



# Do you really want to speak?

## Antecedent of Voice Behavior in Organization

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### Highlights

- This study aimed to identify the factors influencing employee voice behavior in the organization. Voice behavior is associated with extra-role behavior, which can positively impact the organization. The findings show that four factors can support or inhibit voice behavior in the setting of Indonesian organizations: motivational, organizational, situational, and personal.

### Abstract

*Background:* Voice behavior refers to the behavior that proactively communicates ideas, suggestions, attention, and information about organizational-related issues to promote organizational effectiveness. Employees are often reluctant to voice their thoughts out of fear of negative consequences, such as a threat to their career position and status quo. *Study aims:* To describe the factors influencing employees to voice their opinions. *Method:* 151 employees from various organizations voluntarily agreed to participate in this study ( $X_{age}=30.42$ ,  $SD_{age}=7.683$ ,  $Ma=43.7\%$ ;  $F=56.3\%$ ) by filling out an open questionnaire on voice behavior. Data analysis was performed using NVivo 12 Plus. *Result:* Thematic analysis showed that four factors were evident: motivation, organization, individual, and situational. They served as inhibiting and supporting factors for voice behavior. *Conclusion:* There are four factors that motivate or inhibit employee voice behavior: motivational, organizational, situational, and personal. Aside from personal factors such as self-confidence and fear, the findings suggest that supervisors, workload, and opportunity can also both motivate and inhibit employees' voice behavior.

Keywords: Voice Behavior; Antecedent of Voice; Inhibiting Factors; Supporting Factors; NVivo

## INTRODUCTION

Voice research has a long history, dating back to Hirsman's 1970 study on consumer behavior. By viewing voice as an extra-role behavior, research on voice behavior was growing quickly. However, the term "voice" is still rarely heard or used in research today. Although, there are actually quite a number of studies about voice, even though they still concentrate only on industrial and organizational settings. LePine & Van Dyne (1998) defines voice as a constructive expression from individuals intended to improve the way things are done, in which the expression is oriented toward suggestions and recommendations as tools for organizational improvement. Voice can positively impact a company since the person performing it can propose a new and better way of doing things or implement a policy regardless of instructions from a supervisor or rules, even when their opinion differs from that of other employees (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Research by Latif & Arif (2018) suggest that employees who have a sense of belonging or loyalty to the organization will express their dissatisfaction to the leaders. On the other hand, employees who are not loyal will leave their job immediately.

According to various theories and studies, the response to job dissatisfaction is manifested in one of the following four behaviors (Farrell, 1983; Withey & Cooper, 1989): The first is leaving the organization (*exit*), the second is staying in the organization and making changes for improvement (*voice*), the third is staying passively in the organization or doing nothing for improvement (*loyalty*), and the fourth is staying in the organization but ignoring improvements (*neglect*). To benefit the organization from employee dissatisfaction, employees must respond actively and constructively to the dissatisfaction at work, which is done through voice. Voice not only enables organizations channel employee dissatisfaction positively, but it also assists them in solving existing problems and making improvements. Other research on voice behavior includes work by Azzahrah and Prihatsanti (2017), Maynes & Podsakoff (2014), Amah & Sese (2018), Morrison (2011), and Garung et al. (2021). These studies have shown that a variety of factors influence voice behavior.

According to Liu Wu et al. (2010), voice behavior has three characteristics: discretionary, challenge-oriented, and potentially risky. First, voice behavior is discretionary, meaning universities cannot make any provisions for lecturers to perform it or to make voice behavior one of the requirements in the job description. Second, voice behavior is challenge-oriented by changing the status quo and creating constructive changes for the future (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Morrison & Phelps, 1999; Van Dyne et al., 1995). Third, voice behavior can be potentially risky because it is associated with discomfort, creating negative public images or labels, damaging relationships with others, and destroying social capital or networks (Liu Wu et al., 2010).

Voice behavior plays a significant role and has positive impacts on an institution or organization. It should be noted that while voice behavior is not compulsory for employees, it has significant benefits for the development and progress of the organization or institution. According to Liang et al.'s (2019) study, people who are highly engaged at work are more likely to have the courage to speak up. Proactive behavior and high engagement from lecturers will make them more vocal in expressing their opinions, and that will have a positive impact on the work they are doing as well as on the institution (the university) they work at (Qian et al., 2019).

According to Morrison (2012), voice behavior is influenced by two factors: contextual and individual. Contextual factors include formal organizational structure, organizational culture, workgroup size, leaders' openness, and leadership styles. Individual factors, on the other hand, include job attitude, personality, experience and tenure, full-time versus part-time work, position and status, role definitions, and performance history. Morrison (2014) discovered two factors that

influence the emergence of voice behavior: motivators and inhibitors. These factors include individual dispositions, organizational attitudes and perceptions, emotions, beliefs, and schemas, supervisor and leader behavior, and other contextual factors. Chamberlin et al. conducted a meta-analysis in 2017 based on the motivating and inhibiting factors of *voice behavior* (Morrison, 2014) and discovered that the dominating variables influencing voice behavior are personal initiative, feeling responsible, engagement, leader-member exchange, and positive work climate.

The lack of research on voice behavior in Indonesia prompts this study to be conducted. Therefore, based on previous research findings, this study aims to describe of the factors influencing employee voice behavior in Indonesian organizations.

## **METHOD**

### *Study design*

A descriptive study was used in this research, utilizing open-ended questions. This design was chosen in order to describe and gain a more in-depth understanding of the factors that motivate and inhibit employee voice behavior in organizations.

### *Participant*

Participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the research. 151 employees from various organizations in Indonesia volunteered to participate in this study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and signed an informed consent form stating their willingness to participate in this study and giving permission to publicize the research findings.

### *Instruments*

The data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire. Participants responded to two questions regarding factors that influence voice behavior. The first question was, "What factors influence you in sharing ideas, suggestions, thoughts, or concerns in an organization?" The second question was, "What factors prevent you from sharing ideas, suggestions, thoughts, or concerns in an organization?" Participants filled out the questionnaire according to their experiences working at their organizations.

### *Procedure*

Data was collected by disseminating an e-questionnaire with a Google Form about voice behavior to 151 employees from various organizations. This form was distributed online through applications and social media platforms. The research procedure is described for ethical considerations. On the first section form, the purpose of the study described. Participants can withdraw from involvement. Informed consent was written down to ensure the participants understood the purpose of the study and their willingness to participate. Participants gave approval to fill out the questionnaire and to publicize the research findings. Following that, participants filled in the next section of the questionnaire with the remaining questions. Participants' responses were downloaded in Excel format, which was then coded according to the data analysis procedure and thematic analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Data was analyzed using the thematic analysis method from Braun and Clarke (2006) with the help of the NVIVO 12 Plus program, which aims to get a pattern from the data. Thematic

analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006) has several stages, such as understanding the data, creating initial code, searching for themes, reviewing the findings, defining themes, and writing reports. To understand the data, interview results are transcribed and then read repeatedly. Afterward, each piece of data considered relevant to the research question was coded. The data analysis was performed by the author (C.H). To become familiar with the data, C.H initially read the transcripts. A method that allows for the deduction of thematic categories from a theory. Coders were clustered together into candidate themes. Initial coding scheme of four factors voice behavior as a thematic category. In the first coding round, the initial coding scheme was complemented by the inductive of further themes and subthemes. The definition for each theme and subtheme were elaborated and applied by the first author (U.P) and additional co-author (I.F., C.G., J.V.A.). Discrepancies in the coding were discussed until consensus was reached.

## RESULT

### *Participants' Characteristics*

The participants in this study have a mean age of 30.42 (SDage = 7,683). Males make up 43.7% of the participants, while females make up 56.3%. The majority of participants have worked for less than ten years, and the majority are permanent employees

### *Data Analysis*

The results of data analysis reveal two final themes: predictor and inhibitor factors. The predictor factor supports voice behavior, whereas the inhibitor factor prevent it. Before arriving at the final themes, the data was coded and the initial themes were discovered. The codings were then categorized into eight initial themes. Following the identification of the initial themes, two major themes, predictor and inhibitor, were identified. Tables 1 and 2 show the results of data analysis.

**Table 1.**

*Motivator factors theme*

No	Initial Theme	Coding
1	Motivational	Appreciation Convincing information Opportunity Impactful to many people Information urgency
2	Organizational	Support Democratic culture Company condition
3	Personal	Self-efficacy Supervisor's character Pleasant mood
4	Situational	Conducive situation Not much work to do Casual discussion Informal

**Table 2.**

*Inhibitor factors theme*

No	Initial Theme	Coding
1	Motivational	Incomplete data Worrying the impact on work Not appreciated
2	Organizational	Neglectful supervisor/management Closeness with supervisor Differences in opinion Seniority Company condition
3	Personal	Lack of confidence Leader's characteristic Authoritarian supervisor Colleague's characteristic Fear Worrying about the response Unpleasant mood
4	Situational	Workload Opportunity to express Situation is not conducive Informal

Employee voice behavior in organizations is influenced by four factors: motivational, organizational, personal, and situational. In Table 1, motivator factors include when the employee's voice is appreciated, when the information is convincing (for example, when giving information, the employee must first be convinced that what they are conveying is based on data), when the employee has the opportunity to speak up, and how the voice is impactful to others. Employee voice behavior is also influenced by organizational factors such as support, culture, and company conditions. Personal factors of voice behavior include self-efficacy, feeling proud, and positive leader's character. Lastly, situational factors including the working environment and workload also influence employee voice behavior.

Table 2 shows that, in addition to motivator factors, there are inhibitory factors for voice behavior. Employees who choose silence are influenced by motivational factors such as fear of financial impact, job termination, a lack of appreciation, and incomplete data. In the organizational factors, supervisors have a significant impact on employee silence, which is related to seniority and employee's closeness with the supervisor. Next, personal factors involving the leader's characteristics and situational factors like workload and lack of speaking opportunities also cause employees' reluctance to speak up.

## DISCUSSION

Morrison (2014) emphasizes that answering the question of why employees voice or do not voice despite having potentially valuable information is difficult because many factors are at play. According to previous research findings, there is some similarity in the motivator and inhibitor factors of voice behavior, one of which is the leader factor (Prihatsanti, 2018). Leadership can influence whether or not employees speak up. An effective leadership will encourage employees to speak up. Voice behavior refers to the activity in which an employee gives recommendations, advice, constructive criticism, or communicates ideas or concerns to a supervisor or colleague in order to improve organizational performance (Morrison, 2011, 2014; Liang et al, 2012; Van Dyne et al, 1998). The characteristics of the leader have an impact on the

voice of the employees. An authoritarian and closed leader is the reason for an employee's silence. Leaders should create an environment that facilitates employee voice behavior. The characteristics that increase the propensity for voice behavior are openness, willingness to listen, and providing the chance to speak up (Andiyasari, et al, 2017; Um-e-Rubbab & Naqvi, 2020).

Leaders who communicate the organization's purpose and provide constructive feedback will inspire their teams to do the same. Employees are motivated to share ideas, give advice, or express concerns because they know their leaders value their input. The presence of appreciation for voicing will encourage the employee to speak up. Recognizing employees' contributions is done by implementing changes based on their recommendations. Leaders who appreciate their teams will encourage their employees to continue to voice their ideas, whereas employees who are not appreciated will choose silence. A supervisor or someone in a senior position often controls rewards, resources, and assignments, so if the employee's relationship with them is strained, it will affect their performance. This is related to the employee's position in the hierarchy, which may hinder them from voicing (Milliken et al, 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). Tangirala & Ramanujam (2012), Walumbwa & Schaubroeck (2009), and Avey et al. (2012) discovered that having a supportive relationship with a supervisor and an ethical or transformational leadership style can influence employee voice behavior.

Findings also show that employees choose silence because they fear the voice receiver's response and that it will affect their job. Employees may be afraid that if they express their opinion or problem, they will face a situation involving their supervisor and colleagues, such as a negative evaluation, dismissal, limited career opportunities, or even termination. Employees can also be perceived as complainers, resulting in a loss of respect or support from others (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Grant, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003). As a result, employees choose silence in order to avoid any negative consequences. Morrison (2011) explains that employees consider the positive and negative consequences of voicing, such as whether it is perceived as effective or may cause them harm. There are several reasons why employees prefer not to speak up, especially when the subject is sensitive (Liang et al., 2012). Accepting and listening to feedback from others is also difficult.

Aside from external factors, internal factors such as lack of confidence play a role in why employees choose silence. Employees may believe their opinions are worthless and will not be valued by others. The lack of confidence will make those hearing it feel as if the argument conveyed is uncertain. Employees may have doubts that any change will occur by voicing, so they choose silence because voicing will make no difference. An organizational factor also playing a role here is the lack of a culture that encourages employees to speak up. The experience of having ideas neglected or not acknowledged can cause an employee to choose silence to avoid conflict, protect oneself, and maintain harmonious social relationships (Prihatsanti, 2020).

Workload can influence employee voice behavior. A heavy workload can cause employees to choose silence or reduce their organizational participation. Some causes include a lack of time because they are too focused on getting the job done, making it difficult to contribute or discuss work-related issues. Aside from that, voice is not a priority because the results are not immediately visible. Employees may choose silence due to stress or fatigue (Xia et al., 2020). Voicing may also lead to conflict because it challenges the status quo. Fatigued employees will try to avoid additional conflict that can drain their energy.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides an answer to the research question about the factors that influence employees to voice. Four factors have been identified: motivational, organizational, personal, and situational. These factors can either motivate or inhibit employee voice behavior. Aside from personal factors such as self-confidence and fear, findings show that supervisors, workload, and the opportunity to speak up are important factors that can motivate or inhibit employee voice behavior.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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