voicing, safeguarded by employee-led formal voice mechanisms. We therefore propose that:

**Proposition 6.** *The effectiveness of management-led formal/informal voice mechanisms moderates the impact of employee-led formal voice mechanisms on employee contextual voice efficacy.*

In a similar vein, we do not expect a strong and direct influence of employee-led informal voice mechanisms on employees' CVE. The effect of employee-led informal voice mechanisms is likely to be contingent on the presence or absence of effective management-led mechanisms. Specifically, mechanisms such as web-chatting platforms and social media provide an alternative way for employees to voice their concerns about organisational practices (Martin et al., 2015). Employee voice through these informal channels, as "people powered communication" (Dreher, 2014), is less likely to be constrained by management. However, when employees can exert influence through highly effective management-led voice mechanisms, employee-led informal mechanisms may have limited impact on employees' CVE for two reasons. First, employees may not be motivated to use these external channels to voice their concerns, as they have confidence in the effectiveness of management-led voice mechanisms. Second, employees are less likely to see web-chatting platforms and social media as necessary to express their views and influence management practices.

By contrast, when management-led formal/informal voice mechanisms are less effective, employee-led informal voice mechanisms may undermine employees' contextual voice efficacy for two reasons. First, when organisational voice mechanisms are ineffective, employees may be motivated to make use of those informal voice channels to express their views and gain a sense of personal control in an unrestricted manner, further undermining their expectations of outcomes of voice in the organisational context. Second, the experience of sharing and venting their views on organisational issues through social media or internet discussion forums will induce employees' negative attitudes toward their own organisations and amplify employees' disbelief in the effectiveness of voice in the particular organisational context. Taken together, we develop the following proposition.

**Proposition 7.** *The effectiveness of management-led formal/informal voice mechanisms moderate the impact of employee-led informal voice mechanisms on employee CVE, such that when management-led formal/informal voice mechanisms are ineffective, the relationship between the effectiveness of employee-led informal voice mechanisms and CVE is negative; and when management-led formal/informal voice mechanisms are effective, employees' CVE remains high irrespective of the effectiveness of employee-led informal voice mechanisms.*

Employee-led formal and informal voice mechanisms may also shape the joint effect of voice motives and CVE on conflictual voice. As we argued earlier, whether self-interest motives, justice-based motives, and pro-organisation motives lead to co-operative voice, silence, or conflictual voice is dependent on employees' CVE. Voice motives are likely to promote co-operative voice when CVE is high, but silence and conflictual voice when CVE is low. We further contend that as employee-led formal/informal voice mechanisms tend to provide alternative voice channels for employees to gain a sense of self-control, the presence of such employee-led mechanisms may further intensify the negative influence of low CVE. Specifically, when CVE is low and there exists effective employee-led formal/informal voice mechanisms, employees driven by the three motives are most likely to seek to exert personal control through engaging in conflictual voice and least likely to engage in co-operative voice. This is because the presence of effective employee-led formal/informal mechanisms such as unions and web-chatting platforms allows employees to make use of these mechanisms to confront the views of management.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of our paper is to develop new insights into what drives employees to adopt different voice strategies by drawing theoretical insights from I/ER, HRM and OB research. Although much theoretical insight from

previous research has been derived from an inductive approach, this accumulated knowledge enables us to synthesise a new theoretical understanding of the phenomenon using a deductive approach. The deductive approach is particularly useful when we have sufficient established theories and abundant empirical evidence, while the inductive approach is particularly useful when theoretical explanations and empirical evidence are not available. Over the last four decades, we have accumulated a large number of studies on voice across all three disciplines, which allow us to deductively develop these testable propositions, however this research has to this point been conducted primarily within discrete disciplinary boundaries with little integration.

In line with recent voice scholarship (see, Wilkinson, Barry and Morrison, 2020) the aim of this paper is to broaden and integrate literatures rather than work within existing silos. Thus, whereas most voice studies in OB demonstrate that employees' prosocial motives of bringing benefits to the organisation drive them to engage in co-operative voice behaviors, we extend that logic to demonstrate how employees' co-operative voice might also be driven by their concerns about fairness in the organisation and their self-interests (Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Klass et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2020). Second, we move beyond the assumption (implicit in much OB voice research) that employee and management interests are the same and hence voice is co-operative (e.g., Morrison, 2014). We do so by drawing on I/ER research which emphasizes the "structured antagonism" between employees and management (Edwards, 1995). Thus, employee voice need not necessarily contribute constructively to the goal attainments of organisations (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Budd, 2004). Third, psychological safety has been widely employed by voice researchers in OB as the key mechanism explaining how organisational or group contexts lead employees to speak up or remain silent (Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010; Liang et al., 2012). This framework, however, needs refinement as it cannot fully explain why employees engage in conflictual voice even in environments that are not conducive to voice (e.g., King et al., 2019; Lebel & Patil, 2018; Li et al., 2020). Fourth, we widen the theoretical framework developed by Morrison and Milliken (2000) to investigate two key contextual factors of employee voice that are primarily shaped by the management: organisational structure/policies and managerial behaviors. Apart from management efforts, however, employees may also take initiative to shape the context of voice, such as by accessing collective voice entities (Brewster et al., 2015; Freeman & Medoff, 1984) or setting up web-chatting or social media platforms (Martin et al., 2015).

Our interest is in the conditions and motives under which employees choose to voice in a co-operative or conflictual manner, or to remain silent. We therefore draw from voice research in the literatures of OB, I/ER, and HRM to propose a model of employee voice in which different voice motives lead to alternative voice behaviors, or silence. Central to our model is the notion of CVE. Our key proposition is that employees' beliefs in the extent to which their voice can make a difference in the specific organisational context plays an important role in determining whether they direct their pro-organisation, justice-based, or self-interest motives toward co-operative voice, conflictual voice, or silence. Specifically, our theoretical model predicts that pro-organisation voice motives tend to lead to co-operative voice when CVE is high but result in silence when it is low. The model further predicts that employees' justice-based and self-interest motives may indeed drive employees to engage in co-operative voice behavior where employees experience high CVE, and cause employees to remain silent about co-operative suggestions and opinions, and to express conflictual or dissenting voice, when they develop low CVE.

Our model also allows us to expand the conceptual scope of contextual characteristics and depict how various contexts may influence EV efficacy. Building on these insights from diverse disciplines, we have identified four types of contextual voice mechanisms: management-led formal voice mechanisms, management-led informal voice mechanisms, employee-led formal voice mechanisms, and employee-led informal voice mechanisms. We posit that management-led formal and informal voice mechanisms can independently enhance employees' CVE, and also these two types of mechanisms may reinforce each other's effects to buttress such belief. Our model also postulates that employee-led formal and informal voice mechanisms may influence employees' CVE only when the management-led formal/informal voice mechanisms are ineffective. When management-led voice mechanisms become ineffective, while employee-led formal voice mechanisms may complement (and in a sense assist) the management weakness by boosting employees' CVE, employee-led informal voice mechanisms will not because employees' engagement in such informal channels will undermine their faith in the effectiveness of voicing in the specific organisational context.

## 4.1 | Implications for theory and future research

Our model of contextual influence lays down theoretical foundations to assist in broadening current voice research in four ways. First, we propose and theorise this new mechanism, which not only serves as a theoretical linkage between contextual characteristics and voice behavior, but also allows us to explain and predict why and when employees motivated by meaningful ideas and suggestions may voice in a conflictual manner rather than voicing co-operatively or remaining silent. Thus, the construct of CVE may broaden theoretical perspectives of how contexts shape EV behaviors.

Second, the four contextual voice mechanisms incorporated in our model expand conceptual space for future research to advance new theoretical perspectives on contextual influences. As Morrison acknowledges “the impact of formal and collective voice mechanisms has been almost entirely ignored in the OB voice literature” (2023:99). Although we know that contexts matter (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), past research in OB has not included contextual characteristics that are outside the organisational boundary, such as employment laws and various institutional actors, limiting a more complete understanding of contextual influences on voice. More importantly, whereas I/ER research highlights the critical role of institutionalised collective voice entities in safeguarding employees' right to exercise of self-control through voicing (Freeman & Medoff, 1984), research on social media and online sharing view these “people powered communication” channels as an emerging alternative way for employees to exercise influence on organisational practices (eg Dreher, 2014; Holland et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2015; Thornthwaite et al., 2020). Including these two mechanisms in a single model of voice marks an important step forward for voice research.

Third, we distinguish pro-organisation voice motives from justice-based and self-interest motives in terms of their differential effects on employee voice behaviors under unfriendly contexts. When employees have a lower level of CVE, they may suppress their pro-organisation motives to remain silent or reduce co-operative voice; yet they may strive to realise their justice-based and self-interest motives by engaging in conflictual forms of voice. While HRM and I/ER research has a long tradition of viewing voice as a way to express employees' self-control (Barry & Wilkinson, 2021), OB research has much more limited acknowledgment of the role of voice in fulfilling individuals' needs for control (e.g., Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Our model brings this distinctive feature of justice-based and self-interest voice motives to the theoretical forefront and makes it possible for future research to explicate why different voice motives may result in different voice behaviors.

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### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) characterise destructive voice as follows:

“To be destructive is to be hurtful or critical (i.e., challenge) or to bring down or end (i.e., prohibit; Gorden, 1988; Warren, 2003). We define destructive voice as the voluntary expression of hurtful, critical, or debasing opinions regarding work policies, practices, procedures, and so on. Representative behaviors include bad-mouthing organisational policies, making disparaging comments regarding work-related programs, and harshly criticising the organisation's work methods” (p. 92).

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