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# When Voice Matters: A Multilevel Review of the Impact of Voice in Organizations

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*The conventional wisdom is that voice leads to desirable outcomes for organizations. However, this is most certainly an oversimplification. Of the over 1,000 studies examining the impact of voice in organizations, the implications of voice vary by the level of the organization (individual, group, organization) as well as the outcome of interest (e.g., group harmony vs. job satisfaction). In this article, we draw from the diverse literatures examining the impact of voice to integrate the theoretical frameworks and empirical results for voice outcomes across organizational levels. To do so, we start with a discussion of the definition and development of voice as a construct, beginning with Hirschman's seminal work on voice/exit/loyalty. We then review the theoretical frameworks within each level that explain the effect of voice on outcomes, highlight the role of mediating or moderating mechanisms, and discuss directions for future research. Finally, we emphasize emerging trends in the study of voice and suggest areas in which the various literatures may benefit from borrowing across fields and levels of interest to produce a more comprehensive, theoretically grounded, and cohesive body of work.*

**Keywords:** *employee voice; justice/fairness; feedback*

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Employees frequently face situations in which they decide to speak up or stay silent about important work-related issues. When they do speak up, their voice can be powerful and affect outcomes at all levels of the organization (e.g., individual job attitudes, group innovation, or organizational performance; Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009; Klaas, Olson-Buchanan, & Ward, 2012). Despite the conventional wisdom that voice is healthy for organizations, when teased apart by level (e.g., individual vs. organization) or literature (e.g.,

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justice vs. proactive behavior), the effects of voice are rather mixed. Additionally, because the different literatures are developing somewhat independently (Klaas et al.), knowledge about outcomes of voice is siloed within each area, and opportunities for exchanges of ideas and approaches are reduced.

In this article, we draw from these diverging literatures to integrate the theoretical frameworks and empirical results for voice outcomes across organizational levels. We begin by briefly discussing the history of voice since its introduction by Hirschman in 1970. We then review the theoretical frameworks used to explain the effects of voice on outcomes within each level (individual, group, and organizational), discuss the variables mediating or moderating the relationships between voice and employee, group or organizational outcomes, reconcile discrepant findings, and emphasize where additional research is needed.

In performing this review, we used a number of databases (e.g., EBSCOhost, PsychInfo, ScienceDirect) and search engines (e.g., Google Scholar), filtering for articles published since 1970 (when Hirschman first introduced the concept of voice). Because our conceptualization of voice includes similar constructs from literatures such as upward feedback (London & Wohlers, 1991), proactive behavior (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998), process control (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and whistle-blowing (Near & Miceli, 1996), we also examined these literatures for relevant articles. We included only those articles that positioned voice as an independent or mediating variable and excluded articles that treated voice as a dependent variable.

## Voice in Management Research

### *A Definition of Voice*

In his seminal work, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, Hirschman (1970) defined voice as directed to a higher authority and intended to bring change or improvement to an existing, objectionable state. However, as Hirschman himself admitted, this is a “messy” construct that ranges in amplitude from “faint grumbling to violent protest” (1970: 16). This messiness becomes amplified as one considers the range of literatures that makes use of (at least some elements of) the construct. In this review, we embrace the messiness in order to give the most complete picture possible of the effects of voice in organizations.

To do so, we expand this definition to include some of the latest developments associated with the construct (e.g., in the area of proactive work behavior). Thus, we define voice as the discretionary or formal expression of ideas, opinions, suggestions, or alternative approaches directed to a specific target inside or outside of the organization with the intent to change an objectionable state of affairs and to improve the current functioning of the organization, group, or individual. We use “voicer” to refer to the person expressing voice and “receiver” to refer to the person to whom the voice is directed. This definition positions voice as problem focused, change oriented, and constructive. It encompasses a broad content area to include research on voice in different literatures as well as related concepts, such as upward feedback and whistle-blowing. This definition also makes clear that changing the current state of affairs should be the most proximal dependent variable of voice. In fact, a change motive is the common factor across most definitions of voice, but it is also one of the most commonly ignored when the effects of voice are empirically tested. Voice is not simply speaking or communicating; it is an attempt to change the status quo (e.g., Hirschman, 1970;

Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012). The emphasis on changing an objectionable state of affairs excludes work on employee silence in organizations (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), complaining (Kowalski, 1996), issue selling (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), and more recent constructs such as supportive voice (Burris, 2012) or acquiescent voice (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003), none of which are explicitly motivated by a desire for change or improvement.

## Voice and Outcomes

Virtually every article on voice begins with a discussion of the positive effects of voice. Given that voice involves making suggestions for better ways of doing things and correcting existing problems (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998), this is perhaps unsurprising. However, it is an oversimplification (Morrison, 2011). Authorities may see voice as unwarranted and unhelpful such that employees who give voice suffer repercussions for their actions (e.g., Burris, 2012). In addition, voice, when it is seen as an attack on the status quo, may actually harm interpersonal relationships (Frese & Fay, 2001) and impair unit or organizational performance (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). As we describe the relationships of voice to outcomes across levels, we highlight when and how voice changes from a force for good to one that is risky.

We begin this review with a discussion of the theory and empirical findings for individual-level outcomes. We then turn to the less well-studied (but no less interesting) effects of voice at the level of the unit and at the level of the organization.

### *Voice and Individual Outcomes*

Research examining the relationships of voice to outcomes for individuals is exceptionally rich. Five areas dominate the literature: feedback, organizational justice, proactive work behavior, human resource management (HRM), and industrial labor relations (ILR). However, each of these literatures operationalizes voice differently. For example, the proactive work behavior literature frames voice as a prosocial behavior that improves the existing processes or practices at work, while the organizational justice literature operationalizes it as the opportunity or the ability to express one's view about procedures used to arrive at outcomes (see Table 1 for examples). These differences in operationalizations affect the extent to which certain aspects of voice are considered. Each literature also tends to stress a distinct set of dependent variables (e.g., the organizational justice literature tends to examine perceptions and attitudes, while the feedback literature emphasizes behavioral change), resulting in a lack of integration across literatures. To introduce some structure to this diverse body of research, we divided the dependent variables most typically studied at the level of the individual into five primary categories (job performance, justice, job attitudes, relational outcomes, and withdrawal/exit). Below, we review the major theoretical perspectives and empirical findings associated with individual-level voice.

*Individual-level voice theory.* Central to the organizational justice literature, but also a feature of the decision-making and HRM literatures, are *process* and *decision control* (also known as instrumental and noninstrumental reasoning). Having voice in procedures is said to positively affect employees' outcomes because voice reduces uncertainty and increases individuals' felt control over the processes that lead to outcomes (typically an instrumental

**Table 1**  
**Operationalization of Voice Across Literatures**

Literature	Operationalization of voice	1	2	3	4	5
Decision making	Opportunity given for actual voice behavior in experimental studies	✓	✓		✓	
	Amount of dissent (e.g., with items from Rahim's 1982 Intragroup Group Conflict Inventory)					
Feedback	Subordinate ratings of supervisor performance (e.g., leadership effectiveness)		✓	✓	✓	✓
Human resource management/ Industrial labor relations	The presence or absence of unions or union representative, union membership, formal (or informal) voice mechanisms	✓				
Organizational justice	Opportunity given for actual voice behavior in experimental studies	✓	*	*	*	*
	Perception of opportunity for voice in field studies (e.g., procedural justice scales; Colquitt, 2001; Moorman, 1991)					
Proactive work behavior	Proactive, extrarole, or organizational citizenship behavior, operationalized as the extent to which employees engage in prosocial voice (e.g., LePine & Van Dyne, 1998)		✓	*		
Whistle-blowing	Actual whistle-blowing behavior, whether or not the individual discloses wrongdoings of the organization to external or internal parties		*	*	*	*

*Note:* 1 = voice as an opportunity; 2 = voice expressed; 3 = voice ignored; 4 = voice acknowledged; 5 = change enacted. Check marks represent frequent cases (greater than 60% of studies); asterisks represent only rare cases (three or fewer studies).

concern), as well as because voice makes individuals feel like valued members of the organization (noninstrumental concerns typically couched in the “group-value model”; Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Another popular theoretical approach to explain the effects of voice at this level is social exchange theory (P. Blau, 1964). The proactive work behavior and HRM literatures in particular use this framework to theorize about employee voice. In the proactive work behavior literature, voice is seen as prosocial and improvement oriented. As a result, voice signals employee commitment and concern for the organization and, in exchange, managers recognize and reward employees who express voice (e.g., Burris, 2012). In contrast, the HRM literature operationalizes voice as the number of formal and informal channels (e.g., two-way feedback systems, unionized voice) for employees to express voice. This is similar to how the organizational justice literature treats voice in that it focuses on the opportunity to express voice rather than actual voice behavior (see Table 1). When organizations increase voice opportunities, an exchange mechanism is triggered and employees are expected to reciprocate (e.g., with organizational commitment; Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton, & Swart, 2003). Although these theoretical frameworks are used extensively across different literatures to link voice to individual-level outcomes, specific literatures also utilize their own, unique frameworks. Below, we discuss some of the less common theoretical frameworks where applicable and review the effect of voice on individual outcomes.

*Voice and performance.* Individual performance is among the most studied outcomes of voice. Although voice is believed to positively relate to individual performance, the findings are mixed. Recall that the organizational justice literature predicts that voice (operationalized most typically as the opportunity to give voice) relates to positive performance outcomes for the voicer. In their meta-analysis, Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, and Ng (2001) showed that voice was positively related to the supervisor-rated performance ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .17$ ) and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB;  $r_{\text{corrected}} = .21$ ) of the voicer. In one of the rare organizational justice studies that examined the effect of actual voice behavior (rather than simply the opportunity to voice), Hunton, Price, and Hall (1996) showed that voice, when ignored, resulted in a 41% decrease in output compared to when it was acted upon.

The literature on proactive work behavior takes a broader perspective and integrates theories from a variety of areas (e.g., impression management, persuasion) to operationalize voice as a proactive and prosocial behavior that is cooperative and change oriented in its motive but that may entail an element of risk for the voicer (e.g., LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). When conceptualized this way, meta-analytic estimates suggest a significant relationship of voice with subjective performance (a combination of peer-, supervisor-, and self-rated overall performance,  $r_{\text{corrected}} = .59$ ; Thomas, Whitman, & Viswesvaran, 2010) and other-rated in-role performance ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .27$ ; Ng & Feldman, 2012). This relationship with performance ratings is further strengthened when voice provides a solution, when the voicer is trustworthy and an expert in the relevant area, when the voicer provides input early in the process, and when there is a norm for speaking up in the organization (Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012). Interestingly, however, the correlation with objective performance (including both financial performance and productivity rates) is not significant ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .09$ ; Thomas et al.).

Of course, given the challenging nature of voice, there are instances where voice may actually harm the voicer. For example, Seibert, Kraimer, and Crant (2001) initially hypothesized a positive relationship between proactive voice and career progression (e.g., promotions received and salary progression) and career satisfaction. Instead, they found a negative relationship between proactive voice and career progression and no relationship with career satisfaction. In an effort to explain these results, they argued that employees whose proactive voice focuses on problems without providing innovative solutions may damage their own careers. This type of voice, albeit proactive in its nature, impairs the existing interpersonal relationships at work, which in turn can negatively affect how managers evaluate the voicer's performance. Thus, voice can actually have a negative effect on performance (or performance ratings) when it is deemed unhelpful.

The feedback literature switches the emphasis from the voicer to the receiver and operationalizes voice as the action of expressing one's opinion, complaint, or evaluation. This literature draws heavily on control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981) and goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 1990) and emphasizes the impact of voice on the receiver's cognitive and behavioral reactions. Indeed, meta-analytic estimates suggest that managers whose initial self-ratings are lower than subordinates' ratings can (when motivated) improve their performance ( $d = 0.15$ ; Smither, London, & Reilly, 2005).

The feedback literature has also identified a range of variables that moderate the relationship of feedback and performance. For instance, the effect is stronger when feedback is anonymous (e.g., Antonioni, 1994) and focused on specific dimensions of performance (e.g.,

Nemeroff & Cosentino, 1979). Similarly, feedback has more influence on receivers with high levels of self-efficacy (e.g., Heslin & Latham, 2004) or conscientiousness (e.g., Smither, London, & Richmond, 2005). This suggests that the impact of voice (or feedback) depends not only on the content of the voice, as suggested in the justice and proactive work behavior literatures, but also on how receivers perceive that voice and whether they have the ability or desire to act on it (e.g., Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

*Voice and justice perceptions.* As noted earlier, the organizational justice literature frequently operationalizes voice as whether the opportunity to express voice exists, rather than the actual voice behavior. The “voice effect” (employees deem a process or an outcome as more fair when given voice) was first examined by Folger in 1977 (and is alternatively called “process control”; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Most typically, the specific criteria of interest are the perceived fairness of the process (procedural justice perceptions) and outcomes (distributive justice perceptions). Two meta-analyses report a significant positive relationship between voice and how fairly both the outcome ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .20$ , Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001;  $r_{\text{corrected}} = .34$ , Colquitt et al., 2001) and the process ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .52$ , Cohen-Charash & Spector;  $r_{\text{corrected}} = .51$ , Colquitt et al.) are perceived.

The (very) few studies operationalizing voice as actual behavior report interesting effects. For example, giving postdecisional voice (which, because it came after the decision was made, had no effect on the decision itself) results in higher fairness perceptions than no voice at all (Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990). In addition, voice does not always lead to higher fairness perceptions. In a series of experimental studies, Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, and Cochran (1979) showed that when individuals’ voices are heard but not acted upon, the voice effect reverses into a “frustration effect,” depending on whether outcomes are equitably or inequitably distributed. When outcomes are equitably distributed, participants in the voice condition perceive decisions and procedures fairly but also more fairly than in the no-voice condition. In contrast, when outcomes are inequitably distributed, participants perceive decisions and procedures unfairly but also less fairly in the voice condition (i.e., they are given voice but their voice is ignored) than in the no-voice condition. Apparently, people want and value the opportunity to voice, but once they use it, they also want it to matter.

*Voice and job attitudes.* The relationships between voice and job attitudes are examined in a variety of literatures; however, these literatures operationalize voice differently (e.g., procedural voice vs. formal voice mechanisms) and generally assume a positive effect of voice for the voicer rather than the receiver of voice.

In their meta-analysis of organizational justice literature, Colquitt and colleagues (2001) observed that voice (operationalized as the opportunity to express concerns and arguments) positively relates to outcome satisfaction ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .45$ ), job satisfaction ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .37$ ), and organizational commitment ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .27$ ). In the proactive work behavior literature, the relationships between challenging and change- and improvement-oriented voice and job attitudes are also positive (job satisfaction:  $r_{\text{corrected}} = .20$ ; affective organizational commitment:  $r_{\text{corrected}} = .25$ ; Thomas et al., 2010). Interestingly, despite the potentially disruptive effect of challenging voice, the proactive work behavior literature also reports significant negative relationships between voice and affective detachment from the organization (self-rated voice:  $r_{\text{corrected}} = -.25$ ; other-rated voice:  $r_{\text{corrected}} = -.22$ ; Ng & Feldman, 2012) and organizational

disidentification (self-rated voice:  $r_{\text{corrected}} = -.45$ ; other-rated voice:  $r_{\text{corrected}} = -.14$ ; Ng & Feldman). One possible interpretation is that individuals who are affectively attached and highly identified with their organizations are more motivated to express voice in an effort to improve the current functioning of their organization.

In the HRM and ILR literatures, the results for the effect of unionized voice on job attitudes are not as uniformly positive. For instance, the ILR literature frequently reports a negative correlation between union voice and job satisfaction. However, these relationships become more positive when both employee and union voice are present in an organization than when employees have no voice or only one type of voice (e.g., Bryson, 2004). This may be due to the increased number of voice mechanisms in these types of organizations. When organizations increase opportunities or the number of formal or informal voice mechanisms, employee attitudes, especially satisfaction at work, tend to improve (Purcell et al., 2003).

*Voice and relational outcomes.* Because of the somewhat limited number of studies on these outcomes, we have clustered the dependent variables of trust, liking, leader support, manager–subordinate relationships, and loyalty into a larger category, which we call “relational outcomes.” Interestingly, the majority of research on this set of constructs reverses the direction of the effect to position them as predictors rather than outcomes of voice (e.g., trust in the supervisor predicts employee willingness to express voice; e.g., Detert & Burris, 2007). However, these are generally correlational studies, and it is equally plausible that when employees voice, they also affect the liking or trust a manager has in them.

Relational outcomes are of particular interest to the organizational justice and proactive work behavior literatures and are typically expected to improve with increasing amounts of voice. The organizational justice literature frames these effects within the relational model of authority (Tyler & Lind, 1992) to argue that individuals will use the fairness of procedures enacted by an authority as a proxy for the trustworthiness of the authority. Meta-analytic findings support this argument and show a significant positive relationship between the opportunity to voice and trust in authority ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = .47$ ; Colquitt et al., 2001). In contrast, the proactive work behavior literature positions voice as a way for employees to reduce their own stress (i.e., conservation of resources theory; Hobfoll, 1989) and argues that by giving voice, employees can receive help from their supervisors. This then leads to better relationships with authority figures (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Indeed, meta-analytic findings report a negative correlation between proactive work behavior and strained relationships with authorities ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = -.32$ ; Ng & Feldman).

*Voice, withdrawal, and exit.* The relationship between employee voice, withdrawal, and exit has attracted significant research attention. Both the HRM and ILR literatures operationalize voice as the presence of unions or other informal voice mechanisms and largely employ exit/voice/loyalty/neglect (EVLN) frameworks (an expansion of the original EVL framework to include “neglect”; Farrell, 1983) to explain their effects. In line with this framework, the main theoretical argument is that voice, if acted upon, will improve the situation, and employees will subsequently become more satisfied with working conditions and less likely to quit the organization (e.g., Iverson & Currivan, 2003). Empirical studies generally support this view and report a negative relationship between the presence of a union, intentions to quit (e.g., Avery, McKay, Wilson, Volpone, & Killham, 2011), and turnover (e.g., Iverson &



Currihan). When unions are absent or voice is otherwise lacking, but employees do not have the option to quit, employees instead tend to withdraw and absenteeism tends to increase (what the EVLN framework calls “neglect”; e.g., Farrell).

In the organizational justice literature, voice is (as mentioned above) said to increase one’s trust in authorities, subsequently resulting in higher levels of perceived legitimacy of authorities. With increased levels of legitimacy, acceptance of decisions increases and the likelihood of quitting the organization drops (Daly & Geyer, 1994). In line with these predictions (and the findings in the HRM and ILR literatures), the meta-analysis by Colquitt and colleagues (2001) reported a negative relationship between voice and withdrawal behaviors ( $r_{\text{corrected}} = -.24$ ). However, on a more disquieting note, Burris, Detert, and Romney (2013) showed that managers may perceive employees who express constant, challenging voice as offensive, hostile, or disloyal and that this can result in what they politely called “involuntarily turnover” from the organization.

Two variables seem to play a moderating role in the relationship between voice and withdrawal or turnover. The first, organizational tenure, moderates the relationship between voice and intention to remain. More specifically, both the instrumental and noninstrumental effects of voice on one’s intention to remain at the organization vanish for employees with longer organizational tenure (Avery et al., 2011). The second, organizational commitment, weakens the negative relationship between voice and withdrawal/exit (Hammer, Landau, & Stern, 1981). In a manner akin to those high on the “loyalty” dimension of the EVLN framework (Farrell, 1983), employees who are more committed will remain with the organization in hopes of seeing an eventual change.

*Conclusion for effects of voice at the level of the individual.* When voice is available or heard, it increases employees’ sense of value (e.g., Lind & Tyler, 1988), felt control over decisions or outcomes (e.g., Folger, 1977), and satisfaction and motivation at work (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986). However, voice can also have negative effects for individuals. When unheard (Pinder & Harlos, 2001) or ignored (e.g., Folger), expressed voice leads to frustration for the voicer. More perniciously, employees who give voice may be seen as troublemakers and can receive lower performance ratings from supervisors (e.g., Seibert et al., 2001). Furthermore, the effect of voice at the level of the individual is at least partially dependent on whether voice is actually expressed and how that voice is received. Work on voice would be made richer if researchers broadened their lens to consider these issues.

Of course, once we begin looking at reactions to voice, it becomes clear that the next interesting question is will or how will voice change as a function of that reaction? Clearly, voice is a process, not a one-shot exchange. To better understand the effects of voice (and the effects of outcomes on subsequent voice), we believe that it is necessary to look at these relationships over time. The possibilities are obvious and many of the theoretical frameworks already exist. For example, in the work on proactive work behaviors and job attitudes, there are already well-developed ideas about how each of the categories discussed earlier (which we have positioned as outcomes) should lead to voice in their own right. In addition, by taking a longitudinal approach to voice and its effects, it becomes clear that the majority of work on voice actually ignores what should be the most proximal outcome of voice: change (or the lack thereof). When change or a lack of change is taken into consideration, the model of voice becomes substantially richer and our ability to predict an effect for voice is improved.

We return to these issues in the overall discussion section. For now, we turn to the effect of voice at the level of the group.

### *Voice and Group-Level Outcomes*

Work examining the effects of voice on unit- or group-level outcomes remains scant (Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013). While the assumption remains that voice should be good for the functioning of the group, limited theoretical or empirical work exists explaining when or how these positive outcomes should unfold. MacKenzie et al. (2011) make the argument that an individual speaking up in a group may act as a role model, set a group norm, and encourage others to speak up, in effect creating a climate for voice within the group. McClean, Burris, and Detert (2013) make a similar argument and add that voice, whether expressed as an individual in a group or as a group, will have outcomes for the entire group. From this perspective, it makes sense to examine the impact of both individual- and group-level voice on group-level outcomes. In the following sections, we have concentrated only on those outcomes for which there are empirical findings.

*Voice and unit creativity and innovation.* Creativity is the production of novel and useful ideas or solutions to problems employees face, while innovation refers to the extent to which those creative ideas are implemented (Mumford, 2011). Hence, innovation is frequently viewed as a two-stage process in which creativity is seen as the first stage of innovation. Voice in this literature is usually conceptualized as minority opinion or dissent, either as a single individual or as a minority of group members (De Dreu & West, 2001).

Arguments about the impact of voice on unit-level creativity and innovation are rooted in lab-based findings from social psychology (e.g., Nemeth & Kwan, 1987). In general, it is expected that dissent (if voiced) stimulates unit-level creativity. This is because dissent acts to rupture the pressure to conform in groups (Hackman & Morris, 1975). Dissenting voices force the majority to better understand the minority, presumably in order to better reject their arguments (Nemeth, 1997). As a result, the majority begins to consider the problem from many perspectives (Nemeth, 1986), which is then expected to translate into higher levels of creativity.

However, while higher levels of minority dissent lead to more creativity in a unit, implementation of these ideas is required if they are to translate into actual innovation. De Dreu and West (2001) showed that minority dissent led to innovation only when participation in decision making within the unit was also high. De Dreu (2002) replicated this relationship in a sample of 32 organizational teams and also identified a second moderator, team reflexivity (whether the team is self-reflective and adaptive), that amplified the positive relationship between dissent and team innovation. In teams low in team reflexivity, even when minority team members voice their ideas, the solutions are not discussed further. In such teams, dissenting views are unlikely to be voiced, but even when they are voiced, they are unlikely to be heard or processed. In teams high in participative decision making or team reflexivity, minority dissent is more likely to be voiced, heard, and translated into innovation.

*Voice and unit decision making.* Voice in the decision-making literature is also operationalized as minority dissent and is said to affect unit decision making in much the same way

as it does innovation and creativity. Minority dissent stimulates more complex thinking and better problem solving (Nemeth, 1997) by disrupting stability and introducing dissonance into the group (Matz & Wood, 2005). This leads to greater attention to the message, the consideration of multiple perspectives, improved information search, and greater flexibility in thought (e.g., De Dreu, DeVries, Franssen, & Altmink 2000), all of which are associated with improved decision making.

Related to the idea of minority dissent is the large literature on the effect of a devil's advocate (a team member whose role is to criticize the assumptions of the team) in improving group decision making (Schweiger, Sandberg, & Ragan, 1986). While the usefulness of a devil's advocate is well established (mostly in controlled lab environments), there is an interesting potential downside to this effect. Because devil's advocates are assigned to the role of dissent (and this is known by the group), they may actually be discounted as a useful source of information on the issue (Maass & Clark, 1984). Experimental work comparing the effect of no voice, authentic voice (voice believed to be spontaneous and genuine), or a devil's advocate showed that authentic dissenting voice had a more powerful effect on decision making than either no voice or a devil's advocate (Nemeth, Connell, Rogers, & Brown, 2001). More insidiously, the Nemeth et al. findings suggest that because groups with a devil's advocate perceive that they have considered an alternate viewpoint (the one proposed by the devil's advocate, which they may have actually discounted because it was from a devil's advocate), they are less energetic about considering other options and may become even more extreme in their initial judgment. This is akin to the findings at the level of the individual discussed earlier; when supervisors attribute self-interested or destructive motives to the voicer, they ignore the content of the voice and may even punish the voicer. Similarly, when group members attribute a lack of conviction to the voicer (the devil's advocate), they are less likely to be moved by the voice (e.g., Burris et al., 2013).

Work on voice and group decision making, while compelling, has been dominated by lab studies rather than organizationally based field studies. The only field study we identified examined the relationship of dissent to enhanced decision quality. Using a sample of 86 strategic decision-making teams in U.S. hospitals, Dooley and Fryxel (1999) showed that higher levels of team dissent related to better decision quality. However, they also identified an important boundary condition, perceived loyalty to the team. That is, they argued that in the absence of loyalty, dissent is seen as self-serving. In contrast, when loyalty is high, dissent is perceived as goal oriented and the team will better concentrate on the content and meaning of the dissent and, therefore, make higher quality decisions. Taken together then, dissent relates to positive group outcomes only when that dissent is expressed, accepted (usually as a function of beliefs about the motives of those expressing voice), and processed by the team or leader.

*Voice and unit exit.* Akin to its effects at the individual level, voice is not always beneficial for groups either. The presence of dissenters in a group is disruptive and can lead to conflict that undermines group harmony and performance (De Dreu, 2006). In extreme cases, this can lead to groups exiting an organization. As compared to the decision-making and innovation literatures, which conceptualize voice at the level of the individual, work on unit-level exit has conceptualized voice as a group-level independent variable.

Dyck and Starke (1999) built on Farrell's (1983) EVLN framework to examine the relationship between voice and exit at the level of the work unit. They reconceptualized

traditional EVLN approaches that consider exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect as independent responses to dissatisfaction with the organization (e.g., Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988) to longitudinally study whether instead, groups progress through these responses sequentially. Their study reported a number of important findings. First, they showed that over time, groups in greater conflict with their organizations moved progressively through the responses of loyalty, voice, and exit. Initially, members of dissatisfied groups were loyal (waiting for the organization to change). When change was not forthcoming, they began to express voice (attempting to trigger change). Only when their voice was ignored or resisted did the group exit. So again, as suggested in the HRM, ILR, and organizational justice literatures at the individual level, voice, when ignored, leads to exit for some. In addition, in a manner similar to that reported in the feedback literature, Dyck and Starke illustrated why the reaction of voice recipients is also important. They showed that in reaction to voice, proponents of the status quo (receivers) also went through a sequence of stages from tolerance to protection to active dismissal. Proponents of the status quo may at first tolerate dissenters (waiting for them to regain their senses). As dissenters become more vociferous, receivers may begin actively defending the status quo. Finally, when the tension becomes too much, they may force dissenters to leave.

In a more recent field study conducted over two time periods, McClean et al. (2013), in line with Dyke and Starke (1999), proposed that voice is part of a progression of behaviors leading to group-level exit, depending on how that voice is responded to. Using multisource data from 136 restaurants, they showed that unit-level voice is related to unit-level turnover, especially when management was not change oriented, did not participate in decision making, and had limited access to resources. In other words, when managers were not willing or not able to respond to voice, it led to turnover.

*Other notable findings.* While a number of the studies discussed above conceptualized voice at the level of the group, work studying the effects of a voice climate (typically defined as shared beliefs about speaking up) as a discrete construct is also beginning to emerge. Indeed, the majority of studies on voice climate show that higher levels of voice climate relate to more voice behaviors at the level of individuals within a unit (e.g., Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011) as well as voice at the group level (Frazier & Bowler, in press).

Given the findings for an effect of voice on individual performance and the findings for an effect of individual voice on unit-level outcomes, it seems reasonable to expect that group voice should relate to performance at the level of the unit. To date, only one study we are aware of has examined this possibility. Detert et al. (2013), in a comprehensive study of how voice flows towards and around leaders, used time-lagged field data with a sample of 801 credit union employees and their 93 managers to show that voice directed to the manager improved the average performance of that manager's unit ( $R^2 = .31$ ). The authors postulate three main reasons for this effect. First, because voice is intended to serve the larger group or organization, it is inherently improvement oriented and prosocial. Thus, voice, when acted upon, should lead to improvement. Second, because voice can still be risky, subordinates will self-censor, vet, or more carefully form their suggestions before actually voicing them to their managers. Thus, the voice expressed is of higher quality and value to managers. Third, because the voice expressed is of higher quality, it is also more likely to generate learning in the manager. The manager then has more high quality information from employees as a result

of the voice and can make a better decision about how to translate that voice into actions that improve unit performance.

*Conclusion for effects of voice at the level of the unit.* While limited, the emerging research on the effect of voice at the level of the unit is interesting. In particular, there is an emphasis on the motive of the voicer as a key boundary condition. Additionally, this body of work has done a better job incorporating time and process effects into their studies. The work of Dyck and Starke (1999) in particular demonstrates the power of this approach by changing what had been a set of independent outcomes (exit, voice, loyalty, or neglect) into a sequence of outcomes (loyalty, then voice, then exit or neglect). They also incorporate the idea of recipient responses to show that the majority (receivers) follow a similar but distinct process that can lead to rejection of the voicing minority's voice. Finally, work at this level has demonstrated the importance of norms (climate) and a consideration of context as additional boundary conditions affecting the expression of voice as well as the outcomes of that expression. Next, we turn to work that examines the impact of voice at the level of the organization.

### *Voice and Organizational Outcomes*

Voice is said to lead to a number of positive outcomes for an organization, including learning, adaptability, decision making, and performance (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). However, while this claim is often repeated across literatures, empirical findings are few and far between. Indeed, the articles making this claim are usually studying voice and outcomes at the level of the individual. Even less well explicated is a theoretical rationale for why voice at the level of the individual should lead to organizational-level outcomes. Nevertheless, some findings do exist, although they present a slightly different picture of the effects of voice on organizational level than conventional expectations.

*Voice and turnover.* Work on voice at the organizational level tends to operationalize it as either direct (e.g., team meetings) or representative voice (e.g., unions) and argue that, at the organizational level, voice is expressed through one of two different channels—union (i.e., representative voice) or nonunion (i.e., direct voice) mechanisms—or a combination of these (also known as dual forms; Bryson, Willman, Gomez, & Kretschmer, 2013).

Although voice generally relates negatively to turnover at the organizational level, the empirical findings differ depending on the type of voice and the channel through which it is expressed. One of the dominant arguments for a negative relationship between voice and organizational turnover is that unions, through the collective bargaining process, help employees receive higher than average market wages and that these relatively higher wages make employees less likely to quit (Akerlof, 1982). Freeman and Medoff (1984) built on this argument and drew on Hirschman's (1970) EVL work to point out that in addition to dealing with monetary issues, unions provide communication channels for employees to articulate their dissatisfaction with the current state of the organization. Assuming that employee voice is acted upon, voice expressed through unions should improve working conditions and make employees less likely to quit. Empirical tests of this idea support Freeman and Medoff's claim: Voice explains additional variance in quit rates after controlling for compensation levels (Batt, Colvin, & Keefe, 2002).

In fact, both representative voice and direct voice demonstrate a negative relationship with turnover rates (e.g., F. D. Blau & Kahn, 1983; Long & Link 1983). Nevertheless, a comparison of their relative effects suggests that direct rather than representative voice is more powerful and a combination of the two is best. Spencer (1986) examined the relationship between employee voice and retention rates in hospitals to show that greater numbers of direct voice mechanisms are related to lower quit rates, regardless of the presence or absence of unions. Bryson and colleagues (2013) examined the effect of all three channels of voice on quit rates using a data set of five representative surveys (in different years) of British private sector workplaces. Their results suggest that dual form channels, in which both union and nonunion mechanisms exist, outperform single voice channels. This fits with earlier work on the effect of union voice at the individual level. The presence of union voice generally relates negatively to quit rates at the individual level, and as the number of voice channels increases, individual outcomes improve (Purcell et al., 2003). Given the recent shift from union to non-union voice channels in practice (e.g., Bryson, 2004; Bryson et al.), further effort should be dedicated to examining the generalizability of these findings.

*Voice and organizational learning.* Organizations, in order to remain competitive and to better adjust themselves to dynamic market conditions, aspire to continuously learn (East-erby-Smith, Crossan, & Nicolini, 2000). This never-ending process of learning requires them to obtain, make sense of, communicate, and transform market-related (and frequently time-sensitive) information in order to change or adapt accordingly (Sinkula, 1994). In the HRM literature, voice, particularly at the individual level, is one pathway through which learning (usually conceptualized as either improvement or efficiency in organizational activities; e.g., Dodgson, 1993) occurs at the organizational level. Voice feeds critical information into the organization (Barker & Camarata, 1998) and challenges assumptions, norms, and values regarding the process of change (Beer & Walton, 1987). In a process similar to that described in the unit decision-making literature (e.g., De Dreu, et al., 2000), voice helps leaders of the organization think more broadly and identify crucial issues (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996).

Although voice should positively affect organizational learning and change, the actions of middle management can moderate this impact, either helping (Levine, 2001) or hurting (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996) the process by which voice translates into learning within the organization. On one hand, middle management can gather, analyze, synthesize, and disseminate relevant information communicated through employee voice to upper management. On the other hand, middle management may resist employee voice because of its challenging or threatening nature.

This line of reasoning makes sense theoretically and fits conceptually with findings in other areas of the voice literature (e.g., voice and decision making); however, there is a problem with the way organizational learning is operationalized. As stated by Dodgson, organizational learning is frequently operationalized as either “quantifiable improvements in activities,” “sustainable comparative competitive efficiency,” or “comparative innovative efficiency” (1993: 376). However, learning is actually a change in the amount of knowledge in an organization, not whether or how that knowledge is translated into action. The operationalizations described by Dodgson more closely resemble outcomes of organizational learning (e.g., organizational performance) than a change in organizational knowledge. It seems more reasonable to operationalize organizational learning as change in organizational knowledge and examine its role as a mediator of the relationship between voice and organizational performance.

*Voice and organizational performance.* Voice, as in the work examining voice and organizational quit rates, is operationalized as the presence or absence of union voice, the existence of formal voice channels, or as a human resource (HR) practice, while organizational performance is operationalized as financial performance (e.g., operating margins, financial performance indicators), labor productivity (e.g., total revenue, sales, or labor hours per employee), as well as improvement in organizational outcomes (e.g., service failures).

Generally speaking, voice is expected to lead to higher organizational performance. One theoretical rationale revolves around the arguments of Freeman and Medoff (1984) and is similar to those made for voice and individual performance. When voice channels are present, employees become more satisfied with and committed to their organization, try harder, and engage in extrarole behaviors, which in turn translates into better individual performance and, eventually, better organizational performance.

Despite these arguments, the broader empirical findings are rather inconsistent. For example, some studies report that union representation (representative voice) is positively related to operational productivity and operating margins (Gittell, Von Nordenflycht, & Kochan, 2004), while direct voice appears to relate to better financial performance than no-voice channels (Bryson et al., 2013). Other studies, in contrast, report that neither employee voice (Delery & Doty, 1996) nor union representation (within the organization and industry; Huselid, 1995) has an impact on financial performance. In the broader HRM literature, no studies have found a significant relationship between voice and labor productivity (e.g., Bryson et al.; Gittell et al.; Huselid) with one exception. Kim, MacDuffie, and Pil (2010), in contrast to other studies on voice and organizational performance, looked at team-level voice as well as representative voice. Team and representative voice positively relate to labor productivity only when their interaction term is included in the analysis. Low team and low representative voice lead to inferior labor productivity compared to other conditions, but the two types of voice do not complement each other. The positive impact of each is stronger at lower levels of the other.

There are at least two possibilities for these less than overwhelming findings. First, research in both HRM and ILR base their arguments for a relationship between voice and organizational performance on the well-established (theoretical and empirical) results at the individual level (e.g., performance, satisfaction). There is a dearth of theory that explains the mechanisms that translate these individual-level outcomes into enhanced organizational performance. Second, regardless of how individual-level outcomes may bubble up to affect organizational outcomes, performance at the organizational level can be driven by a wide array of external factors (e.g., poor market conditions), which may mitigate any effect of voice on organizational performance.

One study from the proactive work behavior literature provides one possible blueprint on how to tackle this issue. MacKenzie and colleagues (2011) looked at the relationship of affiliative and challenging voice to financial performance. They argued that the two types of voice interact to predict the financial performance (sales and profit) of the organization and that task performance of the work group mediated this relationship. Using 150 restaurants, they showed a U-shaped relationship between challenge-oriented OCBs and work group performance. Challenge-oriented OCBs had a positive relationship up to a point but beyond that point, the effect remained positive only when affiliation-oriented OCBs were also present. This is in line with the literatures in organizational justice and proactive voice behavior

showing the importance of considering the attributions that receivers make about the motives of the voicer. Criticism is more effective when it comes from subordinates who appear more committed to the organization or supervisor (Whiting, Podsakoff, & Pierce, 2008). MacKenzie et al. also showed that the effects of these voice behaviors on organizational performance were completely mediated by work group task performance. Voice improved work group task performance and, as the work groups (restaurants) performed better, the bottom line of the organization improved.

Another study, by Lam and Mayer (2014), took a different approach to this issue and expanded the construct of voice to include what they called organizational-level customer-oriented voice (i.e., an organizational-level aggregate of employee voice that expressed customers' dissatisfaction and recommendations regarding workplace procedures). Using time-lagged field data with a sample of 132 employees and their managers from 41 hospitals, the authors reported a positive relationship between employees' customer-oriented voice (aggregated to the level of the organization) and the hospital-level service performance as appraised by the CEO ( $\beta = 0.43, p < .05$ ) and vice president ( $\beta = 0.71, p < .05$ ). As the hospitals acted upon the customer-oriented voice expressed by their employees, customers were more satisfied with the service quality, which translated into higher levels of service performance in the organization.

Clearly, theories exist that allow us to build from results in the voice literature at the level of the individual to make specific theoretically based predictions about how individual-level voice links to group- and organizational-level voice and outcomes. We believe that this approach can only further strengthen the work in the HRM and ILR literatures when studying the relationship between voice and organizational performance.

*Voice and organizational wrongdoing.* The whistle-blowing literature dominates work on voice and its impact on organizational wrongdoing. Defined as "the disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action" (Near & Miceli, 1985: 4), whistle-blowing, akin to voice, is constructive in its motive and can be beneficial for organizations (Dozier & Miceli, 1985).

Whistle-blowing fits firmly within the EVLN paradigm. As Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran point out, "Organizational employees have three options to address an unsatisfactory situation within an organization: (1) to exit the organization, (2) voice discontent (i.e., blow the whistle), or (3) remain silent" (2005: 280). Typically, however, in the whistle-blowing literature, voice is usually operationalized as the intent to voice (at the level of the individual) rather than actual voicing behavior. Researchers generally justify this choice as a result of the difficulties of studying actual unethical behavior in organizations (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran). However, for our purposes, intent to voice is not actually voice. Similarly, improved organizational performance or increased organizational ethicality have been touted as outcomes of whistle-blowing; however, as Near and Miceli (1995) point out, when operationalized this way, the effects of whistle-blowing are still unclear. Whistle-blowing could lead to better performance (because of better monitoring) or simply to a more efficiently corrupt organization (because of better disguising of the unethical behavior). Instead, effective whistle-blowing should lead to a termination of the wrongdoing (Near & Miceli).



However, the empirical evidence for the effectiveness of actually blowing the whistle is mixed. In one of the two empirical studies of whistle-blowing effectiveness, Miceli and Near (2002) surveyed three different field samples of individuals who had blown the whistle and asked them to rate their perceptions of whether their voice had led to a change in the level of wrongdoing within their organizations. The combined effect across these three samples was a nonsignificant correlation of  $-.07$  (Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2005) between blowing the whistle and the perception of its effectiveness in stopping the wrongdoing. However, the effectiveness of whistle-blowing also varied across the three samples. In the sample of federal employees, 31% reported that their whistle-blowing was effective, while in the sample of internal auditors, 85% reported that their whistle-blowing was effective (Miceli & Near). As argued by resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), this difference in effectiveness may reflect the respondents' relative power in the organization (Miceli & Near). In fact, the results partly support this argument in that whistle-blowers perceive that wrongdoing is terminated when the organization is more dependent on the whistle-blower (the whistle-blower is more powerful and legitimate and has the support of others) and when the wrongdoing is not as central to the organization (it occurs less frequently, has a small impact, or has not been going on for long). Most recently, Skivenes and Trygstad (2010) found yet more support for this power perspective, reporting that the effectiveness of whistle-blowing in driving perceived change was moderated by the power of the whistle-blower (whether they were a manager). Notwithstanding the difficulty of studying unethical behaviors in organizations, there remains a pressing need for research in this area to improve our understanding of how and when whistle-blowing can lead to effective change.

*Conclusion for effects of voice at the level of the organization.* Voice relates to a number of important outcomes at the organizational level. Most of the studies on the effect of unions on organizational-level outcomes treat voice as a binary variable (i.e., it exists or does not exist). In some ways, this is similar to the organizational justice approach in that voice is conceptualized as an opportunity to speak out rather than actually speaking out. By taking this approach, however, it is impossible to examine other potential moderators or drivers of voice-related outcomes, such as the intensity of union voice or the relative power of the union. In contrast, in the organizational learning literature, it is less of an issue of how voice is operationalized than how learning is operationalized. It may be useful to first develop a more specific knowledge-focused operationalization of learning (rather than as a change in performance) to examine how voice translates into organizational learning and then study how this learning drives organizational performance. Similarly, the whistle-blowing literature has suffered from a lack of specificity in the operationalization of both voice and outcomes. It is encouraging, however, that more recent studies have taken some of these issues into account and started looking at actual voice expressed and its relationship to perceived change in wrongdoing.

Finally, the work on organizational performance demonstrates a lack of theoretical grounding that hampers efforts to understand how voice can translate into organization performance. Part of the issue may be that both HRM and ILR tend to deal with variables at the firm level of analyses. In addition, HRM tends to look at the effects of bundles of HR practices rather than a specific practice such as voice. Researchers may need to weave together the multiple theoretical backgrounds for each individual practice into a coherent narrative.

However, if the goal is to understand the processes by which HR practices and ILR issues translate into organizational-level phenomenon, it will also be necessary to specify how individual effects build into group effects, which, in turn, affect organizational-level effects. The study by MacKenzie et al. (2011) serves as a good example of the benefits of such an approach.

### **Summary and a Recommendation**

The evidence largely supports the conventional wisdom that voice is a good thing for organizations. Voice matters. It relates to a host of positive outcomes across levels. For individuals, voice opportunities or voice expressed can relate to improved justice perceptions, better job attitudes, higher levels of OCBs and performance ratings, better relationships, and lower levels of turnover. At the level of the group, a similar pattern is seen. Voice expressed as an individual or as a unit can relate to better decision making and performance, more innovation, and lower unit-level turnover. Even at the level of the organization, there is evidence that voice can relate to lower levels of organizational turnover, wrongdoing, and better performance. However, Morrison (2011) is correct to caution against oversimplifying this relationship. There is an underappreciated modifier at the heart of most of these relationships: whether voice is ignored or acknowledged and acted upon (see Table 1 and Figure 1). When voice is ignored, many of the positive outcomes turn negative. Ignored voice can lead to turnover, absenteeism, and withdrawal across all levels of the organization as well as punishment for the voicer. This is explicitly modeled in some pockets of the literature (e.g., “frustration effect” in Folger, 1977, and “deaf ear syndrome” in Pinder & Harlos, 2001) but remains unacknowledged in the majority of existing studies of voice outcomes.

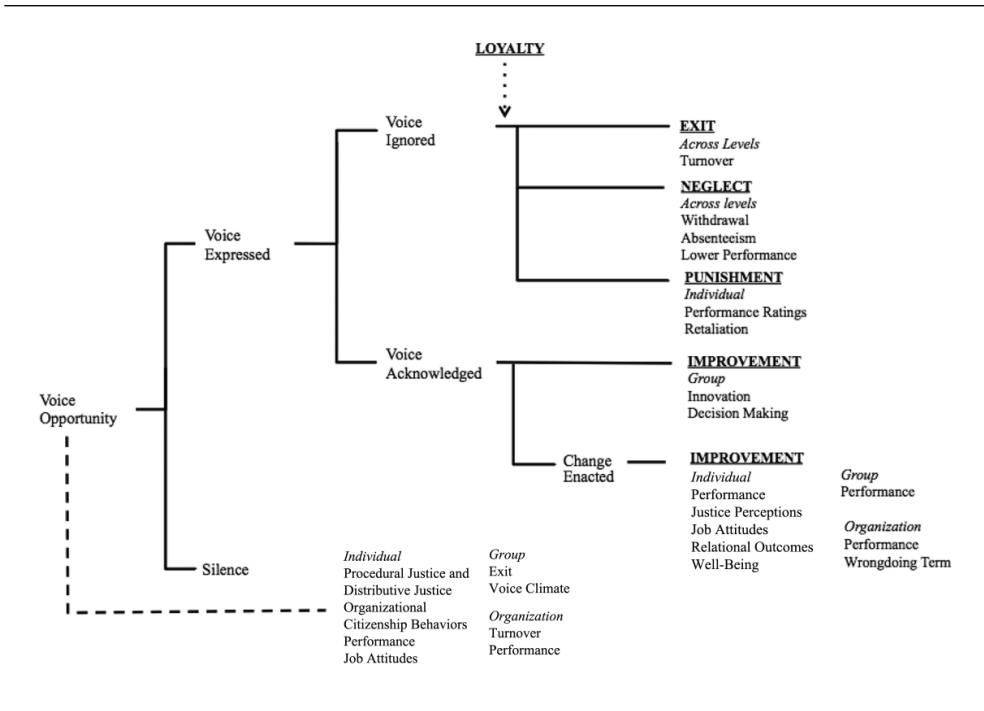
Instead, the temptation to come up with new types of voice seems irresistible. Recently, an array of new types of voice has been proposed, including supportive voice (Burris, 2012), acquiescent voice (Van Dyne et al., 2003), and voice as revenge (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). We join Pinder and Harlos (2001) in their long-standing call for conceptual clarity and recommend a return to definitions more closely rooted in Hirschman’s (1970) original conceptualization of voice. As our review details, there remains a huge amount of work to be done on voice even as it is traditionally defined without parsing the construct of voice into ever smaller and distally related miniconstructs.

### **Future Directions for Research on the Effects of Voice**

#### *Voice as a Process Over Time*

Dyck and Starke (1999) made the initial foray into this area with promising results. Simply by conceptualizing voice as a process, they repositioned what had, for many years, been treated as a set of independent outcome variables into an unfolding sequence of outcomes. McClean et al. (2013) replicated this relationship between voice and exit but demonstrated how voice recipients are crucial moderators of this process. Work by Oc, Bashshur, and Moore (in press) showed that the type of voice expressed to power holders over time either moderated or exacerbated the self-interested tendencies of those in power. Challenging voice caused power holders to take less from a common resource over time, while acquiescent voice caused them to take an increasing amount over time. In an effort to encourage this trend

**Figure 1**  
**Voice, Exit, Neglect, Punishment, Improvement, Loyalty (VENPIL) Progressive Model of Voice**



towards treating voice as a process, we have also tried our hand at developing voice as a process model largely built on the EVLN framework (see Figure 1). In what might awkwardly be called a VENPIL (voice, exit, neglect, punishment, improvement, loyalty) model, we have incorporated “neglect” as an outcome of voice ignored and “loyalty” as a moderator attenuating the relationship of voice ignored to “exit,” “neglect,” and “punishment.” We have also added the more hopeful “improvement” outcome category to reflect the overwhelming body of empirical results for the benefits of voice.

In fact, Figure 1 could be further modified to include a feedback loop from outcomes to voice opportunities or expressed voice. As discussed, many areas (e.g., proactive work behaviors, trust, job attitudes) have well-developed theories and empirical evidence that argue for outcomes leading to voice. Taking a longitudinal approach to voice can only enrich our understanding of these relationships. Similarly, work examining more elaborate models of voice, as part of a more extended process, may be useful. For example, work on voice and attitudes could be extended longitudinally to examine a process by which the negative or positive attitudes that result from voice may later translate into differences in the well-being of those employees expressing voice (an outcome of voice that is completely underrepresented in the literature), which may then lead to a willingness or desire to express voice again.

A glance at the work on silence provides some direction on how such a process may unfold. Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin (2003) identified how negative social and relational consequences of voice lead to employee silence. Bowen and Blackmon (2003) extrapolated this idea over time to theorize about spirals of silence. They argued that the more an individual or group self-censors, the more likely they (and everyone else) are to subsequently remain silent. A similar process may hold for voice. Indeed the theories of social learning and social exchange mentioned earlier would predict such an effect if they were looped for multiple iterations. When a group member voices, it makes others more likely to voice either because of the positive response experienced by the voicer or because of a felt obligation to contribute to the group. Over time, these processes could combine to form a spiral of voice, a climate for voice or a voice norm in a group or organization. Taken to the extreme, one could make predictions about how this may take a turn for the worse when voice becomes omnipresent and individuals vie for attention to their ideas or suggestions. Peterson (1999) explored this to some extent to show that employees grew frustrated with supervisors who gave too much voice, but it is easy to imagine that supervisors might become equally frustrated with their ever more demanding subordinates or that employees become frustrated with one another. Thus, a "voice spiral" may actually cause a group to descend into disharmony. In contrast, from a more optimistic perspective, voice may beget more voice to the point where voice is no longer (or hardly ever) necessary. In such a situation, actual voice behavior would be expected to asymptote or even decline as problems are identified, suggestions are made and adopted, and issues are resolved with alacrity and efficiency. However, the option to voice would continue to have an effect. Either version is possible, but to begin studying these processes, a longitudinal lens is first necessary.

### *Potential for Cross-Pollination*

As represented by the dashed line in Figure 1, the majority of the organizational justice literature (with some notable exceptions; e.g., Folger, 1977; Hunton et al., 1996) as well as most of the work in ILR and HRM do not assess whether voice is expressed let alone ignored or acknowledged. This is not to say that the simple opportunity for voice should not have an effect on outcomes; it clearly does. But the relationship between that opportunity and a given outcome is underspecified and likely underestimated if it does not incorporate how voice, when expressed, is reacted to. For example, when voice is more narrowly defined as constructive and change oriented, as it is in the proactive work behavior literature, and voice is actually expressed, there should be an even more powerful relationship with performance than when voice is operationalized as simply an opportunity to speak up. In addition, other potentially important features, such as the content of the voice when expressed, are completely ignored in these approaches. As we see in the feedback and proactive work behavior literatures, there certainly is an effect for who the voicer is, what is actually said, and how it is said. Adding these elements into future studies of voice in the justice, HRM, and ILR literatures can only help. By the same token, literatures that focus solely on voice as expressed are also missing how simply having the opportunity to voice affects key employee and organizational outcomes.

There is also room for more cross-pollination in terms of the moderators most commonly used in work on voice and outcomes. If one takes the perspective of the receiver of voice (usually at the level above the voicer), it becomes clear that both the desire and the ability of

the receiver to respond to voice should powerfully moderate how voice is reacted to (and downstream, how the outcomes play out). Attributed motives and managerial resources are already demonstrated to have a powerful effect on the relationship of voice to outcomes (e.g., McClean et al., 2013). Other areas interested in voice outcomes might adapt their models to include the recipient's perspective. They might even broaden the lens to consider other managerial attributes, contexts, cognitions, or even emotions that might moderate how expressed voice translates into outcomes.

Another area of "low hanging fruit" is the process by which individual-level effects bubble up into unit-level effects. In some areas, such as unit decision making, these effects are already being well described (e.g., Dooley & Fryxel, 1999). In others, such as voice and organizational performance, they remain "a black box." As MacKenzie et al. (2011) demonstrate, theories of social learning (Bandura, 1977) or social exchange (P. Blau, 1964) may be particularly useful for thinking about how voice and its effects may emerge across levels. Social learning suggests a modeling process within units in which members learn from their colleagues how, when, and what to voice. A social exchange approach takes a prosocial perspective on voice to suggest that when one group member speaks up, it creates a felt obligation in other group members (since voice in this approach is essentially a unit-directed OCB) to return the favor and express their own voice. How these might combine to form a voice climate, a shared belief about the level of voice appropriate, within a unit is as yet unstudied. The examination of the effects of such a climate on both individuals within the group and on the broader organization is only just beginning. One issue to consider in such an approach is the idea of variance in voice within a group (Morrison, 2011). Outcomes may be qualitatively different for a group in which a minority is continually expressing voice versus one in which each member only sometimes gives voice. Given that voice and the consequences of voice affect both the voicer and those hearing the voice, this becomes an important question to consider (e.g., Milliken et al., 2003).

### *Context: Supervisors, Climate, and Culture*

There is also need for deeper consideration of the context in which voice takes place. As discussed, some work is emerging on the role of climate on voice behavior and the outcomes of that behavior (e.g., Frazier & Bowler, in press; Morrison et al., 2011). There is also work on how supervisors respond to voice (Burris et al., 2013; McClean et al., 2013), but much more remains to be done. Perhaps most notable is the shortage of work exploring the role of culture in voice (Shapiro & Brett, 2005). Brockner et al. (2001) showed that power distance influences the value that employees place on voice. Employees from high power distance cultures do not seem as troubled by an absence of voice when compared to employees from low power distance cultures. Research on the value function of voice extends this finding and expands our understanding of the role of culture in how voice is valued (e.g., Hunton, Hall, & Price, 1998; Paddock et al., in press; Price, Hall, Van den Bos, Hunton, Lovett, & Tippet, 2001). For instance, Price and colleagues found individuals expect greater amounts of voice (i.e., have higher reference points) in low power distance cultures (e.g., Great Britain, Netherlands) than individuals in high power distance cultures (e.g., Mexico), but the impact of that voice (the shape of the value function) does not change much by culture. Across cultures, voice has the largest impact on individual perceptions of fairness when individuals are given some voice as compared to being given no voice at all. One could take a cultural lens

to our Figure 1 and make a variety of new predictions for the relationship of voice to outcomes. For example, it seems reasonable that power distance could also affect the motives that are attributed to the voicer for expressing voice. It would also be interesting to examine the reactions of a voicer from a high power distance culture when voice is ignored or the cognitive and affective reactions that recipients of voice have to voicers when voice is expressed.

## Conclusion

Generally, the outcomes of voice across all organizational levels are positive. People value having the opportunity to express voice. Simply knowing that one is able to speak up is valuable in and of itself. A key caveat, however, is that when voice is actually expressed, it needs to be acted upon or, at the very least, acknowledged.

We would, however, like to inject a note of caution into the discussion of the effects of voice. As interest in the effect of voice in organizations continues to grow, there is an increased risk of compartmentalization of what we know within areas and levels of research. We argue that historically, this has led to numerous missed opportunities to improve our understanding of the effect of voice.

We attempted to address this issue by examining the existing literature on employee voice, its operationalization, and its relationship to outcomes at all organizational levels. We suggest a number of areas in which the various literatures may benefit from borrowing across areas and levels of interest to produce a more comprehensive, theoretically grounded, and cohesive body of work. We hope that the views and ideas presented here help to meaningfully structure the field and seed conversations across levels and areas of interest.

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