

Employee's Perception of Voicing: Does the Organization Really Provide Voice Channels?

Unika Prihatsanti^{1,*}, Seger Handoyo², Rahkman Ardi³

¹Psychology Faculty, Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

^{2,3} Psychology Faculty, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia.

*Corresponding author. Email: unikasantie@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the employee voice in organizations based on the channel chosen. 151 employees from various companies in Indonesia who volunteered to be involved in this research (43,7% Male, 56,3% Female; 17,9% secondary-diploma, 59,6% Bachelor, 22,5% Master; Mean age=30,41, SD=7,68) answered the open questionnaire. Questionnaires are distributed through social media and instant messaging applications. Respondents' answers were recorded and coded using the qualitative software Atlas.ti 8.4.4 student version. The code is combined into the main theme, which is then mapped according to the research objectives. Based on employee perceptions, the company has provided 65.69% formal channels and 32.85% informal channels. While employees choose to use formal channels 49.8% and informal 43.3% to give suggestions; formal channels 51.1% and informal 43% to convey ideas; formal channels 47.5% and informal 43.5% to convey information. Interestingly employees use 32.4% formal channels and 44.3% informal channels to convey concerns. The concern is everything that harms the function of work units and organizations. Hence, employees prefer to convey it in an informal situation such as informal meetings outside working hours, directly meet leaders, gathering events. Another fact is that although the organization has provided a voice channel, only 38.7% of companies are very open to employee voices, 22% are somewhat open, 25.3% are sometimes open, 11.3% are less open, and 4% are not open. These results indicate that employees' perceptions of voicing vary considerably.

Keywords: *Voice channel, Informal, Formal.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Researches on employee voices have developed, attracting the attention of researchers from various scientific disciplines which can be broadly grouped into two areas, namely human resources management (HRM) / employee relations (ER) and organizational behavior (OB). Although there are some criticisms of the OB study which are considered to ignore formal voices, researchers agree that employee voices have a positive impact on organizational and individual performance^{1, 2, 3-4}. Employee's voice has a personal impact not only on employees but also on the company. For example, when employees are given the opportunity to talk, they will feel valuable⁵, and attached⁶. Organizations can also gain benefits such as avoiding financial losses⁷. The literature review of

employee voice studies experienced a turning point when employee participation and engagement were carefully considered in voice studies, along with a decline in unions and an increase in individual voicing regulation.

In the HRM / ER study, voice is categorized as (a) task-based participation, where voice is an integral part of task-based participation because it facilitates employees to argue about how work should be organized or managed; (b) voice as a form of problem-solving participation, a mechanism designed to acquire employee knowledge and ideas, including suggestion schemes, problem-solving groups, quality circles; (c) employee voices occur when employees complain to the management about others' behavior and performance in the workplace, through a formal

grievance procedure. Based on this categorization, it can be seen that the HRM / ER discipline conceptualizes the voice of employees as providing a formal mechanism that allows employees to have a voice in their work, as well as encouraging employee contributions to organizational performance². Researchers described the complaint procedure, participatory decision-making. It can be concluded that the HRM / ER discipline provides a formal mechanism that allows employees to have a say in their work, while at the same time encouraging employee contributions to organizational performance. This study considers a formal mechanism or system built by the organization to provide employees with the opportunity to communicate with the management and have input in the decision making.

OB researchers explored employee voice as a form of informal communication in which employees can choose to speak or not. The OB discipline uses a managerial perspective in employee voices. Employee voices are considered non-coercive behavior where employees communicate constructive ideas, suggestions, concerns, opinions with the intention of fostering improvement or change^{3-4, 8}. OB experts focus on informal voice mechanisms. However, the OB concept has received criticism, namely ignoring the fact that formal voting mechanisms provide an opportunity to create voice opportunities and thereby change the goals by not only benefiting the organization, but also the employees. On the other hand, not all expressive behavior is referred to as voice. It to be considered as a voice, expressions must be (a) openly communicated, (b) related organizationally, (c) focused on influencing the work environment, (d) being accepted by someone in the organization. Providing improvement-oriented advice to managers is an example of speaking out, whereas notifying about violations in the organization, placing anonymous notes in the ballot box is not a voice⁹.

Based on the review above, for better understanding of employee voices, a broader concept is needed. Therefore, the definition of employee voice used in this study is to express ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems or opinions related to the interests of the organization or employees, through formal or informal mechanisms or channels.

Furthermore, according to Indonesian dictionary, ideas are defined as the product of innovative employee. Suggestions are defined as opinions related to work or organization put forward by employees to be considered by policy makers. Information is the news related to work or other information related to the company or organization, while concern is employee's anxiety on something that might interfere with work processes and the company in general.

When speaking out, employees will consider the advantages and risks they will face, for example the risk of misunderstanding that can damage good relationships¹⁰. Therefore, an understanding of how employees perceive a channel to speak is important and raises a research question, namely what channels / media does the company provide for speaking out? What media / channels does the employee choose to express his / her voice? How do employees think on the company's response to its employee voices?

A voice can be expressed in a formal channel, namely ideas and concerns expressed through pre-existing structures or rules¹¹. It can also take the form of informal channels, namely ideas and concerns expressed directly and outside of a structured process¹². This channel is represented by different mechanisms provided by the organization such as collective bargaining, quality circles, suggestion schemes, formal meetings. As a consequence, differences in voice channels may contribute to whether employees have a voice or not.

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants

This study is part of a larger quantitative study of the organizational employee voice model in Indonesia (in preparation). Due to the lack of knowledge on the available voice channels chosen by the employees, the researchers distributed an open-ended questionnaire given to employees working in various organizations in Indonesia. Voluntarily 151 employees were involved in this study by filling out a verbal consent statement. the research subjects were 56.3% female, and 43.7% male. The majority of education is bachelor's with a majority working period of less than 10 years. Meanwhile, the majority of employment status are permanent employees (80.1%).

The verbal consent statement was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Faculty of Psychology, Airlangga University.

2.2. Data collection & Analysis

Data were collected by providing open-ended questions to be filled in by the research participants. The research sheet was made in google form format so that it could be filled out online to get a wider reach of participants. The research form is distributed online through applications and social media platforms. On the first sheet, the researcher included informed consent stating the participants' willingness to participate in the study and the approval of the research results for publication. Participants must complete this sheet in order to continue answering the questions on the next sheet. One person who raised objections to the publication of the data was not included in the analysis process.

Participants were asked "Have you ever express a voice (ideas / suggestions / information / concerns) to a company which should be answered with" yes "or" no ". What channels or media does the company provide? " "What channels or media do you use to speak out?" These four types of voices are questioned separately. Apart from asking about voice channels, they were also asked "How open do you think the company / organization is to employee's voice?"

Data analysis used qualitative software program ATLAS.ti version 5.2. Participants' answers were first typed into the excel file and saved as text in Pdf format. The first writer coded the data using open coding, which was then collected into relevant categories, to be mapped into the main theme to answer the research questions. Codes, categories and themes are discussed regularly with the second author until agreement is reached on the theme. The frequency and percentage of participants who mentioned the theme were counted and recorded.

3. RESULT

Employee's Voice

The results of this study answer the question "Have you ever express a voice (ideas / suggestions / information / concerns) to the company?" In Figure 1, it can be seen that employees were willing to speak up, especially in providing ideas, suggestions, and information. The majority of employees, in this case

more than 80%, had contributed in this regard, although there were still employees who did not use their voices or chose not to speak up. Interestingly, in terms of raising concerns, it appears that only 59.6% of employees expressed their voice, as much as 40.4% of employees chose not to raise concerns related to organizational functions.

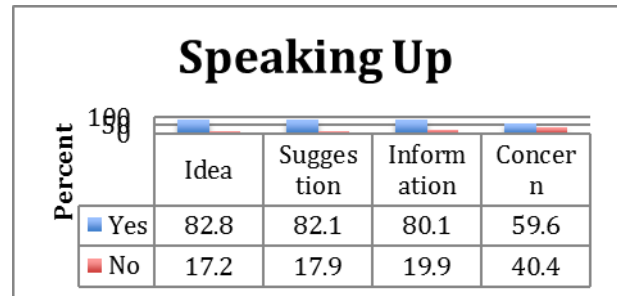


Fig. 1. Employees' Participation in Giving Voice

Voice Channel

Figure 2 provides the answer to the question "What channels or media does the company provide?", It appears that the company has provided formal and informal channels, namely 65.69% provided formal channels. and 32.85% informal channels. Meanwhile Figure 3 show the channel selected by the employee to convey their voice in answering the question "What channels or media do you use to speak out?" In terms of conveying ideas, information, suggestions, employees choose to convey them via official media provided by the organization. Meanwhile, in raising concerns, employees choose to convey it through informal media or channels. Interestingly, not all employees actually understand or know about the channels that employees can choose or use to convey their voice.

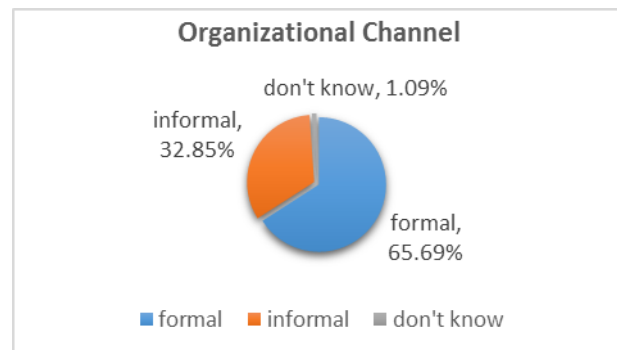


Fig. 2. Organizational Voice Channel

There are 41 codes obtained from the data. Based on the code, the data were analyzed until 11 themes

were categorized into two clusters, namely informal and formal channels. The themes in the question are face to face, gathering, social media (informal channels), meetings, electronic media, company applications, designated departments, suggestion boxes, quality control cycle, mail, intranet, company newsletters. Based on the research results, the company appears to have provided both types of voice channels, formal and informal, which can be used as channels for employees to voice. Although the proportion of formal channels is higher than the informal ones, at least employees have the opportunity to choose to use these channels. However, in reality, despite the availability of voice channels, employees assess that only 38.7% of companies are very open to employee voices, 22% are somewhat open, 25.3% are sometimes open, 11.3% are less open, and 4% are not open to employee voices.

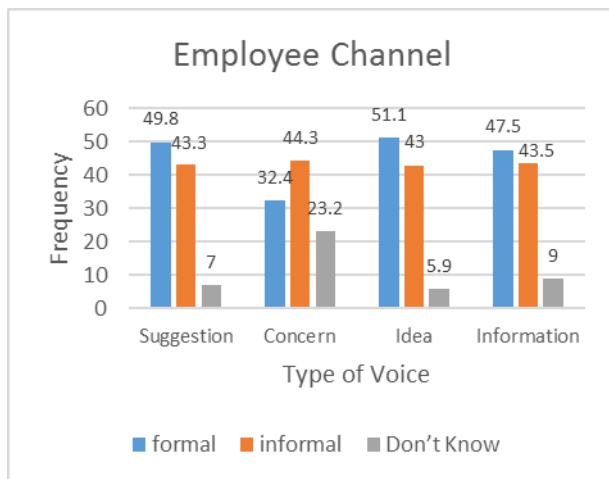


Fig. 3. Employees' Voice Channel

4. DISCUSSION

Employee voices that have been defined in this study refer to expressing ideas, suggestions, information and concerns related to work through formal and informal channels. Based on employees' perceptions, the company has provided formal and informal channels. The formal channels that are widely used are discussion forums or meetings. This is understandable because every activity in a company involves meeting with other people or a team formally. Meanwhile, the informal channel that employees prefer to convey their voice is to come directly to the target person in relation to their voice. However, the majority of voice was cast informally

on how to meet their direct supervisor. This happens because employees consider the boss as a superior figure who can provide comments to or decide based on the voice given. According to Durham, supervisors play an important role in structuring the work environment¹³⁻¹⁴. Organizational norms regulate how leaders react to different voice channels when employees send a signal about whether the voice is considered appropriate, thus giving an effect on employees to judge whether the voice is safe or effective to convey¹⁵. When employees feel safe and the results are effective, they will share opinions, ideas, concerns and information. The results showed that more than 80% of employees had submitted ideas, suggestions and information related to work (Figure 3). Meanwhile, when it comes to raising concerns, it seems that there is a tendency for employees to choose to remain silent. Concern relates to conditions or circumstances that jeopardize the functioning of the organization. Research) found that 85% of professional employees and managers know that they have failed to disclose important and crucial things that should be the company's attention¹⁶. Perhaps employees are reluctant to speak up about their concerns, perhaps because they do not want to tarnish their boss's reputation. Failure of organizational function can be considered as failure of superiors to monitor a work process. Previous research stated that employees are reluctant to speak out because they fear the consequences, that speaking is considered risky, can damage a person's reputation, and has an emotional and career impact^{16, 17, 18}. Detert and Edmondson explained that the purpose of speaking considers voice as personal, requires solid data, evidence and solutions, employees should not confront their superiors and not embarrass their superiors in public¹⁹.

Employee's voice research has also involved many elements of national culture^{20, 21-23} where employee voices are considered as behavior that defies social order or hierarchy. For example, Indonesia holds a culture with a big power gap and collectivism, so voice is considered dangerous for group cohesiveness and harmony.

Regardless of what the employees want in the workplace, employees often feel insecure in expressing themselves openly on issues or problems in the organization¹⁶. In fact, companies need members of the organization or employees to be able

to express their ideas, suggestions, information that can bring change so that the company can create new innovations. In addition, they are even expected to convey criticism on procedures or methods that are deemed inappropriate. This is true especially for companies with collectivism culture and a big power gap²⁴. In general, social order is built on the basis of loyalty and obedience to a higher authority²⁵. Speaking, conveying suggestions, opinions, information can be seen as destroying harmony and a challenge to the leader's authority. Employees tend to be silent because they do not want to be seen as destabilizing, complaining, not being considered for promotion and receiving negative ratings³. When speaking, employees will choose the ways that are considered the most appropriate so that harmony is maintained and more personal. This is not a form of concern or insecurity but as a strategy or way for employees to speak up without damaging good relationships with others. For example, when delivering criticism, they choose to deliver it face to face in person, or other informal meetings.

This explanation is supported by Young Park & One Kim's findings stating that cultural differences have an influence on employee voices²⁴. Previous research supports the notion of collective culture and big power gap tends to prevent employees from speaking actively to their superiors²⁰. Indonesia is a country with a collective culture and a big power gap²⁶. This means that people who live in an environment with this culture will emphasize harmony in the group and value the absence of conflict. Employees who focus on social relations tend to be more sensitive to social norms, avoiding conflict especially with their superiors²⁷.

As explained by Hoo-Cho and Yoon employees will appreciate the hierarchical order and leadership of their superiors in their organization²⁸. Organizational culture as a shared belief that characterizes how the organization operates takes part in the voice of employees. Hierarchical culture, which is mostly applied to government organizations, establishes the rules and behaviors expected from employees under certain guidelines. Hierarchical culture emphasizes stability and is systems oriented. Martins & Martins stated that this culture is strong because of the high centralization and formalization of its structure²⁹. Meanwhile, private companies also

have a hierarchy, although in practice it is more flexible.

Age, gender, role or status in organizations are emphasized, especially employees who are working in the same organization. These relationships are characterized by a specific set of communication rules and patterns that can help employees to avoid embarrassing situations or conflicts. Therefore, voicing channels are perhaps the alternative that employees choose to speak out, not because speaking out carries risks but rather because of the employee's desire not to make public confrontations. Perhaps the voice conveyed can be considered unpleasant for the recipient. Indonesia with a collectivist culture and big power gap uses implied communication, characterized by message content that is full of symbols and message flow that is indirect and not straight forward³⁰. Based on this description, it can be understood that employees will choose other, more personal ways, such as through informal channels, although in the employees' perceptions there are fewer informal channels to use.

Klass et al argued that the formality of the voice is a determinant of whether employees will speak or not¹². A formal voice follows a set of established procedures and requires costs from the company. The provision of formal voice channels alone is not sufficient to make employees speak up¹⁵, but the values underlying the voice, organizational norms will show that employees who seek to have a voice will receive support.

This is supported by the results of this research even though the voice channel is available, it is still not fully utilized by the company and the employees themselves because there are still employees who think that the company is not open to employee voices. Only 38.7% thought the company was very open to employee voices.

5. CONCLUSION

The study found that employees considered that the company has provided both formal and informal voice channels. Formal channels are more widely used in delivering ideas, suggestions, and information related to work functions. Meanwhile, informal channels are preferred when employees raise their concerns on organizational problems. Although this

voice channel has not been fully utilized, both in terms of employees and organizations, there is still a perception from employees that the organization or company is not open to employee's voices. Employee's voice is important for both the organization and the employees, so the channels provided need to be well managed to maximize the voice delivery.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, U.P; Data collecting & analysis, U.P, Supervision, S.H, R.A; writing -original draft, U.P.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was supported by Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang, Indonesia

REFERENCES

- [1] B. E. Kaufman, Theorising determinants of employee voice: An integrative model across disciplines and levels of analysis. *Human Resource Management Journal* 2015 25(1), pp. 19–40. DOI: 10.1111/1748-8583.12056
- [2] P. K., Mowbray, A. Wilkinson, H. H. M. Tse, An Integrative Review of Employee Voice: Identifying a Common Conceptualization and Research Agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 2015 17(3), pp. 382–400. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12045>. J. Ashford, K.M. Sutcliffe, M. K. Christianson, Speaking up and speaking out: The leadership dynamics of voice in organizations, *Voice and Silence in Organizations*, 2009, pp. 175–201, DOI: 10.1016/S0169-4332(01)00209-4
- [3] E. W. Morrison, Employee voice behavior: Integration and directions for future research. *Academy of Management Annals* 2011 5(1), pp. 373–412. DOI: 10.1080/19416520.2011.574506
- [4] E. W. Morrison, Employee Voice and Silence. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 2014 1(1), pp. 173–197. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091328
- [5] E. W. Morrison, F. J. Milliken, A barrier organizational silence: to change and development in a pluralistic world, *Academy of Management Review* 2000 25(4), pp. 706–725.
- [6] C. Rees, K. Alfes, M. Gatenby, M. Employee voice and engagement: Connections and consequences. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 2013 24 (14), pp. 2780–2798. DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2013.763843
- [7] Y. Bai, L. Lin, J. T. Liu, Leveraging the employee voice: a multi-level social learning perspective of ethical leadership, *International Journal of Human Resource Management* DOI: 10.5465/AMJ.2011.61967925, 2017, 5192(October), pp. 1–33. DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2017.1308414
- [8] L. Van Dyne, J.A. LePine, Helping and voice extra-role behaviors: Evidence of construct and predictive validity. *Academy of Management Journal* 1998 41(1), pp. 108–119. DOI: 10.2307/256902
- [9] T. D. Maynes, P. M. Podsakoff, Speaking more broadly: An examination of the nature, antecedents, and consequences of an expanded set of employee voice behaviors. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 2014 99(1), pp. 87–112. DOI: 10.1037/a0034284
- [10] J. Liang, C. I. C. Farh, J.L. Farh, Psychological antecedents of promotive and prohibitive Voice: a two-wave examination, *Academy of Management Journal* 2012 55(1), pp. 71–92. DOI: 10.5465/amj.2010.0176
- [11] M. Marchington, J. Suter, Where informality really matters: Patterns of employee involvement and participation (EIP) in a Non-Union Firm. *Industrial Relations A Journal of Economy and Society* 2013 52, pp. 284–313. DOI: 10.1111/irel.12004
- [12] B.S. Klaas, J.B. Olson-Buchanan, A-K. Ward, The determinants of alternative forms of workplace voice: An Integrative Perspective. *Journal of Management* 2012 38(1), pp. 314–345. DOI: 10.1177/0149206311423832
- [13] M. A. Griffin, M. G. Patterson, M. A. West, Job satisfaction and teamwork: The role of supervisor support 2001 22(5), *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, pp. 537–550. DOI: 10.1002/job.101
- [14] S. Pohl, M. Galletta, The role of supervisor emotional support on individual job satisfaction:

- A multilevel analysis. *Applied Nursing Research* 2016 33, pp. 61-66. DOI: 10.1016/j.apnr.2016.10.004
- [15] B. Kwon, E. Farndale, (Employee voice viewed through a cross-cultural lens. *Human Resource Management Review* 2020 30(1), DOI: 10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.06.002
- [16] F. J. Milliken, E. W. Morrison, P. F. Hewlin, An Exploratory Study of Employee Silence: Issues that Employees Don't Communicate Upward and Why*. *Journal of Management Studies* 2013 40, pp. 1453-1476.
- [17] A. C. Edmondson, Speaking up in the operating room: How team leaders promote learning in interdisciplinary action teams, *Journal of Management Studies* 40 (6), 2003, pp. 1419–1452 DOI: 10.1111/1467-6486.00386.
- [18] C.C. Pinder, C.C. K. Harlon, Employee silence: Quiescence and acquiescence as response to perceived injustice. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management* 2001 20, pp. 331-369. DOI: 10.1016/S0742-7301(01)20007-3
- [19] J. R. Detert, A. C. Edmondson, Implicit voice theories: Taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship at work, *Academy of Management Journal* 54 (3), 2011, pp. 461–488. DOI: 10.5465/AMJ.2011.61967925
- [20] I. C. Botero, L. Van Dyne, Employee Voice Behavior. *Management Communication Quarterly* 23 (1), 2009, pp. 84–104. DOI: 0.1177/0893318909335415
- [21] B. Kwon, E. Farndale, J.G. Park, Employee voice and work engagement: Macro, meso, and micro-level drivers of convergence? *Human Resource Management Review* 2016 26(4), pp. 327–337.
- [22] X. Huang, E. Van de Vliert, G. Van de Vegt, Breaking the silence culture: Stimulation of participation and employee opinion withholding cross-nationally. *Management and Organization Review* 2005 1(3), pp. 459–482.
- [23] J. Landau, To speak or not to speak: Predictors of voice propensity. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict* 2009 13(1), pp. 35–54.
- [24] J. Young Park, D. One Kim, Employee voice behavior across cultures: examining cultural values and employee voice behaviours in Korea and United States. *Employee Voice in Emerging Economies (Advances in Industrial & Labor Relations* 2016 23, pp. 73–103.
- [25] Z. X. Chen, A.S. Tsui, J.L. Farh, Loyalty to supervisor vs. organizational commitment: Relationships to employee performance in China, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 75, 2002, pp. 339-356. <https://www.bps.org.uk>.
- [26] G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede, M. Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations Software Of The Mind* (Rev. 3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. *Cultures and Organizations* 2010, DOI: 10.1007/s11569-007-0005-8
- [27] S. Ting-Toomey, G. Gao, P. Trubisky, Z. Yang, H.S. Kim, S.L. Lin, T. Nishida, Culture, face maintenance, and styles of handling interpersonal conflict: A study in five cultures. *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 1991 2, pp. 275-296. DOI: 10.1108/eb022702
- [28] Y. Ho-Cho, J. Yoon, The Origin and function of dynamic collectivism: An analysis of Korean corporate culture, *Asia Pacific Business Review* 2001, 7(4), pp. 70-88. DOI: 10.1080/713999116.
- [29] M. C. C. Lee, M. A. Idris, P. H. Delfabbro, The Linkages between hierarchical culture and empowering leadership and their effects on employees' work engagement: Work meaningfulness as a mediator. *International Journal of Stress Management* 2016. Advance online publication. DOI: 10.1037/str0000043
- [30] H. Panggabean, H. Tjitra, J. Murniati, Kearifan lokal, keunggulan global. *Cakrawala baru Indonesia dalam kancah global* 2014. Jakarta: Elex Komputindo.