

PRESENTATION AND VALIDATION OF EMPLOYEE PROSOCIAL VOICE MODEL IN INTERACTION WITH THE MUNICIPALITY EMPLOYEES OF MASHHAD

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study is to identify the dimensions and components of employee prosocial voice and present the relevant model in the municipality of Mashhad. Mixed methods research is used in the current study. The research plan is also an exploratory mixed research project; since the qualitative method was first performed and then, based on the results obtained, a quantitative method was used. The statistical population in the qualitative section was Mashhad Municipality employees who had the experience of prosocial voice for more than twice and had at least 3 years of work experience in the city municipality; 23 subjects were interviewed due to the adequacy of data. Colaizzi's analysis method was applied to analyze the interviews; as a result, the primary employee prosocial voice model was extracted in three levels. In the first level, four free, promoting, preventive, and ethical aspects were obtained. A questionnaire was distributed among 346 municipality employees of Mashhad in the quantitative section of the study to measure and fit the model. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Amos software were employed for data analysis in the quantitative section. The results of the CFA indicated that all dimensions and components were confirmed. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was estimated 0.969 using the Amos software, which indicates fitting of the proposed model. The results of the present study, while helping to develop and implement management improvement programs, could also help improve performance and behavior beyond assigned tasks, such as the employee prosocial voice.

Keywords: Employee Voice, Employee Prosocial Voice, Municipality of Mashhad

INTRODUCTION

Emphasizing employees' feedback and suggestions for improving organizations' performance is of vital importance in today's competitive business environment (Detert & Burris, 2007). In order to encounter changes affecting organizations and to achieve organizational goals in today's competitive environment, the relationship between employees and managers should be in such a way that employees could express their constructive ideas and suggestions easily and without concern for improving the organization. (Hames, 2012). Employees' voice, or the expression of their comments and suggestions are communicative actions and the first step is to resolve organizational problems in which employees discuss their organization's problems and issues or make suggestions for constructive changes in the organization (Pauksztat et al, 2011). The voice of the employees has a lot of positive results in order to increase organizational performance and survival of the organization. In order for managers to make right decisions in

a variety of situations and the organization to maintain its dynamics, managers must have the required information about the organization, most of which can be provided to managers by employees. Employees make every day decisions confronting various circumstances whether to comment on improving organizational conditions or work-related issues. Researches have been expanding rapidly on this subject in recent years so that researchers could identify the cause of employees' selection between voice behavior and silence, which employee's motivation and organization's conditions seem to be highly effective in employees' voice (Morrison, 2011). In situations where employees feel that they encounter problems in case their voices are revealed in the organization, they consider silence as the logical behavior; silence in organizations is to a large extent due to the fear of facing a negative reaction in the organization. In order for managers to be able to make appropriate organizational decisions, employees' information and ideas seem to be required, and their voices are essential to increase the quality of decisions and performance of the organization (Umar & Hassan, 2013).

Understanding employees' viewpoints regarding their relationships in current organizations is highly significant since they need employees for competitive advantage and to improve continuously. One of the ways through which organizations can achieve competitive advantage is by means of employees' ideas for improving processes, products and services (Betero & VanDyne, 2009). Today, organizations provide employees with an opportunity to express their ideas, opinions, and information in their work-related processes in order to achieve competitive advantage and continuous development (Moaşa, 2013). Employees voice or the expression of their opinions is a communicative action in which employees discuss their workplace problems or offer suggestions for promoting their work place, colleagues, supervisors or subordinates, which are the first steps towards resolving problems. (Pauksztat et al, 2011). In the current era, effective management of employee voice could increase the organization's popularity and organizations that can direct and manage their employees' voices could use it as an effective competitive advantage (Miles & Mangold, 2014); therefore, the success of each organization depends on its employees, who are the base and foundation of each organization, without whom, the organization cannot realize its objectives (Constantin & Baias, 2015). Voice behaviors are obtained through a process of recognition and employees compare the costs and benefits of talking and expressing ideas and opinions and then decide how to react (Boichuk & Menguc, 2013). Employee voice is an intact resource that can lead to a positive public image of the organization, or may act as a destructive bomb for the reputation of the organization (Miles & Mangold, 2014). In addition, in different studies, characterizing the concept of employee voice has been neglected, and few studies have focused on explaining the issue. This is in a way that, if the employee voice develops in the organization, the relations between the employee and the manager will improve, and the bargaining process will be directly and indirectly realized in the organization. In the past, employees would become members of the unions in order to express their views in the organizations, while nowadays the significance of unions and the employee membership has decreased; therefore, organizations must take measures so that employees could, in other ways, express their views and opinions in organizations (Budd et al, 2010). Providing conditions for employee voice can enhance organizational innovation and dynamism, improve organizational performance and prevent crisis (Liang et al, 2012). Employee voice can also be used to make constructive changes to the existing situation. Researchers in this area agree that explaining the concept of employee voice is one of the fundamental issues confronting



organizations (Chan & Yeung, 2016). Through surveys and initial interviews with some of the municipality's managers in Mashhad, it was discovered that, expressing the employees opinions and voices is one of the main concerns of the managers in the municipality of Mashhad, as they believed that the expression of views and suggestions of employees have led to a lot of financial and non-financial savings for the municipality of Mashhad, considering the fact that in this organization the presentation of views and ideas are usually based on sense of partnership, altruism, assisting, and benefitting the organization and this concept is not compatible with submissive and defensive voices; therefore, prosocial voice is the focusing issue in the municipality of Mashhad. The present research seeks to explain the concept of employee prosocial voice; accordingly, the main question of the present study is the dimensions and components of the employee prosocial voice.

THEORETICAL FUNDAMENTALS OF RESEARCH

In 1970, Hirschman introduced the term “voice” for the first time, defining the concept as “any attempts to change, rather than escape the protest”. He stated that employees react to unpleasant situations by leaving the organization or expressing their dissatisfaction (Hirschman, 1970). In fact, Hirschman through a political and economic analysis of the organization's decline in maximizing profits, has presented a theory for employee dissatisfaction (Gorden, 1988). According to Hirschman (1970), due to circumstances, employees have potential solutions to respond to dissatisfaction, which include three behaviors: Voice, Loyalty, and Exit; Farrell (1983) added Neglect, as another optional response to the Hirschman model at the time of employees' dissatisfaction (Gorden, 1988). In the behavior of Loyalty, employees support the organization and they believe that it has to be supported. In the Voice behavior they propose that improvements should be made, and they speak about workplace issues and suggest their views and opinions to improve the organization. In the behavior of Neglect, employees delay in responding to dissatisfaction and reduce their efforts, complain, and increase the rate of error. Finally, in the Exit behavior, employees are looking for new job opportunities to leave the organization. Voice is considered as the best behavior for increasing employee loyalty, reform of the organization, and the welfare of society (Gorden, 1988). Subsequently, studies on the concept and the factors influencing management developed and various views were raised. Van Dyne & LePine (1998) considered Voice to be a behavior beyond duties that is voluntary and conscious and outside of the individual's job expectations; it is defined as “a promotional behavior instead of mere condemnation which emphasizes constructive views with the aim of improving conditions” (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Voice includes a wide range of symbolic communication behaviors, rooted in the ethical, political, economic, and psychological context, and is a tool for changing the structure and organizing process of the organization (Gorden, 1988). Employee voice is a way for challenging the status quo or offering suggestions to improve the status of the organization. Employee voice is actually an attempt to provide voluntary information; the behavior of Voice refers to commenting, providing information, and expressing employees' opinions in making changes in an organization (Van Dyne et al, 2003). In other words, employee voice is a change-oriented behavior which challenges the status quo. In fact, the voice of employees is the expression of constructive suggestions and individuals' concerns on the affairs of the organization with the motivation to cooperate (Liang & Tang, 2010). Furthermore, in the literature of the voice, the employee voice is considered as one of the



productive (Liu et al, 2010) and positive (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001) work behaviors and is actually an attempt to analyze problems to find opportunities for improvement (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001) which is often defined at the individual level (Liang & Tang, 2010).

Two valuable frameworks have been debated for explaining and predicting the voice behavior of employees. The first framework is the two-spectrum active/passive and constructive/destructive model presented by Gordon (1988). According to this model, based on the two active/passive or constructive/destructive criteria, employees' behaviors are classified in four dimensions. These four dimensions are: constructive active behavior, constructive passive behavior, destructive active behavior, and destructive passive behavior. According to understanding organizational communication and analysis of the Hirschman (1970) and Farrell (1983) model, Gordon (1988) presents a clear picture of employee behavior in time of job dissatisfaction when employees sometimes display destructive or constructive behavior and at times show active or passive behavior. Active and constructive behavior is aligned with the voice in the Hirschman model and the increase in the suggestions and comments is in line with the improvement of the organization. The constructive passive behavior is consistent with the loyalty behavior in the Hirschman model, and to support, is to be adaptive with and participatory to the organization. The destructive active behavior is in consistent with the exit in the Hirschman model and includes behaviors such as hypocrisy, verbal aggression, flattery, and leaving the organization and destructive passive behavior is in accordance with neglect in the Farrell model, including indifference and inattention to organizational problems, as well as silence (Gorden 1988). The second model is presented by Van Dyne et al. (2003), and has made employees' motivation as a basis for classifying the types of employee voices. They focus on three main motivations and introduce three voices:

- 1) **Defensive Voice:** In this type of behavior, the person expresses his/her opinion on the subject by fearing that stating his ideas and attitudes by providing specific information on a subject could have consequences, such as punishment and insult. The motive of this type of voice is self-protection (Van Dyne et al, 2003).
- 2) **ProSocial Voice:** The motive of this kind of voice is altruism and good will, which is against personal self-interest. In this type of voice behavior, an individual expresses opinions on the assumption that his ideas and comments could be in the interests of the organization or his colleagues (Van Dyne et al, 2003).
- 3) **Acquiescent Voice:** This type of voice refers to the oral presentation of ideas, information, and opinions based on the sense of acquiescence. It is a passive behavior based on the feeling that a person is not able to create different circumstances, and this disability in making changes leads to agreeable and supportive comments based on low self-efficacy. This kind of voice is created with the motive of impartiality and employees express their ideas and comments only to approve the current situation while they believe that they cannot change the present situation (Van Dyne et al, 2003).

The second model of employee voice is more popular among researchers, and this model has been the model of research in most studies conducted on the voice area. In the present study, the second model has been selected as the basis. In addition, due to the fact that the data is collected from people who have expressed their ideas, opinions or suggestions, and according to the definitions of all three types of voices, this concept is consistent with prosocial voice, since individuals express their ideas and opinions based on the motivation of altruism, goodwill, and



benefits to self and the organization. As stated in the definitions, in defensive and acquiescent voices, individuals express ideas and opinions in confirming the opinions of others and in defensive voice individuals express ideas for self-preservation based on fear. Here the employees do not express their ideas spontaneously or in favor of benefiting themselves and the organization; therefore, in the current research, employee prosocial voice has been emphasized and the employees' goals in expressing their voices are to provide solutions for the organization's problems or to benefit themselves or the organization. Additionally, there is no mechanism for identifying acquiescent and defensive voices in the municipality of Mashhad; thus, explaining the concepts has not been possible, and there is only a formal framework for the expression of prosocial voice that is to express opinions with prosocial motivation in order to improve the working environment and benefit the colleagues and the organization.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, mixed research methods and exploratory mixed research project were used to analyze and identify the dimensions and components of the employee prosocial voice. In the exploratory mixed research project, the researcher seeks to provide surveys about uncertain circumstances; meaning that, qualitative data are collected first, and by using this primary identification, formulating hypotheses about the appearance of the studied phenomenon would be possible (Sarasvathy et al., 1998). In the next step, the researcher can test the hypotheses by collecting quantitative data; therefore, in the mixed research project, the qualitative data are more emphasized. The present study aims at identifying the dimensions and components of employee prosocial voice through interviewing, the result of which is the basis for the next stage of the research; the research project is an exploratory mixed method. In the following, the research methodology is presented in two qualitative and quantitative sections.

Methodology in the qualitative section

The interview was used to collect data in the qualitative section. The sampling method was purposive in this section. Employees of the municipality of Mashhad were interviewed; they had already expressed their voices officially for more than 20 times and had at least 3 years of work experience in the municipality and had the ability and willingness to participate in the research. In the present study, in-depth semi-structured interview method was used which is an appropriate method for collecting data in qualitative studies due to the fact that flexibility is of great value in this type of research (Sunders, 2009). In this study, ethical considerations such as obtaining permission to conduct the research, explaining the research goals and methods used, and assuring the participants regarding the confidentiality of their personal profile and information were taken into account in each section of the study. There were two main questions in the interviews: "how do you define employee prosocial voice?" and "What behaviors in the workplace are considered as prosocial voice?" The duration of the interviews varied between 40 to 90 minutes, and they were conducted in the employees' work environment in coordination with them. In the present study, after 23 interviews, theoretical saturation was obtained. The Colaizzi's strategy is used in the qualitative section of the research, since Colaizzi regards this method as a valuable one that not only draws semantic units but also considers the significance of their phenomenological content as expressed in the description of the experience. In fact, Colaizzi's method extracts important and meaningful statements from the experiences of individuals; this method provides a profound understanding of the individuals' experiences



through their descriptions (Belle, 2014). Mustacus (1994) has also proposed this method as the most practical method for data analysis. The Colaizzi's method is able to clearly and distinctly lead the researcher to reach the essence of experiences step by step; therefore, this method is used in the present research to analyze phenomenological data. The data analysis method, based on the Colaizzi's model (Shosha, 2012), consists of seven steps:

1. Overview of the data: In this step, the written interview data were read several times in order to understand its overall content.
2. Extracting important sentences: Phrases, sentences, or paragraphs relating to the questions asked in the interview are separated and kept in separate files. This is because the data that are less important would not be lost until they may be of importance in the next steps.
3. Creating conformed concepts: A short description of the hidden meanings was written for each important sentence that formed the components.
4. Including the conformed concepts within the categories and forming the contents: The components obtained in the previous step were placed in different categories. Repeating the themes is one of the credit indexes. To determine the validity of the data, the obtained content and the data were matched.
5. Creating a brief narrative description: key data concepts were written in a narrative summary.
6. Return in order to determine credit: The results were explained to some of the participants and they were asked to provide their views and feedback on the results.
7. Determining follow-up capability: To achieve this goal, the daily activities of the research process were written down and personal experiences in dealing with the participants were recorded.

Validity and reliability

In the present study, for credibility and reliability of the data, according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability were employed to judge the scientific accuracy of the research. Credibility means to what extent the structure and meaning of the phenomenon are desirably represented (Sinkovics et al, 2008). To consider credibility of the research, it was attempted to insert subjects who had rich experience in prosocial voice. In addition, for credibility, long-term involvement of the researcher with the subject of research and confirmation of the findings by the participants were carried out so that the findings indicate their true and correct experiences. Transferability contains this message that to what extent the research findings could be generalized to other environments; in the current study this objective was tried to be achieved through expressing the characteristics of the research and the subjects. Dependability indicates the coherence of the internal processes and the way in which the variable condition of the phenomenon is examined by the researcher (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). For dependability, excerpts from the text of the interviews, along with the emerging codes and categories, were provided to three of the professors who were informed and aware of the qualitative research that reviewed the research process and confirmed the results. Conformability is indicative of the extent to which other people who examine the research or its results confirm the researcher's findings (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).



Conformability has been obtained through detailed and accurate reviews of the data, interpretations, and findings of this study by regarding previous studies.

Research methodology in the quantitative section

To evaluate the credibility of the extracted model, a survey strategy has been used. The statistical population in the quantitative section is all the employees of the municipality of Mashhad, who have experienced expressing prosocial voice and include 2780 subjects. To determine the sample number, the Cochran formula has been used. At the detection level of 0.5 and 5% error, the sample size of the study was 338 people, and 346 questionnaires were collected. A researcher-made questionnaire containing 40 items was used to collect data. The questionnaire was based on the components and sub-components of the survey. Content validity and construct validity were used to assess the validity of the questionnaire. To assess content validity, the questionnaire was distributed to a number of professors and management experts and their corrective comments were applied. After that, Amos software was used to evaluate the construct validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to measure the reliability of the measurement tool. The value 0.969 was obtained for the model questionnaire, which indicates high reliability of the questionnaire.

QUALITATIVE SECTION FINDINGS

Subjects in the qualitative research section of the present study were 23 employees of Mashhad municipality who were 2 females and 21 males and in terms of age distribution between the range of 30 to 50 years with the average work experience of 15 years. After analyzing the interviews, the employee prosocial voice was extracted at three levels. The first level consists of four dimensions of employee prosocial voice, including promoting, free, preventive and ethical. The second level consists of 10 components that include expressing opinions to resolve problems, improve the organization, create changes in the organization, benefit the organization, participation, risk taking, decrease damages, reduce undesirable behaviors, show commitment, and to express opinions for ethical reasons. Finally, the third level of the model includes 40 sub-components of employee prosocial voice as listed in Table 1.



Table 1. Extracted dimensions, components, and sub-components employee prosocial voice

Dimension	Component	Sub-component
Promoting	Expressing opinions to solve organizational problems	Expressing problems and challenges of the organization, providing solutions for solving organizational problems, concern with the organization, expressing opinions in order to reduce waste costs.
	Expressing opinions to improve the organization	Expressing opinions for improving work strategies, expressing opinions about effective issues in the organization, expressing opinions for increasing productivity, expressing opinions to development organization's activities, expressing opinions to improve my work life and my colleagues'.
	Expressing opinions to create constructive changes	Making suggestions for creating new projects and activities effective for the organization, expressing ideas for making changes, expressing criticisms in a constructive way to create positive change

	Expressing opinions to benefit the organization	Expressing opinions to increase organization's earnings, expressing opinions so the organization achieve its goals, expressing opinions to serve the organization, expressing opinions to help colleagues
free	Participating	Willingness to take part and encourage colleagues to participate and express opinions, expressing opinions to enhance interactions and collaboration, expressing opinions and information on important work subjects with managers or colleagues, expressing opinions for good relationships with colleagues
	Risk taking	Expressing constructive opinions in spite of the opposition of others (managers or colleagues), expressing constructive opinions despite possible disagreements, accepting the risk of expressing opinions, dare to express opinions, expressing thoughts freely, expressing actual feelings towards work, expressing the realities of the organization
preventive	Expressing opinions to decrease damages	Expressing opinions to prevent probable damage and crises, expressing issues that may reduce the efficiency and damage to work units, expressing issues which cause waste of resources
	Expressing opinions to reduce undesirable behaviors	Expressing opinions to reduce dissatisfaction, prevent undesirable behaviors, pointing out wrong procedures
Ethical	Religion-oriented	Expressing opinions due to religious beliefs, expressing opinions for the hereafter rewards
	Expressing opinions out of responsibility	Expressing opinions due to feel of belonging to the organization, expressing opinions out of interest in the organization, expressing opinions for reasons of work conscientiousness, expressing opinions due to the sense of responsibility, expressing opinions because of compassion for the organization

Findings of quantitative section

Out of 500 distributed questionnaires, 346 questionnaires were collected from 165 women and 185 males, with the minimum age of 22, maximum 62, and average 13 years old. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to analyze the data.

In the present study, it was discovered that the collected data are normal, and secondly, according to the fitted CFA model, the factor weight of all items is significant and more than 0.5. As a result, due to significant factor loads more than 0.5, as well as the establishment of acceptable limits of the compound validity of factor loads greater than 0.5, the convergence credibility of the measurement tool is confirmed. In addition, the correlation between the variables of the research model was less than 0.9; therefore, the lack of overlapping in the form of differential credibility is also confirmed, as a result of which the credibility of the model's structure is confirmed as well. Thirdly, considering that fit indexes are within their desired range; therefore, the research measurement model has an acceptable fit (Table 2).

Table 2. Fitting indexes of employee prosocial voice model by using confirmatory factor analysis

Name Index	Desirable amount	The amount obtained in the actual model
Incremental Fit Index	More than 0.9	0.987
Comparative Fit Index	More than 0.9	0.987
Root Mean Residual	Less than 0.8	0.013
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	Less than 0.8	0.069
Fit Index	More than 0.9	0.980
Tucker-Lewis index	More than 0.9	0.960

As a consequence, in general, the research measurement model is confirmed. In addition, the Hoelter index reported in the fit subcategory of this model is also accepted at a 95 confidence level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study has been conducted to detect the components and dimensions of employee prosocial voice through a mixed approach in the municipality of Mashhad; therefore, in this study, which was done on employee prosocial voice, a three-level model comprising of 4 dimensions, 10 components, and 40 sub-components was obtained. It should be noted that abstracted concepts are usually interconnected without a clear and distinct boundary and there is sometimes overlapping between the concepts. In addition, the model includes a good fit, and all dimensions, components, and sub-components have been verified in validating the model.

Employee prosocial voice is considered as a promoting dimension, meaning that employees can express their opinions along with promoting the current status of the organization and can bring up its problems, challenges, and major issues. According to the findings of the study, promoting voice is to represent employees' suggestions and opinions to improve the organization, make constructive changes, benefit the organization as well as raise the problems of the organization and provide solutions. Employees acknowledged in the interviews that no one could be aware of the organization's problems rather than themselves and, given the fact that they are at the heart of the organization, they can identify its issues better than anyone else and can provide solutions. Additionally, considering that work environment forms an important part of people's lives, improving it can lead to individual satisfaction with life, job satisfaction, and improvement of their performance. A large number of interviewees stated that they would like to be effective in the organization; therefore, they try to make comments and suggestions in order to create constructive and positive changes in the organization. Furthermore, a large number of employees declared that providing comments and suggestions for the benefit of the organization is regarded as a significant issue for them. These are presented as components of "expressing opinions to resolve organizational problems", "expressing opinions to improve the organization", "expressing opinions to create constructive changes", and "expressing opinions in order to benefit the organization".

The second dimension of the employee prosocial voice is a free dimension which represents the expression of opinions freely with the intention of participation, and the individual's willingness to take part in various affairs of the organization to increase interactions with his colleagues and express his views. Free dimension, as discussed, represents the expression of opinions freely and voluntarily and the individual expresses his views with the aim of contribution. Moreover, the



expression of views and suggestions may generate some risks for the proposer who also accepts the outcome of expressing his or her opinions. A number of interviewees stated that they express their views and suggestions in the organization due to their willingness to participate and this sometimes impose some risks, especially if they point out bad practices to managers, but if they know that continuing improper practices may be harmful to the organization, they express their suggestions with evidence, even if they are not welcome to managers and officials of the organization. This dimension emerged as components of “participation” and “risk taking”.

The third dimension of the employee prosocial voice is a preventive one; this dimension represents the expression of opinions and suggestions that prevent problems and undesirable behaviors in the organization, as well as the expression of issues that can reduce the efficiency of the organization. In the preventive dimension, the interviewees stated that they sometimes express comments and suggestions to prevent problems and reduce potential damages in the organization. Some interviewees also said that they sometimes express their dissatisfaction with the organization; if the organization does not allow them to express themselves, it may appear as unfavorable behaviors such as laziness in work, violence, and desire to leave the organization. This dimension emerged as components of “reducing potential damage” and “decreasing undesirable behaviors”.

The fourth dimension of the employee prosocial voice is an ethical one. The ethical dimension of the employee voice indicates that employees express their opinions and suggestions according to their ethical standards, in which, religious beliefs and the individuals’ sense of commitment to the organization is very important. A number of interviewees expressed that if they know that their opinions could be useful to the organization and their colleagues, they would express it to obtain rewards of the hereafter. Furthermore, a person’s commitment to the organization makes him sensitive to organizational issues and expresses opinions and suggestions that he/she thinks can be useful to the organization. This dimension emerged as components of “expressing opinions out of religious beliefs” and “expressing opinions out of commitment”.

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