

Overall Justice Perceptions & Voice Behavior- A Social Exchange Perspective

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Employees' ideas and suggestions are a crucial resource for organizations. Employees are often unable to offer their suggestions for various reasons. This study examines the relationship of overall justice perceptions (OJP) on promotive as well as prohibitive voice behavior through the social exchange lens. This enables us to examine voice behavior as a reciprocal action to OJP. A survey was conducted with 106 employees from various organizations. The findings of the survey show OJP is positively related to prohibitive voice behavior, but not to promotive voice behavior. This indicates that when employees perceive organizations to be fair, they tend to express concerns regarding the organization's development but are less likely to give constructive suggestions to make processes easier.

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Introduction

Employee voice which is the “expression of constructive ideas, opinions or concerns about issues related to work” (Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003), is a way in which employees contribute to organization's efforts to innovate and successfully adapt to a dynamic business environment. It is for this reason that organizations constantly seek employee contribution in the form of ideas, opinions and suggestions. In an organizational context, making these suggestions and offering inputs may have both positive and negative effects. Employee voice behavior may interrupt an organization's status quo, may discomfit authority and risk the position of the employee engaging in voice behavior in the organization. However, in the form of constructive suggestions and ideas, it is also known to positively affect managerial decisions, problem solving and organizational learning (Chou & Barron, 2015). Thus, it is crucial that employees engage in voice behavior even if others in the organization disagree. In this research, we examine voice behavior as an outcome of overall justice perceptions. Before examining the relationship in detail, we look at a few gaps that exist in literature which we attempt to examine in our study.

First, research indicates that employees may be reluctant in expressing their frank opinion about organizational practices and policies because they may fear negative consequences for themselves. Perceptions of organizational justice are pertinent here in either confirming or alleviating this fear (Takeuchi, Chen & Cheung, 2012). We use the social exchange theory as it may particularly help us examine voice behavior as a resource which the employee exchange in return for the fair treatment received from the organization (Moorman, 1991).

Second, although the existing theory and research have identified various aspects of voice behavior, this work has not been able to provide insight into identification of important antecedents and consequences that can enable strong predicting models (Chamberlin, Newton & LePine, 2017). We attempt to examine organizational justice perceptions (OJP) as an antecedent of promotive and prohibitive voice in this article.

Thirdly, voice behavior can be classified into two categories (Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012). Promotive voice behavior relates to the expression of constructive suggestions whereas, prohibitive voice behavior relates to concerns regarding organization's operations. Prohibitive voice behavior may be more crucial for the organizations in critical situations where stopping potential harm may prove to be more beneficial for the organization than developing innovative solutions. While the existing research has focused more on promotive voice behavior, both promotive and prohibitive voice

behavior need to be examined to understand if they are affected differently by various organizational factors (Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012). Since both the forms of voice behavior differ in their nature, understanding of how they associate differently with OJP will lend more clarity to the existing research and may aid a more robust theoretical development that considers possible antecedents and consequences of voice behavior.

In this article, we specifically use the social exchange perspective to examine the relationship between OJP and both promotive and prohibitive forms of voice behavior with an aim to obtain insights into the individual, motivational and contextual aspects of voice behavior in an organization. We begin with explaining the constructs of employee voice behavior and organizational justice and then examine the social exchange relationship between them. Further, for the purpose of this research, an online survey was conducted with 106 working individuals from different organizations and the obtained results provide important insights into voice behavior especially prohibitive voice behavior.

Voice Behavior

Voice behavior is “an employee's constructive and change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation at hand” (Le Pine & Van Dyne, 2001; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003; Hsiung, 2012). It is important to note that voice behavior is a voluntary behavior on the part of the employees. The concept of voice behavior is different from the

concept of voice frequently associated with procedural justice. Folger (1977) labelled the process by which people were allowed to provide input into decisions that affect them, as voice. There are two ways in which voice behavior differs from voice as used in procedural justice. First, while voice is an opportunity to speak up that the organization gives to its employees to ensure that there is better acceptance for the outcomes; voice behavior comes out of an employee's volition. It is looked at as a proactive behavior on the part of the employee and willingness to contribute to effective decision making at work. Second, while voice entails speaking up only for oneself, voice behavior involves contributing to larger organizational benefit (Bies & Shapiro, 1988; Folger, 1977). Thus, while voice is restricted to individual self-interest voice behavior involves consideration of the larger organizational interest and considers employee volition making it an important construct to study vis-a-vis voice.

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Secondly, research has classified voice behavior under the category of citizenship behavior. However, unlike other citizenship behavior and extra-role behavior that are discretionary even when they are highly beneficial for the organization, voice behavior is different (Van Dyne, Cummings & McLean Parks,

1995). The critical aspect to consider in voice behavior is the personal cost employees incur to engage in voice behavior, which may not be present in any other form of citizenship behavior (Zhu, 2013). Voicing constructive ideas (promotive voice behavior) may result in favorable performance evaluations, visibility and increased chances of being promoted, while voicing ideas that may challenge the status quo (prohibitive voice behavior) may result in being misunderstood or other adverse social consequences (Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). This makes voice behavior a complex phenomenon and creates a need to examine factors that explain it in a more holistic manner and close to how employees experience it in the real life context.

Lastly, voice behavior may mean risk for the person engaging in it and may imply a personal cost. In order to make an evaluation about the consequences of engaging in voice behavior employees turn to their immediate surroundings and interpersonal network for information. This information often comes through the employee's perception of organizational fairness (Takeuchi, Chen & Cheung, 2012). According to the fairness heuristic theory, justice perceptions of employees act as ready sources of information that help them decide their level of investment and engagement with the organization (Ambrose, Wo, Griffith, 2015:119). The theory also states that overall fairness would trigger an 'interdependent identity' where employees are looking out for larger organizational interest, whereas overall unfairness would

trigger 'self-identity' where concerns for self are more salient (Johnson & Lord, 2010). This indicates that perceptions of fairness prompt employees to look beyond their personal interest and work for the larger organizational goals. Since voice behavior also involves an individual's willingness to work for larger organizational goals over personal goals, overall justice perceptions may provide a good explanation for why employees engage in voice behavior. However, research examining the effect of overall justice perceptions on employee voice behavior is relatively less (Johnson & Lord, 2010).

Overall Organizational Justice Perception

Overall organizational justice perception refers to the employees' overall evaluation of fairness experiences at work (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Greenberg, 2001). Often in a routine workday, employees are faced with what Lind (1994; 1995a; 1995b) termed fundamental social dilemma- the choice between individual versus larger organizational or group interests. As a means to cope with these demands and choices, individuals use their impressions of fair treatment as a surrogate for interpersonal trust. So far, while some researchers have tried to investigate the effects of different facets of justice on voice behavior (Takeuchi, Chen & Cheung, 2012;

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Makens, 2016) the relationship between overall organizational justice perceptions (OJP) has not been explored. We believe it is worth exploring this relationship for the following reasons:

First, exhibition of voice behavior depends on getting positive reactions from the receivers (Takeuchi, Chen & Cheung, 2012). Further, because voice behavior, particularly prohibitive voice behavior is likely to attract punishment or loss of rewards, employees may be concerned about how their voice behavior may be interpreted in the organization. In line with the fairness heuristic theory, when an employee perceives the organization to be fair in general, not limiting the perception to a single entity, or interaction, he/she may feel more confident about expressing his/her opinions and will be encouraged to engage in voice behavior openly. Overall justice perception is not related to a single event or entity. Therefore, when employees feel that the authorities treat them with respect and dignity in day-to-day encounters, they tend to speak up because their justice perceptions cue to them that the authorities consider their needs (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter & Ng, 2001). Employees also feel that their colleagues are willing to establish and maintain a long-term relationship with them and they do not treat each justice experience as an independent encounter (Tyler & Lind, 1992).

Second, fairness perceptions not only work as a guide, but also regulate an individual's involvement in various re-

relationships to match the level of fairness experience. When an individual experiences fair treatment, he/she takes it as a cue for being valued in the organization and it boosts the employee's organizational self-esteem (Purang, 2011). Overall perceptions of fairness carry information about positive regard, social inclusion and solidarity which is valuable in not only helping employees determine their actions and attitudes but also changing the orientation of employees from individualistic to group and motivating them to work for the greater organizational good. This group orientation is considered to be an important motive for voice behavior. Further, since each interpersonal transaction employees engage in has different justice related information, evaluating them individually may not help. Instead, research calls for looking at justice more holistically involving interpersonal transactions across time and entities, in a manner people actually experience it (Lind, 2015:81). This approach when examined in relation to voice behavior may help us understand it more holistically and in ways employees experience it in real life.

Lastly, researchers argue that fairness creates a sense of trust on the part of the employees leading them to feel less anxious about going the extra mile. Similarly, employees' relationship with their organization is of social exchange where behaviors such as voice behavior are looked at as a resource that can be exchanged in return for the fair treatment received from the organization (Moorman, 1991).

Organizational Justice & Voice Behavior- The Exchange Relationship

Social exchange theory describes how various kinds of resources can be exchanged leading to better relationships. In Colquitt et al (2013) meta-analysis we find that social exchange research in relation to organizational justice has been done primarily with three outcome variables namely, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), task performance or counter productive work behavior. However, in the studies mentioned in the meta-analysis, while various forms of OCB i.e. OCB directed towards organizations (OCBO), or towards individuals in an organization (OCBI), have been considered, voice behavior does not seem to have found a place. In case of voice behavior, which has also been listed under citizenship behaviors, employees are at a risk of facing negative consequences expressing themselves. Employees may worry that pointing to an issue or even voicing a suggestion for improvement, may cause them to be labelled negatively and damage their credibility. At times, they may also fear negative performance evaluation or worse termination. It can still not be denied though, that voice behavior is crucial for the organization. Considering the probable benefits and risks associated with speaking up, voice behavior is different from the other outcomes studied in relation to justice using the social exchange lens.

The aspect of voice behavior that demands an examination is when exactly the employees are willing to exhibit voice behavior that transcends self-interest and

is engaged in solely for the benefit of the organization. While there are studies establishing the effects of psychological safety, organizational self-esteem, relationship with the supervisor, climate and other aspects on voice behavior, no study examined the relationship between overall organizational justice perceptions and voice behavior. We believe examining this exchange is crucial because organizational justice perceptions provide a lens to look at how trust and fairness in organizations provide a strong commitment to employees (Hassan, 2002) that enables them to move from their self-interest to looking at the larger organizational interest, even at a personal cost. Takeuchi, Chen & Cheung (2012) in their study mention the need for empirically establishing that justice perceptions foster voice behavior in employees where they are willing to contribute to the larger organizational interest. Further, Blau (1964) pointed out that advice and assistance are exemplars of reciprocity. Voice behavior encompasses reciprocity since it involves giving constructive suggestions to improve organization's functioning and providing ideas to curb practices that are harmful for the organization as well as includes employees providing valuable inputs that assist organizational development. Hence, voice behavior is a resource that employees reciprocate with exchange of fair treatment by the organization.

Fourth, voice behavior may often be misread as unsought interference or an attempt on the part of the employee engaging in voice behavior to undermine credibility of key stakeholders. Interest-

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ingly, research on silence indicates that when employees do not engage in voice behavior, the motive to bring about the improvement still exists, however, this motive is over powered by a concern for one's safety as well as the assurance that voicing one's opinions and ideas will make a difference in the organization (Morrison, 2011). This assurance may come from a work environment that is perceived as fair, safe and conducive to work. Therefore, in an interpersonal context such as organizations, voice behavior has been looked at as a social exchange behavior which occurs in response to favorable and fair treatment received from the organization. Also, actions conducted under voice behavior are less enforceable and less likely to be explicitly rewarded (Colquitt et al, 2013). Thus, from a social exchange perspective, voice behavior goes beyond the degree of reciprocity and is almost altruistic. This means that voice behavior is a higher form of citizenship behavior which may result from receiving benefits from the organization that may be of real value to the employees.

Lastly, high quality social exchange relationships are a result of recurring exchange sequences resulting in a deepened sense of trust, commitment and supportiveness (Colquitt, 2013). These exchange relationships are shaped by not just the current source of justice but also, past experiences and estimated future experiences. Since OJP is not restricted

to a single entity or event in the organization it can well predict good exchange relationship and can foster both promotive as well as prohibitive voice behavior.

Thus, organizational justice implies trust in the organization as well as its members and motivates employees to take risks for organizational well-being. This makes voice behavior a reciprocal action for the fair environment and trust at work. Further, since voice behavior involves an element of risk, there will need to be strong motivation for an employee to engage in it. We argue that perception of high overall organizational justice can serve as that motive as it involves a wide array of positive experiences employees have at work including compensation and rewards, organizational policies and procedures and various interactions with different people in the organization over time (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009).

We therefore hypothesize:

H1: Employees OJP are positively related to promotive voice behavior among employees

H2: Employees OJP are positively related to prohibitive voice behavior among employees

Sample

An online Google form was created with questions for the survey and a link was provided for participants to fill the questionnaire. Snowball sampling was used to recruit the participants where

few participants identified initially were requested to refer other people who would be willing to take the survey. The participants were informed that the survey attempted to measure different experiences employees have at work and their reactions to those experiences. The participation in the study was voluntary. The survey took 10-15 minutes of their time. They were presented with a few statements and they had to indicate their agreement with those statements on a scale. Participants were informed that the statements were about their everyday experiences and nature of interaction in the workplace. They were asked to respond to the degree to which they agreed with the statements. Confidentiality of the responses was assured and informed consent was obtained before the survey. A total of 108 responses were received. However, two responses were duplicate, hence after discarding them 106 responses were analyzed. Most of the participants belonged to the age group of 26-35 years. 68.5% of the respondents were males whereas 31.5% were females. Participants belonged to a range of sectors including IT, manufacturing, education, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, banking and financial services, retail, telecom and media and advertising.

Overall Justice Perception (OJP)

OJP was measured using Perceived Overall Justice Scale (POJ) by Ambrose & Schminke (2009). The POJ six-item measure is consistent with both Lind's (2001a) and Colquitt and Shaw's (2005) suggestions for measuring overall justice and consists of six items out of which

three measure individual’s personal justice experiences and three items measure overall fairness of the organization on a seven point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale was found to be $\alpha = 0.90$. sample item is “Overall I am treated fairly by my organization”.

Voice Behavior

A ten-item scale developed by Liang, Farh&Farh (2012) was used to measure voice behavior out of which five items measured promotive voice and the remaining five measured prohibitive. Respondents indicate their preferences on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha (α) for promotive voice behavior was 0.91 and for prohibitive voice behavior it was 0.82. Sample items for promotive and prohibitive voice behavior are: “I proactively develop and make suggestions for the issues that may influence the unit” and “I advise other colleagues against undesirable behaviors that would hamper job performance”

respectively. Participants were instructed that the questions intended to explore the nature of their daily interactions at work and they needed to indicate their agreement on the scale presented to them and there will be no right or wrong answers.

Results

To test the hypothesized relationship between promotive voice behavior and prohibitive voice behavior, we calculated two simple linear regressions. Table 1 shows the mean and SD of the variables. Further the correlations among the variables were calculated to preliminarily assess the relationship among the variables. OJP was found to be positively related to both prohibitive voice behavior ($r = 0.29, p < 0.01$) and promotive voice behavior ($r = 0.081$).

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Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations & Correlations Among The Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
OJP	3.33	0.45	(0.90)		
Promotive Voice Behavior	3.88	0.51	0.081	(0.91)	
Prohibitive Voice Behavior	3.63	0.78	0.297**	0.342**	(0.82)

Note: The alpha values are given in parentheses along the diagonal. ** $p < .01$. N=106

The regression effects are shown in Table 2. It is seen in the first regression that OJP is not significantly related to promotive voice behavior, $\beta = 0.92, t(104) = 0.825, p < 0.41$ (Table 2) with an R^2 of 0.007. Thus, hypothesis 1 was not supported. In

the second regression equation, our analysis revealed a positive significant effect of OJP on prohibitive voice behavior, $\beta = 0.51, t(104), p < 0.05, R^2$ of 0.08 (Table 2). Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported: OJP positively relates to prohibitive voice behavior.

Table 2 Regression Analysis for OJP: Promotive Voice Behavior & Prohibitive Voice Behavior

Variable	Promotive Voice β	Prohibitive Voice β
Equation 1 OJP	0.92 df= 105 R ² =0.007 F=0.68	
Equation 2 OJP		0.51** df=105 R ² =0.88 F=10.35**

Note: **p<0.01, N=106

Discussion

Guided by the theory of social exchange, we examined the relationship of OJP on two kinds of voice behaviors namely, promotive and prohibitive. The results of our study indicate that OJP significantly predicts prohibitive voice behavior but not promotive voice behavior. These findings have important implications for the voice behavior research. Firstly, it indicates that both the forms of voice behavior may have different antecedents. While OJP seems to significantly predict prohibitive voice behavior, the results indicate differently for promotive voice behavior. One plausible explanation for such a finding is that promotive voice behavior involves providing constructive ideas and suggestions for the organization's benefit (Chamberlin et al., 2017) and the repercussions of engaging in such behavior may not be negative as in the case of prohibitive voice behavior. Further, for promotive voice behavior,

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employees consider the probability of their suggestions being effective. If they perceive that their ideas may not get the required attention in the organization, it reduces the perceived efficacy and they may choose not to engage in promotive voice behavior. Secondly, there may be a few beliefs that the employees have about the social hierarchies in the organization that may hamper promotive work behavior. Beliefs like 'one must not sidestep the boss', 'only seniors have the ownership of the status quo and others must not interfere' or that 'one needs solid data or complete solutions before speaking up' (Detert & Edmondson, 2011) may lead the employee to not voice their opinion even when they have it. Thirdly, an individual may feel inclined to give constructive inputs to improve organization's functioning because such behavior may not involve implicating someone and may have less severe repercussions compared to prohibitive voice. Lastly, to feel compelled to contribute to the organization's development through constructive ideas may in fact need a different kind of motivation that may not be fueled by the social exchange principle alone. One such explanation

may be found in the theory of planned behavior that says that individuals need both internal as well as external factors to judge their control over their behavior (Conner & Armitage, 1998). The internal resources could be information, personal skills and abilities and emotions, whereas, the external resources could be opportunities, dependence and barriers. Thus, even when an organization's environment is perceived as fair and conducive to voice one's ideas, an individual may lack the internal resources to be able to suggest ideas that are future oriented and can improve the organization's functioning. Therefore, despite being treated fairly by the organization an employee may not reciprocate with promotive voice behavior because he/she lacks the resources to engage in constructive change-oriented thinking. This idea deviates from the social exchange principle but may still be a valid explanation for why OJP doesn't influence promotive voice behavior among employees unlike promotive voice behavior.

For prohibitive voice behavior, OJP seems to be a key antecedent, owing to its nature. This study indicates that organizational context within which the individual exists is likely to influence the frequency of prohibitive voice behavior he/she may engage in. When work environments are perceived as fair, employees feel safe to point out practices that may be harmful for the organization, without the fear of negative repercussions. Further, we found that, prohibitive voice behavior not only calls attention to harmful behavior and practices but also implicates those responsible. When employ-

ees raise a flag, it may not be recognized easily by the organization's authorities and may be perceived to be negative since it may invoke negative emotion and defensiveness in the process (Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012). It may also lead to negative emotions among those responsible for the harm and lead to severe repercussions for the one pointing out the harm. It is therefore important that individuals perceive the organization, its members and the policies and practices to be fair. If people fear being falsely implicated for engaging in prohibitive voice behavior then it may not occur. Research on whistle blowing validates this finding by showing that very often employees face retaliation for pointing out something wrong in the organization (Seifert, Sweeney, Joireman & Thorton, 2010).

Further, because prohibitive voice behavior involves an implicit blame, supervisors may perceive this form of voice as person-based rather than issue-based attack and may view employee pointing out harm negatively and may even choose to make them pay for it (Cheung & Li, 2014). However, since OJP implies a long-term relationship with the organization and its members based on fair experiences and trust, prohibitive voice behavior may not be perceived as a person based issue by the supervisors and employees may feel more welcome to provide their opinions and suggestions.

The study also highlights that the nature of prohibitive voice behavior is altruistic. When employees engage in prohibitive voice behavior it is solely for the

organizational benefit and not because the status quo does not fit their personal, moral or social norms. This makes voice behavior really crucial to examine especially in the light of OJP.

This study extends our understanding of how OJP can encourage prohibitive voice behavior. It provides evidence that when employees perceive the organization to be fair they are willing to call out practices harmful to the organization even at a personal cost. The fairness of the organization makes them feel valued as members whose opinions matter in the organization and this may foster prohibitive voice behavior. Further, examining justice holistically helps us understand justice as employees see it, unlike the facet-based approach.

An overall fair working environment is what will foster the motivation among employees to voice their concerns without fearing the consequences.

Practically, though companies seek to benefit from employees' unique contributions in the form of their suggestions and concerns, employees in fact are often uncomfortable in expressing their ideas and opinions. This study highlights the role of creating an overall fair working environment for the employees where justice is not restricted to a single event or entity or a process. An overall fair working environment is what will foster the motivation among employees to voice their concerns without fearing the consequences.

Limitations & Future Directions

There are a few limitations of this study that must be mentioned. First, the data collected was through a cross sectional study across individuals in various organizations. This could have an impact since different organizations have different cultures, values, policies and procedures leading to different OJP and may have affected the participants' responses. We propose that a similar study may be conducted in a single organization, controlling the work environment and organization specific policies to examine the effects of OJP on voice behavior.

Second, survey method was adopted to collect the data for this study. There may be aspects of employee's justice experience which are more personal and may not have been captured on a five-point Likert scale. A mixed method approach with a qualitative examination of employee justice experiences may be adopted for examining the relationship between OJP and voice behavior. We believe that it may provide a more nuanced insight into both justice experiences of employees as well as voice behavior. Lastly, the relationship between voice behavior and OJP may be more complex, and analyzing mediators like affect, psychological safety and moderators like justice centrality for individuals may give us a complete picture of how OJP shapes voice behavior.

Conclusion

We used the social exchange lens to examine the relationship between OJP

and voice behavior: promotive and prohibitive. The results revealed that OJP predicts prohibitive voice behavior but not promotive voice behavior. The study in line with the social exchange theory provides evidence that when employees perceive their organization to be fair, they are willing to point out practices harmful to the organization even at the risk of being perceived negatively and facing the repercussions. OJP is a resource employees exchange for a fair and positive work environment in organizations. Hence, organizations should create fair work experiences for employees to encourage them to raise concerns about work practices or incidents harmful for the organization.

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