Imperfect reflections: Using the carnival to identify transformative employee voice practices

Hoda Jebellie (corresponding author), University of Tehran, Iran, ho.jebellie@ut.ac.ir, Orcid ID - 0000-0002-1587-5462

Anna Zueva, University of Sheffield, UK, a.v.zueva@sheffield.ac.uk, Orcid ID - 0000-0003-3346-7873

Abstract

While the mainstream HRM and OB literature argues that more active employee voice can democratise organisations, critical commentators contend that democratising effects are not possible without a wide-scale transformation of capitalist relations. In this paper, we offer an analytical framework that can be used for a more nuanced understanding of the potential of employee voice initiatives to democratise organisations. The framework is inspired by the carnival – a widely used social practice that simultaneously reproduces and alters existing social order. The application of the framework can help identify limited but nonetheless tangible democratising effects that can occur without a major shift in the organisational hierarchy and structure. We illustrate the application of the framework using a case of an employee voice initiative in a mid-size Iranian oil company. The case demonstrates the identification of three categories of practices within an employee voice initiative, each with a different democratising potential.

Key words: employee voice, participative management, carnival, workplace democracy, management control, human resource management

Imperfect reflections: Using the carnival to identify transformative employee voice practices

Introduction

Employee voice (EV) is commonly defined as either individual or collective voluntary communication through which organisational members attempt to influence their workplace. Such communication can be employee-led or facilitated by management. It can take a variety of forms – individual spontaneous suggestions, unplanned group expressions of grievances, organised suggestion schemes, employee participation programmes, quality circles, and union-initiated negotiations (Maynes and Podsakoff 2014; Huang et al. 2023).

This paper contributes to the EV literature by proposing an analytical framework for understanding the potential of EV initiatives to make organisations more democratic. We aim to understand how EV may enable organisational members to influence decision-making and effect change or, in other words, to acquire workplace agency that goes beyond the discharge of their duties as defined by their superiors (e.g. Rosenthal et al. 1998; Mantere 2005; Wilkinson et al. 2014). Some writers label this EV "efficacy" (Morrison 2014, 180). As we are interested in the proactive fostering of workplace democracy, we focus on organised as opposed to spontaneous forms of EV. Importantly, we acknowledge that EV initiatives can achieve a limited degree of democratisation within the capitalist environment. We agree with Labour Process theorists that "true participation and industrial democracy would only occur … with the complete transformation of society, economy and the means of production" (Chillas and Marks 2020, 88). However, such wide-scale transformation is beyond our present scope.

Our work introduces an alternative perspective to the ongoing debate about the utility of EV and its impact on workplace power dynamics. What can be called the mainstream literature, comprising mainly HRM and Organisational Behaviour (OB) perspectives, has long regarded EV as a means of improving quality and productivity as well as giving employees more control over some aspects of their work (e.g. Deci 1973; Torrington et al. 2017). At the same time, writers coming largely from Employment Relations, Labour Process Theory and Critical Management Studies perspectives critiqued EV as yet another tool of management control (Melcher 1976; Legge 2005; Chillas and Marks 2020; Daudigeos et al. 2021). As we are focusing on the democratising potential of EV, we are aligned with the critical view, yet seek to contribute to the section of the critical literature that does not see EV as definitively working against workplace democracy (Wilkinson et al. 2017; Ruck et al. 2017; Claydon 2000).

We propose a framework that allows a critical analysis of EV initiatives that would not reject EV entirely as a tool of management control but help identify forms of EV that support workplace democracy. First, we present the conceptual development of the framework. Then, we illustrate its utility by applying it to a case of an EV initiative in a medium-sized Iranian oil company. The framework is inspired by the ancient rite of the carnival. This follows an established use of social cultural practices to understand organisational phenomena – e.g. theatre (Biehl-Missal 2012), myth (Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2012), fairy tales (Zueva 2021) and sport (Keidel 1987). Carnivals are part of the traditional calendars of many societies. They are opportunities for social renewal and sometimes change accomplished through a temporary suspension of the normal social order (Islam et al. 2008). We contend that the democratising potential of EV initiatives can be partially understood against the core characteristic of the carnival as a social practice. As we will demonstrate with references to

Bakhtin (1968) and Turner (1969), carnivals are characterised by equality among the participants and erasure of stable social norms. We will show through our illustrative case that an EV initiative can be broken down into individual practices that are characterised by equality and absence of clear norms to varying degrees, generating different outcomes for the participants. It is those practices that are characterised by equality of the participants and absence of clear norms that present the largest opportunities for workplace democracy within wider EV initiatives.

We will begin by discussing how EV and its democratising potential are understood in both mainstream and critical literature. We will then discuss the carnival as a social phenomenon and explain how we derived an analytical framework from its specific features. Finally, we will demonstrate the application of this framework using data from an EV initiative that was implemented at an Iranian oil company.

HRM and OB perspectives on employee voice

HRM and OB literature centres the "business case" in the discussion of EV. To a large extent, this literature originates in the analysis of the performance differences between Westerns (especially American) and Japanese commercial organisations in the 1970s and 1980s where the success of Japanese organisations was ascribed to extensive employee participation in organisational decision-making (Ouchi 1981; Thurow 1992; Itani et al. 2017; Peters and Waterman 1982). The somewhat earlier discussion of "Theory Y" of employee behaviour and the "soft" HRM approach suggested that the employees' wider engagement in workplace decision-making would help secure their active commitment to organisational goals and improve organisational efficiency (McGregor 1960; Storey 2001).

While HRM and OB writings on EV prioritise organisational outcomes such as productivity, they also pay attention to what can be seen as workplace democracy. "Soft" HRM was also referred to as "participative management" and aimed to involve employees more directly in organisational decision-making, encouraging their autonomous initiative for organisational success (Itani et al. 2017; Deci 1973; Schuster and Kendall 1974; Heaphy et al. 2022). The assumption was that employees, motivated by a sense of control over their work, would perform at the top of their ability (Deci 1997; Legge 2005). Later, the discussion of participative management evolved into conversations about the broader concept of EV which emphasised the importance of plurality of voices within an organisation and was linked to the notions of flattened hierarchies, increased worker autonomy and self-actualisation (Block 1993; Daudigeos et al. 2021).

Despite the widespread theorising of a positive link between EV and outcomes for both organisations and their members, studies attempting to evaluate these outcomes are scarce. Morrison (2023), in an extensive review of the EV literature, notes a disproportionately larger focus on predictors than outcomes of EV (e.g. Dundon et al. 2015; Edwards and Edwards 2015; Romney 2021). The studies that do focus on the outcomes tend to be concerned with the impact on the status of employees voicing opinions/proposals or their likelihood of being heard as opposed to wider changes in either the individuals or organisations involved (e.g, Huang et al. 2018; Weiss and Morrison 2019; Zhang et al. 2023, also see Kim et al. 2010 for a rare example of an assessment of EV impact on productivity).

Fryer (2018) suggests that the scarcity of studies on outcomes of EV can be explained by the fact that outcomes such as productivity or financial performance are determined by multiple

shifting factors, making it difficult if not impossible to isolate the effects of EV (also see Kochan and Osterman 1998; Johnson 2006, Dundon et al. 2004). Research on links between EV and workplace democracy is similarly lacking. For instance, the notion of EV "efficacy" or the likelihood that the person engaged in EV will achieve the result they desire is usually treated as a precursor to EV instead of an outcome. The focus is on how employees' *beliefs* about achievable efficacy may lead to their engagement in EV (Duan et al. 2014). Therefore, while HRM and OB perspectives on EV do not ignore the question of workplace democracy, attention to whether and how EV changes organisational power dynamics is lacking.

Critical approaches to employee voice

Critical literature on EV centres the subject of workplace democracy. Critical perspectives on EV emerge mainly from the Labour Process Theory, Employment Relations and Critical Management Studies literature, but also include contributions from the HRM field. These diverse contributions share a direct concern with EV efficacy or whether EV provides employees with the power to impact organisational decision-making (Fryer 2018; Marchington et al. 2005). EV is seen as having a potential to democratise organisations but also as largely failing to do so (Johnson 2006).

Labour Process Theory and Employment Relations theorists argue that mainstream writings ignore the fundamental conflict between employee and managerial/organisational interests that is not reconcilable in a capitalist society (e.g. Braverman 1974; Claydon 2000). The OB literature largely assumes that EV is inherently pro-organisational and does not consider that employees may have interests distinct from those of management (Barry and Wilkinson 2016). One of the consequences of this is the marginalisation, in both research and practice,

of EV that is not aligned with managerial goals, including union-based EV (Wood 2018). Employees are invited to exercise more initiative but only within the parameters and towards the objectives defined by management. Effectively, employees are invited to self-manage for the benefit of the organisation, making their control both more efficient and effective:

> The 'labour process' view of participation, or of any management policies which purport to improve or ameliorate the condition of the worker, derives from this conception of control. Thus these devices are deception, seeking to lure the worker further into collaborating in his/her exploitation . . . [giving the worker] the illusion of making decisions by choosing among fixed and limited alternatives designed by a management which deliberately leaves insignificant matters open to choice. (Ramsay 1985, 54-55, in Chillas and Marks 2000, p. 87).

Some HRM commentators (e.g., Legge 2005; Keenoy 1990; 1997; 2009; Guest 1999; Purcell 1993) also argue that participative management and "soft" HRM are little more than "hard" HRM in disguise as their ultimate objective is the same – to extract more labour from the workers for the same/lesser price. Fryer (2018, 111-112) warns that participative management may end up merely "building commitment to organizational objectives and cultural norms defined by senior management."

Critical Management Studies theorists understand EV as a managerial discourse that transforms organisational members into self-disciplining subjects by promoting "enterprise culture" that creates an appearance of alignment of employee and organisational interests (Keenoy 1990, 126; Willmott 1993; Ezzamel et al. 1996; Keenoy and Anthony 1992). Willmott (1993) in his seminal polemic on the corporate culture literature argued that

"Theory Y" aimed at a more complete subjugation of employees as it demanded not mere compliance but a wholehearted internalisation of the value systems created by management, removing the need for external management control. More contemporary critiques question any potential for workplace democratisation through EV. Daudigeos et al. (2021) situate their critique within a post-bureaucratic organisation that embraces constant change. Such an organisation may welcome the plurality of critical voices as they support the constant change agenda and keep the organisation flexible and agile. At the same time, constant change disempowers critique. It leads to an absence of a stable organisational ideology and deprives critique of a tangible target. Constant change also fractures any shared standards that could be used to judge the legitimacy of any organisational behaviour.

Considering these critiques, can we continue to see EV as a practice that may make organisations more democratic? The mainstream perspectives say little about EV efficacy. Critical perspectives question the feasibility of the democratising effect. While we do not disagree with the critical views, we contend that EV can contribute to democratising workplaces to a limited but nonetheless worthwhile extent. To this end, we propose an analytical framework that can be used to understand and evaluate the democratising potential of specific EV practices. This framework is grounded in theorising that is alternative to that used in the current critical perspectives. At its basis is the practice of the carnival.

The carnival and its democratising potential

We propose the use of the carnival as a lens to evaluate the democratising potential of EV initiatives because carnivals are long-established and widely used social practices that critique the establishment and give voice to normally disempowered sections of society

(Steyaert and Hjorth, 2002; Clegg and Van Iterson 2009; Sant'Anna et al. 2024). As will be explained below, we use the specific characteristics of the carnival that endow it with its transformational capacity to evaluate the democratising potential of EV initiatives and individual practices that comprise them. We contend that EV practices that possess these carnivalesque characteristics will lead to similarly democratising effects.

We derive our understanding of the carnival largely from the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1968) and Victor Turner (1969). Much of today's Western writings on the carnival, including publications in organisation studies (e.g. Islam et al. 2008; Rhodes 2001; Boje 2001), rely on Bakhtin's (1968) analysis of the carnivalesque in the work of Rabelais. Bakhtin focuses on the Mediaeval European manifestations of the carnival and describes it as a festival that is often tied to agricultural feasts and involves comical spectacles, processions and performances.

Bakhtin (1968) identified the suspension of the established social order and the norms that support it as the main features of the carnival. At carnival time, the usual social class and group divisions are abolished. Temporary oppositional power structures are often created. For example, a carnival king and queen who preside over the festivities are commonly elected from among the lower classes. The carnival participants ridicule the established powers through comic enactments. Conventional morality is replaced with laughter, satire, blasphemy, references to bodily functions, the grotesque, and the presence of arrayed fools and clowns.

The carnival is an annual opportunity for the participants to discharge the grudges and anxieties they may have accumulated towards each other – "the purifying power of mutual

honesty" (Turner 1969, 179). It is also an opportunity to underscore the reasonableness of the normal social order through showcasing the carnival chaos as its opposite. Finally, it may have a prophylactic effect on the pretensions of those in power by humbling them through the ridicule of symbols of social hierarchy.

Bakhtin (1968) and other writers after him (e.g. Godet, 2020) frequently use the metaphor of the mirror and treat the carnival as a mirror reflection of society. As a reflection, the carnival presents a symmetrical opposite of the usual social practices and norms. Just as a mirror will reflect left as right, the carnival inverts the normal social order into a temporary carnival order and the usual norms into carnival norms: piety into blasphemy, restraint into indulgence, kings into fools, etc. At the same time, just as a functional mirror will deliver a true, albeit inverted, picture of reality for examination by the onlooker, the carnival's "mirror of comedy" (Bakhtin 1968, 197) allows the participants to observe critically the imperfections and excesses of their usual reality as it is reflected in the inversions.

The mirror metaphor and the associated notion of inversion through reflection, however, deliver only a partial understanding of the carnival's function (Martin, 2001). Turner (1969) argues that the carnival also allows the participants to move beyond the inversions and the simple binaries they create – beyond the king/fool, noble/peasant, virtuous/sinful. As will be explained in more detail below, the carnival does not merely reflect the social structure in an oppositional structure but also destabilises this structure altogether. This allows the participants to experience each other not as roles in the social structure but foremost as a community of humans. Carnival is "the ritual occasion for an exhibition of values that relate to the community as a whole, as a homogeneous, unstructured unity that transcends its

differentiations and contradictions" (Turner 1969, 91). Turner labels this unity of undifferentiated individuals "communitas" or "anti-structure".

The experience of communitas reminds the carnival participants of their underlying social bond and interdependence without which no society and no social hierarchy would exist: The high cannot exist without the low, a leader cannot exist without followers, and hierarchy cannot exist without the gaps between the positions in it. The experience of communitas prevents the structural action from "swiftly [becoming] arid and mechanical if those involved in it are not periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of communitas" (p. 139). Importantly, the experience of communitas alongside the usual structure balances the two against each other, preventing harmful exaggerations:

> "What is certain is that no society can function adequately without this dialectic. Exaggeration of structure may well lead to pathological manifestations of communitas outside or against "the law." Exaggeration of communitas, in certain religious or political movements of the levelling type, may be speedily followed by despotism, overbureaucratization, or other modes of structural rigidification." (Turner 1969, 129)

Once the carnival is understood as an experience of communitas, the metaphor of the true mirror loses some of its descriptive power. Instead, it is more accurate to treat the carnival as a mirror that gives a distorted, imperfect reflection. In this context, the two key features of the carnival identified by Bakhtin (1968) – suspension of the established social order and norms that justify and enable it – should be understood not as merely creating an oppositional hierarchy and norms, but also as a temporary absence of hierarchy and norms altogether and

an institution of equality and ambivalence in their place. Communitas is created through equality and ambivalence.

Equality and ambivalence result from specific carnival practices that depart from how people behave in non-carnival time. Equality emerges from the absence of a separation between the actors and the spectators. Everyone is a participant. "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (Bakhtin 1968, 7). Equality is also created through the suspension of social divisions and hierarchies. For instance, dress codes that distinguish different social strata are abolished, and people of different social ranks are allowed to mix more freely. Turner (1969) describes this not as equality of social positions but as a lack of differentiation between people which enables people to experience their shared humanity, establishing community between the different social groups where they all recognise the links between each other and their roles in a joint project of building and maintaining a society.

While equality challenges the social hierarchy and categorisation, ambivalence undermines the normative systems that support the hierarchy. Ambivalence if often achieved through the use of masks that obscure a person's identity, their place in society and the proper conduct that befits it (Tseelon 2001). The use of obscenity is common. While it inverts the conventional propriety, the main point is not to create an alternative normative system but to destabilise the norms (Turner 1969). The carnival is "hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (Bakhtin, 1968, 10). The prominent presence of clowns and fools – archetypal characters known for their "open" as opposed to "closed" morality, unconventional judgement and speaking in riddles (Turner 1969, 110) – underscores the ambivalence of carnival humour. Nothing is sacred and everything can be questioned. What becomes questions and in

what ways is up to the participants, and the critique is not required to have a clear objective or deliver a clear moral message. Carnival laughter is in "indissoluble and essential relation to freedom" (Bakhtin 1968, 89), allowing new diverse and layered meanings to emerge. Anyone is also allowed to laugh at anyone else. It is not a one-directional exercise of power, but a mechanism through which all strata of society are invited to take a critical look at themselves.

To conclude, while the carnival is unlikely to seriously alter the existing power structures (Martin 2001; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera 2010), it accomplishes a different kind of change. It delivers an experience of communitas through equality of participants and the absence of stable and clear norms. It makes visible the excesses and hypocrisy of the usual social order in one way, underscores its necessity in another, and, most importantly, provides an opportunity for people to renew their connections with each other and their individual sense of playing an integral and active role in their community.

While understanding a carnival as an experience of Turner's communitas, it is important to note that in specific historical times and spaces carnivals can contain practices that replicate or even accentuate certain structural divisions. Gaufman and Ganesh (2024) comment that while the carnival is often used as a framework to study strategies of dissent, historical carnivals were often policed affairs that excluded certain sections of society (e.g. women) or amplified public anger towards already marginalised groups (e.g. Jews) instead of channelling critique towards those in power.

Islam et al. (2008), in their analysis of the New Orleans' Mardi Gras festivities, conclude that diverse practices comprising the carnival can vary widely in the degree of communitas they generate, either maintaining or challenging the existing social order. The "official" part of the

New Orleans carnival that consists of krews sanctioned by local authorities, sponsored by businesses and commanding high fees from participants, end up replicating the capitalist relations, privileging those with means, separating the participants from spectators, encouraging passivity in the latter. Communitas and transgression occur elsewhere – in the unofficial krew studied by the authors that was organised on the principles of equality and ambivalence.

Proposed analytical framework

The understanding of the carnival as an experience of "communitas" where specific practices that differ from non-carnival behaviours generate equality (lack of differentiation between participants) and ambivalence (unstable norms) is the basis for our proposed analytical framework. First, as communitas emerges not from the entirety of the carnival proceedings but from specific "deviant" practices, we suggest that an evaluation of EV initiatives needs to similarly focus on the specific practices that comprise them and examine the degree to which they depart from the normal organisational order. Second, we suggest that EV practices that generate equality and ambivalence can increase workplace democracy by helping organisational members reassess their organisational realities, critique the organisational hierarchy more openly, and form links with each other that would supersede the usual divisions. Understood in this way, EV is unlikely to galvanise revolutionary change, as noted by the critical EV literature. Nonetheless, certain EV practices can be seen as steps towards democracy where organisational members are able to cross hierarchical boundaries and become actors who can develop new understandings.

We now outline the framework. The framework is based on observing the extent to which individual practices comprising an EV initiative depart from normal organisational processes

and behaviours and are characterised by equality and ambivalence. For the sake of analytical convenience and following the mirror metaphor we discussed above, we suggest three types of EV practices differentiated by whether they depart from usual practice and by varied degrees of equality and ambivalence: "replication", "inversion" and "imperfect inversion". We also suggest that, depending on the complexity of a given EV initiative, all three practice types could occur concurrently just as different practices coexisted in the New Orleans carnival in Islam et al. (2008).

****

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

****

"Replication" refers to a situation where an EV practice replicates the existing organisational hierarchy and where no increase in equality or ambivalence occurs. For instance, subordinates may be provided with more opportunities to supply their superiors with information, but without including them in decision-making or linking them with others (equality), or letting them independently define the parameters of the information or the process of its supply (ambivalence).

"Inversion" is a situation where an EV practice is a mirror-image flip of some aspect of the organisational hierarchy. While the normal way of doing things is altered, no significant equality or ambivalence is created. For instance, superiors may pass responsibility for a particular area of decision-making to subordinates, inverting the hierarchy in this particular area of work, but at the same time do not open spaces for the subordinates to create a

community of their own, bring together people from diverse organisational roles (equality), or allow them to decide what decisions are to be made and how (ambivalence).

"Imperfect inversion" is the distorted mirror reflection – a situation where an EV practice creates a new system of relations characterised by equality and ambivalence as opposed to merely inverting the old one. For example, a new process may not only involve subordinates in wider decision-making, but also allow them to decide on its format and substance, promote closer links between different groups within the organisation and open up spaces for debate.

Last, the application of this framework to the analysis of an EV initiative should not only classify the EV practices as one of the three types described above. It should also lead to the observation of their practical outcomes or whether they generate communitas – e.g. uncovering suppressed injustices and contradictions, increasing the visibility of marginalised groups, supporting collective imagination, or encouraging a sense of belonging, empowerment and reflexivity among the participants. We suggest that "replication" has no capacity to generate communitas, the ability of "inversion" to do so is limited, and it is the "imperfect inversion" where communitas can be found.

An illustrative case of framework application

We now provide an illustration of how our carnival-based framework can be used to understand the democratising potential of practices comprising a broader EV initiative. The subject of our illustrative case is OilCo (not a real name) – an Iranian oil company. The choice of the organisational and national context was driven by convenience. Ultimately, the context is not of great importance as we do not seek to illustrate how EV initiatives may be

shaped by local cultural, industry or institutional factors.[1] We use OilCo as an instrumental

case (Bell et al., 2022) to illustrate the utility of our proposed framework in understanding the

democratising potential of EV initiatives. In this, we follow an established practice of using

small case studies as practical illustrations of theoretical arguments in organisation studies.

Such illustrations are largely deductive in nature as they apply developed theoretical

frameworks. They clarify theoretical arguments and concepts by showing how they are

reflected in concrete real-life situations (e.g. Katila et al., 2020; Lennerfors and Rehn, 2014;

Bozeman, 2013). We do not aim for generalisable conclusions or expect that the application

of our framework to any EV initiative will identify the same EV practice types or the same

practical outcomes. The results of the application will depend on the nature of individual

organisations and their EV initiatives.

OilCo is a medium-sized family-owned limited liability company with around 300 members.

It is of over twenty years in age. It has eight strategic business units (SBUs). The CEO is also

the company's founder. He is described by his subordinates as having an entrepreneurial

spirit, his mantra being "everything is possible.'" Traditionally, the CEO made all the

strategic decisions, and the role of SBU managers was confined to the implementation of

these decisions. However, after the economic crisis of 2009, the CEO decided that his

individual capabilities were insufficient for strategizing in a more challenging environment.

He formed a strategic task force in which all the SBU managers were expected to participate.

Sessions were held to share knowledge between corporate strategic officers and SBU

managers. A strategic advisor was designated to coordinate the process. All SBU managers,

---

[1] Local specifics are also of little relevance to the broad use of a carnival such as ours.
While specific carnival practices (e.g. type of masks used) may differ from one location to another,
the underlying logic and function do not vary. Scholars of the carnival used materials from vastly
different societies – e.g. Bakhtin examined European Renaissance traditions, Turner wrote about
traditional societies of Sub-Saharan Africa – but arrived at similar conclusions.

working with their SBUs' internal specialists (experts), had to prepare a proposal for their SBUs' objectives, strategies, and resource requirements for the following year. Final strategies were defined and approved at the annual company-wide strategic event by debating, amending, and voting.

Democratisation of OilCo was not the aim of the CEO's initiative. The only explicit aim was to increase the likelihood that the strategic decisions would deliver financial success. However, it did entail some possibility for democratisation. At least in theory, the strategic decision-making in OilCo became open to organisational members whose prior roles were confined to implementing decisions made by the CEO. Forums were established (discussions, voting on proposals) where organisational members could voice their views, be heard and hear the views of others. The members were given discretion – their views and voting decisions were supposed to be their own. The CEO's initiative also widened the scope of their influence. SBU managers could now impact the running of other SBUs and contribute to the broad corporate-level decisions.

The new decision-making system was in place by 2014. At that point, one of this paper's authors was volunteering in OilCo's HR department for several years to gain access to data for broader projects. The author was responsible for organizing special events and worked across the SBUs to resolve minor issues and provide informal consultancy. Over time, the author gained the trust of the organisational members and was able to observe the organisational events without being a full participant.

A year after the new system was established and at the time of the first annual voting, the author conducted in-depth interviews about the new system with 32 informants: eight SBU

managers ('SBU-M' in quotes below), six corporate strategy officers ('CSO' in quotes below), the CEO, the managing director, and 16 experts in eight SBUs ('EX' in quotes below) responsible for preparing annual strategy proposals. The selection of the interview participants was purposive (Bell et al., 2022), focusing on the individuals who took part in and played key roles in the new decision-making process. The conversations were repeated a year later when the results of the first round of voting could be observed. The interviews were semi-structured and followed accepted guidelines such as ensuring the confidentiality of the respondents, including by conducting interviews in private, psychologically comfortable, and familiar locations, and giving the interview participants ample opportunity to elaborate on their answers and initiate discussion topics (Lewis-Beck et al, 2003; Brinkmann, 2013).

The respondents were asked to describe their experiences with the new system – how they understood its purpose and function, what activities they undertook within the system, what they thought about the presented proposals, and how they saw the outcomes. Each interview lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour and 45 minutes and took place in a quiet and private location in the participants' workplace. The critical views expressed by the participants (as will be demonstrated below) indicate that they felt safe in their communication with the interviewer. The second round of interviews in particular indicated a deepening disappointment in the new system. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by one of the authors and reviewed by each research participant. The transcription was done manually, fully and verbatim, with care taken to preserve the respondents' phraseology and indicating significant pauses with "…" (McLellan et al., 2003). As the interviews were conducted in Farsi, passages used in this paper were translated into English and put through a process of back translation until an equivalence of meaning was achieved (Xian, 2008). To ensure that the meaning intended by the respondent was not lost in the process, the translated passages

were not considered in isolation, and the translation was undertaken with the view of the wider context of the interview text and also checked by a colleague.

We analysed the interview transcripts using a version of the Template thematic analysis approach. The Template analysis usually involves iterative coding that develops a coding template that represents the researchers' final interpretation of the data (King and Brooks, 2018). As our case served to illustrate the application of our framework, the analysis template was based on the framework and contained a well-defined set of themes from the start: the presence or absence of equality and ambivalence and associated presence or absence of communitas.

We started by identifying occurrences of equality and ambivalence in the transcripts. When we looked for equality, we looked for accounts of increasing interaction and dependencies between organisational members, erosion of existing organisational hierarchy, and appearance of new lines of communication between different groups. Looking for ambivalence meant identifying instances where norms and regulations that would govern the actions of organisational members were uncertain or altogether absent: e.g. lack of official definitions of the various processes and individuals' roles within the EV initiative, the absence of predefined the parameters of individuals' involvement in EV, the uncertainty in the objectives that certain actions were meant to achieve. Conversely, we also noted instances of absences of equality and ambivalence or situations where the pre-existing organisational hierarchy was maintained and where the processes and objectives were pre-defined. Equality and ambivalence were not in any way "measured" but simply noted in their qualitative presence or absence.

We realised early in the analysis that we could not treat the OilCo EV initiative as a unified phenomenon with one level of equality and ambivalence. Rather, we found different iterations signifying both the presence and the absence of equality and ambivalence that were clustered in the text relating to specific practices. Three specific practices stood out in the accounts of our respondents: the CEO reserving the right to make the final decision on strategy, the formulation of strategic proposals by SBU managers, and the experts' contributing information to SBU managers. Respectively and as will be explained below, these practices were examples of replication, inversion and imperfect inversion.

Finally, we looked for evidence of the outcomes replication, inversion and imperfect inversion produced and whether they resembled Turner's (1969) communitas. For example, did the organisational members report a heightened sense of community and connection to others? Did they become aware of their dependence on others? Did they feel an increased sense of personal relevance within the organisations? Conversely, did they become more disconnected from their co-workers and feel that the workplace community around them was fragmenting? The links between the specific practices and the presence or absence of communitas were established through semantic association (e.g. Cornelissen, 2017): we looked for iterations related to communitas that accompanied or were imbedded into the discussions of particular practices.

Replication

Replication could be seen in the practice of the CEO making the final strategic decisions, often disregarding the results of the vote. While the new system involved multiple individuals in discussion of and voting on the strategic proposals, everyone was keenly aware that

nothing in the system prevented the CEO from overturning the results of the voting process. Thus, the final decision in practice rested with the CEO. With this in mind, the SBU managers tailored their proposals to the desires of the CEO as opposed to voicing their own views:

'We have to deliver what the [CEO] has in mind...' (SBU-M02)

'Everyone in this company knows how ambitious the CEO is and always likes to be a leader in certain fields. I suggest strategies that are perfectly suited to his approach. Although internal and external environment analysis and organizational resources do not confirm such strategies at all, it is better to be his words.' (SBU-M07)

SBU managers' efforts to convince the CEO to change his views and follow their suggestions were often useless:

'[The CEO] insisted that we start exploring the oil field. No matter how much I insisted that we had neither the resources nor the facilities, it didn't work.... I think you should write the internal/ external environment assessment in a way that justifies his strategy!' (SBU-M04)

Even when certain strategic plans received approval through voting, they could be overturned by the CEO:

'I got the approval for my strategy in the annual meeting, but then, the CEO forced me to follow his agenda in another field. It is insane!' (SBU-M04)

At times, the CEO made major strategic decisions outside the voting system:

> *'We have developed a product by reverse engineering, and it costs one-tenth of its original foreign model, but the domestic customer does not trust it and the foreign customer has no reason to buy our work!... but the [CEO] believes in us so, during these years he never expected any income from us... He sees things differently. I don't write strategy at all... I will discuss everything with him and resolve the problems.'*
> (SBU-M05)

Here we observe an effective replication of the old methods within the new system. There is no move to greater equality as the hierarchical relationship between the CEO and the SBU managers remains intact. A degree of equality would have been possible if the SBU managers felt they could voice the strategies they wanted. In this case, even if the CEO had the final say, space could have been opened up for conversations between the SBU managers. The CEO would be choosing from alternatives not of his making, disrupting the top-down nature of his relationship with his subordinates. This did not happen as the SBU managers wrote the proposals to fit the CEO's existing plans. Ambivalence was also absent. The practice of the CEO having the final say was widely recognised. Little real space was opened up for discussion with unpredictable results – the managers unambiguously felt they had to voice the views of the CEO.

The outcome of replication was the deterioration of organisational community and the growing individualisation: widespread cynicism, the breaking of managerial commitment to the wellbeing of the organisation, the psychological withdrawal of managers to preoccupation

with protecting their individual positions and wellbeing. Drawing a conclusion from the fact that the CEO will disregard the SBU managers' opinions and prioritise his own ideas, one of the SBU managers commented:

> *'Even though I say it's crazy, I think we should go underwater and do whatever is better for us'. (SBU-M04)*

Others expressed feelings of disillusionment, personal irrelevance and disempowerment:

> *'... the conditions of the country are such that we have to go for contraction strategies, but the [CEO] insists on evaluating in such a way that the project in the neighbouring countries is justified... it feels very bad. I know that my [the CEO] has his heart set on working outside of Iran, but it would insult my intelligence if I justified him...if that's the case, he doesn't want an expert to write whatever he wants.' (CSO06)*

Finally, a new system that in practice replicated the old one lost legitimacy among the participants:

> *'This participative system is a joke; we must change or die! This system is stupid and unreal' (former SBU-M08)*

As some participants ignored the official rules of the new decision-making system, the new system was in danger of collapsing under the weight of its contradictions:

'I don't come to the strategy meeting or write anything! We talked with [the CEO] to

take a project in the field of mass housing in... . I will find the investor for it. Don't

waste my time with stupid meetings and voting!' (SBU-M06- a close old friend of the

CEO)

To summarise, replication fractured the relationships between organisational members, destabilising the organisation.

Inversion

While existing power relations in OilCo were replicated in the practice of the CEO making the final decisions, the fact that SBU managers nonetheless had to generate strategy proposals cannot be ignored. The practice of proposal writing could not be reduced to "copying and pasting" of the CEO's ideas. SBU managers had to develop the CEO's ideas into workable plans. To do this, SBU managers had to gather information for their proposal from different colleagues and could discuss their proposals with other SBU managers to gain feedback. Consequently, the final proposals seen by the CEO contained ideas other than his own, thus passing some of the power from the CEO to the SBU managers. And while the CEO had the final say, success in voting still carried some weight. Nobody wanted to tarnish their credibility by losing the vote. In addition, not all SBU managers were convinced that the CEO would override all votes:

'Managers think that they should write a strategy according to the opinion of the

[CEO]... but I know that [he] accepts the opinion of the majority even if he doesn't like

it.' (SBU-M01)

To win, SBU managers lobbied other managers to support their proposals. Some emerging equality could be seen in this interaction. To secure the support of others, an SBU manager had to build lateral links and account for the interests of others in their proposals:

> *'My strategies are 100% guaranteed!... I know what to write to be approved...it's always been the same. …… You must know how to see the benefit of the other managers in your plan so that they all vote for you.' (SBU-M01)*

Some ambivalence was also present in the process as the CEO did not have full control over the contents of the proposals, and there was a degree of uncertainty and disagreement (as seen in the words of SBU-M01 above) about the significance of the vote. However, the extent of both equality and ambivalence was limited. Ambivalence was limited because the SBU managers, as seen in the words of SBU-M01 above, pursued one very unambiguous and even quantifiable predetermined goal – most votes for their SBU's proposal. All their activity was oriented towards this goal, and any links they built with others were purely instrumental. This, in turn, limited opportunities for equality as SBU managers treated each other as means to an end as opposed to developing any shared goals or genuine concern for each other.

While the power structure in OilCo was inverted to some extent as the CEO passed some power over strategy formulation to the SBU managers, this simple inversion locked SBU managers into competition with each other for a maximum share of the budget. As a result, SBU managers had a new-found sense of power, but no sense of community. They treated each other as means to and end:

'I agreed with SBU-M01 to have each other's back. We will end SBU-M05! They have swallowed the budget for years with no income. This year is our turn!' (SBU-M07)

The fight for power created or intensified existing rifts between the managers:

'Managers suggested merging some units, and one person becomes the manager in the name of more alignment. Interestingly, three managers have made such a plan so far, all looking for their own personal benefit.' (CSO04)

'I agreed with SBU-M01 that both of us would vote against the strategy of SBU-M05, but in the meeting, I saw that he voted for it!' (SBU-M03)

As in the case of replication, the legitimacy and meaningfulness of the new system were undermined, leaving the participants feeling isolated, disempowered and demoralised:

'I know we are in a critical situation, and I have a solution, but I have to get approval in the voting system, which is wrong. How do other managers get to decide about my SBU? Who said they know what is best? Democracy is not always good.' (Former SBU-M05)

'No one knows that I write proposals for [two SBU managers] [laughter]. These two cannot stand each other but act as friends on the surface. .... You might think it's funny. Well, there is. But honestly, I'm sick of everything' (CSO02)

Imperfect inversion

The participative system also affected those on lower rungs of the organisational hierarchy - the employees (experts) of individual SBUs and some corporate strategy officers. Officially, the new decision-making system did not change the position of the employees. They were not invited to participate in the voting process or granted any powers previously possessed by their superiors. Nonetheless, the new system created a kind of cascade of unofficial voice opportunities: SBU managers now needed the experts' input to formulate their strategic proposals, but the process of providing input was not regulated.

This gave the experts a way to influence strategy formulation and changed the power dynamics to a degree. It did not constitute a direct inversion as it was characterised by both equality and ambivalence. The demand for the experts' knowledge did not make them officially hierarchically equal to their managers, but it opened up a new conversation between the experts and the managers, creating new links between them through more frequent interaction and information exchange. It also changed the balance of power between the SBU managers and the experts by making the former dependent on the knowledge of the latter. However, this tip of the power balance in favour of the experts did not lead to the managers' attempt to regain power. The experts had no way of converting their newly found informal power into a formal advancement of position, so the managers' status was in no way threatened. As a result, the relationship between the SBU managers and the experts was more equal than before and this increased equality was not contested.

In addition, the conversations between SBU managers and employees were characterised by ambivalence because they were not formalised or regulated. The parameters of the experts' roles were not defined. Their contributions to the strategic plans were not written into their

job descriptions or included in the descriptions of the new decision-making process. Their accounts did not contain any mention of any rewards or other objectives they were trying to achieve through their involvement. There also was no oversight over their knowledge contributions. It was up to the experts what information to divulge and to whom. The format and their greater involvement did not follow set norms and its impact was not always predictable. For instance, experts could go as far as to provide information to the managers of "rival" SBUs without the knowledge of their own superiors.

> *'The SBU-M03 says that a strategy expert is like a gun. Whenever he wants revenge on someone, he comes to me to write a counter-proposal against another manager's proposal to get even! He doesn't know[SBU-M01] also comes to me for the same reason!'. (EX03)*

This clandestine behaviour is reminiscent of the carnival masking because the workplace identity of the expert as a member of one specific SBU becomes blurred as they cross the boundary into another.

As a result of their new position, experts, unlike their managers, felt more visible, empowered and valued:

> *'When [managers] need a plan, they come to us, and suddenly we become worthy.' (EX05)*

The sense of being valued by the rest of the organisation, however, was confined to the period of strategic proposal preparation:

> *'After the strategic meeting, we become nothing; we have to obey their stupid rules and remain silent.' (EX05)*

The cynical struggle for power between SBU managers was also not lost on them. They observed it with disdain and showed little faith in the success of the new decision-making system:

> *'All of this strategic thing is useless. [SBU managers] define insane goals to make the CEO happy. Everyone knows it is just a show'. (EX05)*

> *'[SBU managers] just need to show they hire experts in their SBUs, but they are so incompetent and cannot even defend our plan (EX03)'*

At the same time, the disillusionment was not total. It was accompanied by a sense that they could be more active participants in organisational processes, demonstrating a degree of community building in the organisation: experts began to see themselves as an integral part of the organisation, as able to make their voices heard and benefit the organisation while placing themselves in a better position. They were joined in this by some strategy officers who were in similar subordinate positions.

> *'We are the ones who know what the strategy is. We could make it happen. Let them think they are in charge; we do what is best for us!' (EX03)*

'I prepared a new transformational strategy for the corporate, but my manager is too proud and naive to listen to and understand it…. I presented it to the [CEO]. I know things better'. (CSO01)

In summary, while the change in the position of the experts and strategy officers was minor, they were the only participants in the new decision-making system who reported positive changes.

****

INSERT TABLE 2 AROUND HERE

****

Discussion of findings

Above, we provided an example of the application of the carnival-based framework to understand the democratising potential of specific practices comprising a broader EV initiative. We understood the "democratising potential" as the ability of the EV practices to provide an experience of Turner's "communitas" for the participants, e.g., by facilitating mutual recognition and cooperation. We now reflect on our findings to demonstrate how the application of the carnival-based framework can deliver a more nuanced view of EV.

First, the carnival provides a view of EV practices and their efficacy that differs from existing perspectives. Critical perspectives emphasise the inability of EV and management-driven EV in particular to transform organisational power relations within the capitalist milieu (Chillas and Marks 2000; Ezzamel et al. 1996; Daudigeos et al. 2021). The carnival-based framework

allows us to theorise and observe a form of change that could be accomplished through EV. It involves revitalising rather than transforming an organisation, just as a carnival experience of communitas revitalises rather than transforms society. We argue that certain EV practices can generate communitas, revitalising the organisational community and preventing individuals from becoming so entrenched in their roles as to lose the ability to communicate effectively with others or adapt to change. Organisational members may not acquire significant formal power to identify and forward their own interests. Nonetheless, communitas impacts how individuals experience their workplace. They can increase their agency within the organisation through becoming further embedded in the organisational community and the network of internal informal dependencies as opposed to merely occupying a position in a hierarchy and acting in accordance with a job description.

Our illustrative case was an unremarkable initiative. It aimed to do what most EV initiatives aim to do according to the mainstream literature – to involve more organisational members in taking active responsibility for financial returns (e.g. Itani et al. 2017; Heaphy et al. 2007). It also did so in a way that is reflected in the critical literature, or without any fundamental shift in the organisational power dynamics (e.g. Guest 1990; Keenoy 2009). However, analysing the initiative through the carnival lens revealed a more nuanced picture. First, it made visible the different practices that comprised the EV initiative – those that were characterised by equality and ambivalence (imperfect inversion) and those that were not (replication and inversion). Second, we were able to trace the outcomes of the different practices – increasing fragmentation of the organisation and individualisation of its members, or the generation of communitas and the forging of new links between individuals. This meant that the EV initiative we examined could not be entirely reduced to the "pseudo-democracy" discussed in the critical literature (e.g. Claydon 2000).

The application of our framework also revealed complex effects of individual EV practices. For instance, downward transfers of power do not necessarily result in democratisation. The SBU managers acquired some power to shape organisational strategy. Arguably, as they gathered intelligence, schemed, and jostled to improve their position they became less passive members of the organisation. Nonetheless, they ended up demoralised and fragmented due to the new decision-making system locking them in a zero-sum game against each other where they could not influence the rules. Here we observe the effects of the kind of carnival practice that "did not destroy the hierarchy, [but] just re-arranged its contents" (Lindahl 1996, cited in Gaufman and Ganesh 2024, 26). The experience of the experts had the opposite contradictory dimensions. They were disillusioned with their superiors whom they saw as self-serving and lacking in imagination. On the other hand, they were the only ones to report positive outcomes of the new system and felt that, within the bounds of the initiative, they acquired real power to influence organisational strategy.

Potentially predictably, the "imperfect inversion" occupied the smallest part in our illustrative case. Imperfect inversions, characterised by equality and ambivalence, constitute greater departures from existing hierarchies than simple inversions. Therefore, those in power are unlikely to have a great inclination or ability to create them, and it is more likely that these practices will emerge "from below". This is congruent with existing observations that even when those in power design processes intended to create greater equality and inclusivity in organisations, they tend to resist the resulting attempts of their subordinates to make use of these processes (Ahmed, 2007).

Through demonstrating a more nuanced understanding of EV initiatives and their effects, our findings contribute to the literature on the complex relationship between management control and employee resistance. Prior studies (e.g. Cameron and Rahman 2022; Harding 2014; Mumby 2005) observed that employees do not passively accept the parameters of activity outlined for them by their leaders. Instead, they manoeuvre within these parameters, exploit loopholes in the rules and shape the events to their own benefit. We found the same in our case: e.g., the SBU managers did not merely follow the rules and write their individual strategy proposals, but bargained with each other, formed voting alliances, and exploited their individual relationships with the CEO. We find, however, that while this manoeuvring may create a few individual winners who are able to "game" the system better than the others, it leaves them cynical and disillusioned as the bonds between them are broken by internal competition. In addition, while we find that cynicism is a common employee response to control (Fleming and Spicer, 2003), we observe that in situations where workers have more leeway to structure their own activity and define its goals it can be interlaced with a sense of empowerment and making a creative contribution to the organisation. This gives credence to the suggestion that "having a seat at the table is better than none" (Chillas and Marks 2020, 93).

Final words

In this paper, we proposed an analytical framework that could be used to understand potential of EV initiatives to democratise organisations. This was done as a response to the lack of development of the workplace democracy theme in the HRM and OB literature and the questioning of the democratising potential of EV in the Industrial Relations, Labour Process Theory and Critical Management Studies literature. While we agree with the critical

perspectives, we considered whether some democratising effects could be achieved through EV within the capitalist enterprise.

First, the application of the carnival-based framework led us to view the EV initiative not as a monolithic whole but to break it down into individual practices. By doing so, we were able to demonstrate how different types of EV practices that may comprise the initiative – replication, inversion and imperfect inversion – relate in different ways to the normal organisational order and lead to different outcomes for the participants. Second, the carnival-based framework encouraged us to focus on different outcomes of EV than those usually identified by critical studies. We were able to see the organisation as a community as well as a site where the interests of employees and managers/owners clash. We focused on whether and how EV helped the participants foster relationships with each other and see themselves as integral parts of their organisation rather than assisting them in their power struggle with their superiors. While we observed no major shift in the organisational power dynamics, we found that unofficial, unplanned and unregulated elements of the EV initiative were more likely to empower the participants. For this reason, we conclude that EV should not be viewed solely as means of extending management control.

We contend that our carnival-based framework can be applied both in academic and practitioner contexts. In the academic context, the application of the framework may make more visible the democratising micro-practices, the "under-life of formal organizations" (Clegg and Van Iterson 2009, 280; Alcadipani et al. 2018; Sayed and Agndal 2020) that may otherwise be obscured by the general tendency of participative management initiatives to maintain the status quo. In practitioner contexts, whether in traditional hierarchical or "alternative" organisations that aspire to be democratic, our framework can inform the

methods of involving organisational members into decision-making. Such involvement would need to not merely replicate or invert existing practices, but foster equality and ambivalence in the interaction between organisational members. The transformative potential of such undertakings may, however, depend on the nature of specific organisations. In formal and hierarchical organisations such as the one in our illustrative case, carnivalesque interventions will mean significant departures from the normal order. On the opposite end of the spectrum, in organisations that are already highly democratic (e.g. see Griffin et al., 2022 for a striking example) such interventions may merely replicate the existing ways.

References

Ahmed, S. 2007. "'You End Up Doing the Document Rather Than Doing the Doing': Diversity, Race Equality and the Politics of Documentation." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30 (4): 590-609.

Alcadipani R., J. Hassard and G. Islam. 2018. "'I Shot the Sheriff': Irony, Sarcasm and the Changing Nature of Workplace Resistance. *Journal of Management Studies* 55 (8): 1452-1487.

Bakhtin, M. M. 1968. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by H. Iswolsky. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Barry. M., and A. Wilkinson. 2016. "Pro-social or Pro-management? A Critique of the Conception of Employee Voice as a Pro-Social Behaviour within Organizational Behaviour." *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 54 (2): 261-284.

Bell, E., Bryman, A. and Harley, B. 2022. *Business Research Methods, 6th ed*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Biehl-Missal, B. 2012. Using Artistic Form for Aesthetic Organizational Inquiry: Rimini Protokoll Constructs Daimler's Annual General Meeting as a Theatre Play. *Culture and Organization*, 18 (3): 211-229.

Block, P. 1993. *Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Boje, D. 2001. "Carnivalesque Resistance to Global Spectacle: A Critical Postmodern Theory of Public Administration." *Administrative Theory and Praxis* 23 (3): 431–458.

Bozeman, B. 2013. "What Organization Theorists and Public Policy Researchers Can Learn from One Another: Publicness Theory as a Case-in-Point." *Organization Studies*, 34 (2): 169-188.

Braverman, H. 1974. *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Brinkmann, S. 2013. *Qualitative interviewing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cameron, L. D., and H. Rahman. 2022. "Expanding the Locus of Resistance: Understanding the Co-constitution of Control and Resistance in the Gig Economy." *Organization Science* 33 (1): 38-58.

Chillas, S. and A. Marks. 2020. "Labour Process Perspectives on Employee Voice." In *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, edited by A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon and R. B. Freeman, 85-102. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Claydon, T. 2000. "Employee Participation and Involvement." In *Ethical Issues in Contemporary Human Resource Management*, edited by D. Winstanley and J. Woodall, 208-223. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Clegg, S. R. and A. Van Iterson, A. 2009. "Dishing the Dirt: Gossiping in Organizations. *Culture and Organization*, 15 (3-4), 275-289.

Cornelissen, J. P. 2017. "Preserving Theoretical Divergence in Management Research: Why the Explanatory Potential of Qualitative Research Should be Harnessed Rather Than Suppressed. *Journal of Management Studies* 54 (3): 368-383.

Daudigeos, T., T. Edwards, S. Jaumier, V. Pasquier, and H. Picard. 2021. "Elusive Domination and the Fate of Critique in Neo-participative Management: A French Pragmatist Approach." *Organization Studies* 42 (3): 453-471.

Deci, E. L. 1973. "Paying People Doesn't Always Work the Way You Expect It to." *Human Resource Management* 12 (2): 28-32.

Duan, J., H. K. Kwan, and B. Ling. 2014. "The Role of Voice Efficacy in the Formation of Voice Behaviour: A Cross-Level Examination." *Journal of Management & Organization* 20 (4): 526-543.

Dundon, T., A. Wilkinson, M. Marchington and P. Ackers. 2004 "The Meanings and Purpose of Employee Voice," *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 15 (6): 1149–70.

Dundon, T., N. Cullinane, J. Donaghey, T. Dobbins, A. Wilkinson, and E. Hickland. 2015. "Double-breasting Employee Voice: An Assessment of Motives, Arrangements and Durability." *Human Relations* 68 (3): 489-513.

Edwards, T., and M. R. Edwards. 2015. "Perceptions of Employee Voice and Representation in the Post-acquisition Period: Comparative and Longitudinal Evidence from an International Acquisition." *Human Relations* 68 (1): 131-156.

Ezzamel, M., S. Lilley, A. Wilkinson, and H. Willmott. 1996. "Practices and Practicalities In Human Resource Management." *Human Resource Management Journal* 6 (1): 63-80.

Fleming, P. and A. Spicer. 2003. "Working at a Cynical Distance: Implications for Power, Subjectivity and Resistance." *Organization*, 10 (1): 157-179.

Fryer, M. 2018. "HRM: An Ethical Perspective." In: *Human Resource Management: A Critical Approach*, edited by D. G. Collings, 98-116. New York: Routledge.

Gaufman, G. and B. Ganesh. 2024. *The Trump Carnival: Populism, Transgression and the Far Right*. De Gruyter Contemporary Social Sciences, Vol. 35. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Guest, D. E. 1990. "Human Resource Management and the American Dream." *Journal of Management studies* 27 (4): 377-397.

Guest, D. E. 1999. "Human Resource Management – The Workers' Verdict." *Human Resource Management Journal* 9 (3): 5.

Godet, A. 2020. "Behind the Masks: The Politics of Carnival." *Journal of Festive Studies*, 2 (1): 1-31.

Griffin, M., King, D. and Reedy, P. 2022. "Learning to Live the Paradox in a Democratic Organization: A Deliberative Approach to Paradox Mindsets." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 21 (4): 624-647.

Harding, N., H. Lee, and J. Ford. 2014. "Who is 'the Middle Manager'?" *Human Relations* 67 (10): 1213-1237.

Heaphy, E., J. Lilius, and E. Feldman. 2022. "Moved to Speak up: How Prosocial Emotions Influence the Employee Voice Process." *Human Relations* 75 (6): 1113-1139.

Huang, X., A. Wilkinson, and M. Barry. 2023. "The role of contextual voice efficacy on employee voice and silence." *Human Resource Management Journal*, early view: 1-15.

Huang, X., E. Xu, L. Huang, and W. Liu. 2018. "Nonlinear Consequences of Promotive and Prohibitive Voice for Managers' Responses: The Roles of Voice Frequency and LMX." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 103 (10): 1101.

Islam, G., M. J. Zyphur, and D. Boje. 2008. "Carnival and Spectacle in Krewe de Vieux and the Mystic Krewe of Spermes: The Mingling of Organization and Celebration." *Organization Studies* 29 (12): 1565-1589.

Itani, S., H. House, and W. Lane. 2017. *Ideological Evolution of Human Resource Management*. Bingley, UK: Emerald.

Johnson, P. 2006. "Whence Democracy? A Review and Critique of the Conceptual Dimensions and Implications of the Business case for Organizational Democracy." *Organization* 13 (2): 245–274.

Katila, S., Kuismin, A. and Valtonen, A. 2020. "Becoming Upbeat: Learning the Affecto-Rhythmic Order of Organizational Practices." *Human Relations* 73 (9): 1308-1330.

Keenoy, T. 1990. "HRM: A Case of the Wolf in Sheep′ s Clothing?" *International Journal of Manpower* 11 (5): 4-10.

Keenoy, T. 1997. "Review Article: HRMism and the Languages of Re-presentation." *Journal of Management Studies* 34 (5): 825–841.

Keenoy, T. 2009. "Human Resource Management." In *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies*, edited by M. Alvesson, T. Bridgman, and H. Willmott, 454–472. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keenoy, T., and P. Anthony. 1992. "HRM: Metaphor, Meaning and Morality." In *Reassessing Human Resource Management*, edited by P. Blyton and P. Turnbull P, 233-255. London: Sage.

Keidel, R. W. 1987. Team sport models as a generic organizational framework. *Human Relations*, 40 (9): 591-612.

King, N. and Brooks, J. 2018. "Thematic Analysis in Organisational Research." In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Business and Management Research Methods*, edited by C. Cassell, G. Grandy and A. L. Cunliffe, 219-236. London: Sage.

Klein, K. J., Tosi, H., & Cannella, A. A., Jr. (199Kim, J., J. P. MacDuffie, and F. K. Pil. 2010. "Employee Voice and Organizational Performance: Team Versus Representative Influence." *Human Relations* 63 (3): 371-394.

Kochan, T., and P. Osterman. 1998. "The Mutual Gains Enterprise." In *Strategic Human Resource Management*, edited by C. Mabey, G. Salaman, and J. Storey, 223-236. London: Sage.

Kociatkiewicz, J. and M. Kostera. 2010. "Experiencing the Shadow: Organizational Exclusion and Denial within Experience Economy." *Organization* 17 (2): 257-282.

Kociatkiewicz, J. and Kostera, M. 2012. The good manager: An archetypical quest for morally sustainable leadership. *Organization Studies*, 33 (7): 861-878.

Legge, K. 2005. *Human Resource Management: Rhetorics and Realities.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lennerfors, T. T. and Rehn, A. 2014. "Chance Interventions – On bricolage and the State as an Entrepreneur in a Declining Industry. *Culture and Organization* 20 (5): 377-391.

Lewis-Beck, M., Bryman, A. E. and Liao, T. F. 2003. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, *Vol. 2*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lindahl, C. 1996. "Bakhtin's Carnival Laughter and the Cajun Country Mardi Gras." *Folklore*, 107 (1-2): 57-70

(1 – 2):57 – 70.

Mantere, S. (2005) "Strategic Practices as Enablers and Disablers of Championing Activity." *Strategic Organization* 3 (2): 157-184.

Marchington, M., D. Grimshaw, J. Rubery and H. Willmott. (Eds) 2005. *Fragmenting Work: Blurring Organizational Boundaries and Disordering Hierarchies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Martin, D. C. 2001. "Politics Behind the Mask: Studying Contemporary Carnivals in Political Perspective, Theoretical and Methodological Suggestions." *Questions de Recherche/Research Questions, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Internationales (CERI-Sciences Po/CNRS) No*, 2.

Maynes, T. D., and P. M. Podsakoff. 2014. "Speaking More Broadly: An Examination of the Nature, Antecedents, and Consequences of an Expanded Set of Employee Voice Behaviors." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 99 (1): 87.

McGregor, D. 1960. "Theory X and Theory Y." *Organization Theory* 358 (374): 5.

McLellan, E., MacQueen, K. M. and Neidig, J. L. 2003. "Beyond the Qualitative Interview: Data Preparation and Transcription." *Field methods*, 15 (1): 63-84.

Melcher, A. J. 1976. "Participation: A Critical Review of Research Findings." *Human Resource Management* 15 (2): 12.

Morrison, E. W. 2023. "Employee Voice and Silence: Taking Stock a Decade Later." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 10: 79-107.

Morrison, E. W. 2014. "Employee voice and silence." *The Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behaviour* 1 (1): 173-197.

Mumby, D. K. 2005. "Theorizing Resistance in Organization Studies: A Dialectical Approach." *Management Communication Quarterly* 19 (1): 19–44.

Ouchi, W. G. 1981. *Theory Z.* New York: Avon Books.

Peters, T. J., and R. H. Waterman. 1982. *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies.* New York: Harper & Row.

Purcell, J. 1993. "The Challenge of Human Resource Management for Industrial Relations Research and Practice." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 4 (3): 511-527.

Ramsay, H. 1985. "What is Participation for? A Critical Evaluation of "Labour Process" Analysis of Job Reform." in *Job Redesign: Critical Perspectives on the Labour Process*, edited by D. Knights, H. Willmott and D. Collinson, 107–41. Aldershot: Gower.

Rhodes, C. 2001. "D'O: The Simpsons, Popular Culture, and the Organizational Carnival." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 10 (4): 374–383.

Romney, A. C. 2021. "It's not Just What You Say, It's How You Say It: How Callings Influence Constructive Voice Delivery. *Human Relations* 74 (12): 2021-2050.

Rosenthal, P., S. Hill, and R. Peccei. 1998. "Checking our Service: Evaluating Excellence, HRM and TQM in Retailing." In *Strategic Human Resource Management*, edited by C. Mabey, G. Salaman, and J. Storey J, 170-181. London: Sage.

Ruck, K., M. Welch, and B. Menara. 2017. "Employee Voice: An Antecedent to Organisational Engagement?" *Public Relations Review* 43 (5): 904-914.

Sant'Anna, A. D. S., R. S. Reis, L. F. S. Campos, and M. D. A. A. R. Batista. 2024. "Using the Relational Approach to Explore the Representation of Women Through Brazilian Popular Music: 1880 to 1970." *Culture and Organization*, 30 (1): 23-46.

Sayed, Z. and H. Agndal. 2020. "Neo-colonial Dynamics in Global Professional Service Firms: A Periphery Perspective." *Culture and Organization*, 26 (5-6): 425-443.

Schuster, F. E., and A. F. Kindall. 1974. "Management by Objectives Where We Stand - A Survey of the Fortune 500." *Human Resource Management* 13 (1): 8-11.

Steyaert, C., and D. Hjorth. 2002. "'Thou Art a Scholar, Speak to it...' – On Spaces of Speech: A Script." *Human Relations* 55 (7): 767-797.

Storey, J. 2001. "Human Resource Management Today: An Assessment." In *Human Resource Management: A Critical Text,* 2nd ed., edited by J. Storey, 3-20. London: Thompson Learning.

Thurow, L. C. 1992. "Who Owns the Twenty-first Century?" *MIT Sloan Management Review* 33 (3): 5.

Torrington, D., L. Hall, C. Atkinson, and S. Taylor. 2017. *Human Resource Management*. Harlow, UK: Pearson.

Tseelon, E. 2001. "Introduction." In *Masquerade and Identities: Essays on Gender, Sexuality and Marginality*, edited by E. Tseelon, 1-17, London: Routledge.

Turner, V. 1969. *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Weiss, M., and E. W. Morrison. 2019. "Speaking up and Moving up: How Voice can Enhance Employees' Social Status." *Journal of Organizational Behavior.* 40 (1): 5-19.

Wilkinson, A., J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, and R. B. Freeman. 2014. "Employee Voice: Charting New Terrain." In *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice*, edited by A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon and R. B. Freeman, 1-16. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Wilkinson, A., P. J. Gollan, S. Kalfa, and Y. Xu. 2018. "Voices Unheard: Employee Voice in the New Century." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 29 (5): 711-724.

Willmott, H. 1993. "Strength is Ignorance; Slavery is Freedom: Managing Culture in Modern Organisation." *Journal of Management Studies* 30 (4): 515-552.

Wood, S. 2018. HRM and organizational performance. In *Human Resource Management,* edited by D. G. Collings, G. T. Wood and L. T. Szamosi, 74-97. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Xian, H. 2008. "Lost in Translation? Language, Culture and the Roles of Translator in Cross-Cultural Management Research. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, *3* (3): 231-245.

Zhang, L., J. Liang, and F. Liu. 2023. "I Spoke Up, Did You Hear? The Impact of Voice (in) Congruence on Employee-Initiated Constructive Changes." *Human Relations* 76 (10): 1567-1598.

Zueva, A. 2021. Autoethnography through the folk tale lens. In *Organizational Ethnography*, edited by M. Kostera and N. Harding, 151-165. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Table 1: A carnival-based framing of EV initiative practices

EV Practice Characteristics	EV Practice Types		
	Replication	*Inversion*	*Imperfect inversion*
Change in hierarchy/process	Absent	Present	Present
Equality	Absent	Limited	Present
Ambivalence	Absent	Limited	Present

Table 2: Results of an application of the carnival-based framing to the OilCo case

EV Practice Characteristics	EV Practice Types		
	Replication (CEO makes final strategic decisions)	*Inversion (SBU managers develop strategic proposals)*	*Imperfect Inversion (employees provide information to SBU managers)*
Change in hierarchy/process	**Absent**: No change in who has the power to make the final decision.	**Present**: SBU managers begin to interact, exchange information and bargain with each other to develop	**Present**: Lower-ranking employees increased their interaction with SBU managers and their knowledge contribution to

		strategic proposals and win the vote.	organisational decision-making.
Equality	**Absent**: The usual hierarchy is maintained, with SBU managers individually seeking the approval of the CEO.	**Limited**: SBU managers had to consider each other's priorities to win votes, but treated each other as means to an end.	**Present**: SBU managers depended on the contributions of lower-ranking employees, giving employees power.
Ambivalence	**Absent**: SBU managers tailor proposals to CEO preferences.	**Limited**: The CEO's priorities did not fully define strategic proposal contents, but SBU managers had a clear aim – for their proposal to win the vote.	**Present**: No rules defined the substance or recipients of employees' contributions.
Outcomes	Individualisation, cynicism and disillusionment with the new decision-making system among SBU managers.	SBU managers locked in competition with each other, feeling isolated and demoralised.	While employees regarded the new strategic decision-making process with the same cynicism as SBU managers, they felt an increased agency within the organisation.