

Contextual Antecedents of Voice Behavior: Supervisory Voice Seeking, Climate, and the Joint Moderating Effects of LMX and Prevention Focus

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Abstract—Previous research has yielded mixed results regarding the effects of contextual factors, such as climate as well as supervisory behavior, on subordinates' behavior. This paper is trying to find out contextual antecedents of voice behavior systematically. There were two key findings in the present research: (1) supervisory voice seeking is a very important factor which can affect the subordinates' voice behavior, by way of shaping the voice climate within a group; and (2) there is a 3-way interaction of voice climate, LMX, and prevention focus on voice behavior.

Index Terms—Voice behavior, voice climate, voice-seeking, LMX, Prevention focus.

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's hypercompetitive business environment, employee comments and suggestions intended to improve organizational functioning are critical to performance of both the employee and the organization (Deter, & Burris, 2007). Employees may intend to improve their task performance, as well as the efficiency of the organization by taking the initiative to voice (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Liang & Fahr, 2012). By helping the organization to utility the decision making process, predicting the potential problem or error within group, as well as collecting feedbacks about any issue of procedural, its generally believed that the voice behaviors from the employee are benefit for the organization (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001; Morrison, 2011a; Burris, 2012; Fast, Burris & Bartel, 2014). Giving the dynamic nature of today's workplace, it is no surprise that the study of employees' voice behavior in workplace continues to be a thriving field of research. In this study, we sought to contribute to this body of knowledge by examining the combined effects of different contextual factors on voice behavior in workplace.

Voice behavior in workplace is defined as 'non-required behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge with the intent to improve rather than merely criticize (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998)'. Drawing from the literatures within this growing body, voice behavior shows lots of benefits on organization, such as better decision

making, error correction, other group performance (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001; Morrison, 2011a ; Frazier & Bowler, 2012); as well as on individual, such as job attitudes, stress, image, and other individual performance ((LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). However, by providing the cues about whether it is shared perception and safe to voice in workplace, perhaps the most important sources of cues is the contextual factors (Morrison, 2011b).

Social information processing (SIP) theory states that attitudes and behavior at work are the result of information available in the social environment of the workplace (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Humans are adaptive organisms and as such, adapt their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors based on the informational and social environment. First, on one side, as the one who is with hierarchical authority, the behavior of supervisor does show fits with SIP theory because of the underlying social influence in workplace. Therefore, it's critical and meaningful to give attention to the response of supervisor on voice behavior, such as encouraging or dissuading. On the other side, the relationship-contextual factors also shed its light on the behavior's shaping within a group. Taking note of this importance, some literatures have sought to identify the underlying mechanism behind this (Morrison, 2011b; Fast, Burris, & Bartel, 2014).

Second, voice climate can shed its impact within group as well, according to the SIP theory. Voice climate is defined as the shared perceptions among group members of the extent to which their work group is encouraged to engage in voice behaviors (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Frazier & Bowler, 2015). According to the newly literature of this conceptual, voice climate shows the positive impact on the voice behavior of both group and individual (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Frazier & Bowler, 2015).

While the prior studies have primarily examined the concepts, very few gave attention to systematically combine the different contextual factors and figure out the mechanism behind the whole set of factors. In this study, we posit a systematical way to combine and figure out this mechanism. To address this, we argue that the voice seeking behavior from the supervisor will negatively influence the perception of voice climate of group, in term of the individual voice behavior.

To summarize, this study aims to extend our understanding of voice behavior in three important ways. First, we build a cross level model to extend the understanding the voice behavior within group. Second, we explore a new construct voice-seeking behavior by capturing perceptions related to the negative response from

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supervisor. Finally, which is most important, this study provides additional evidence for the predictive path of

contextual factors. Collectively, this study provides new insights into the contextual impact on voice behavior.

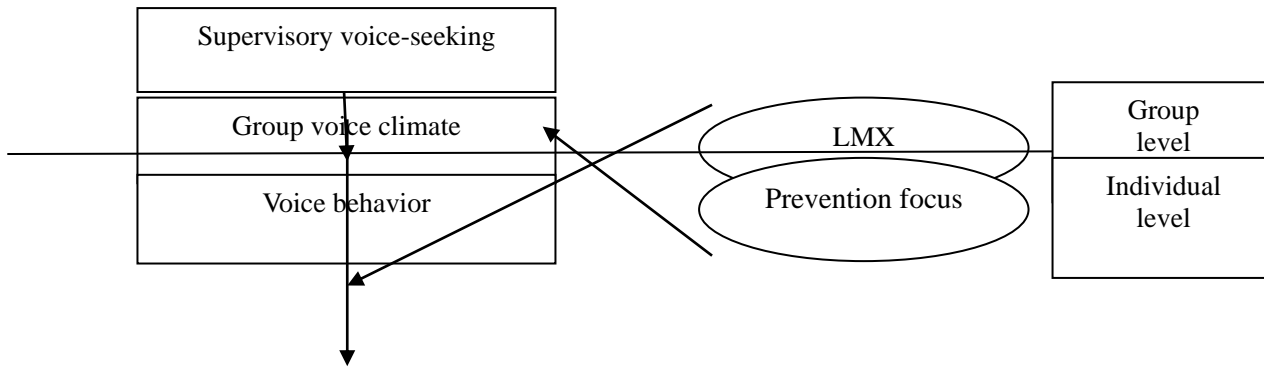


Fig. 1. Research framework.

II. DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONSTRUCTS

A. Supervisory Voice-Seeking

As we discussed before, it's generally believed that the voice behaviors from the employee are benefit for the organization (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, 2001; Morrison, 2011a; Burris, 2012; Fast, Burris & Bartel, 2014). It seems like that all managers might be naturally highly motivated to encourage, even seek for employee voice (Detert & Burris, 2007; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012; Janssen & Gao, 2013). However, a close inspection of managers' behavior in organizations shows that a large number of managers actually engage in actions that indicate an aversion to facing, rewarding, and implementing voice because its potential risks from constructive nature and challenging to the status qua (Liu, Zhu, Yang, 2010). In this study, supervisory voice-seeking is extend to which manager are perceived, by employees, as proactively seeking for the suggestions or concerns on work related issues.

B. Voice Climate

Voice climate refers to the shared beliefs about speaking up on voice behavior within work group (Morrison, 2012b). It found that voice is not only driven by individual attitudes, personality but also by shared beliefs within group, and group members were likely to share ideas and suggestions when they in a group with shaped beliefs that voice was safe and effective (Frazier & Bowler, 2015).

C. Voice Behavior

Voice behavior is defined as non-required behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge with the intent to improve rather than merely criticize criticize (Lepine & Van Dyne, 1998). To fully understand this term, three important points should be emphasized. First, voice behavior should be in way of verbal expression, where s massage is conveyed from a sender to a recipient. Second, voice behavior should be improvement-oriented or constructive in its intent. Finally, voice is risky due to its constructive and challenging the status quo (Morrison, 2011b).

D. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)

LMX is a theory that describes the quality of

supervisor-subordinate). High-LMX (in-group) members share mutual trust, respect, reciprocal influence, loyalty, liking, and a sense of obligation with their leaders. LMX quality is important because it relates to employee satisfaction, promotions, performance ratings, OCBs, and communication behaviors (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kamdar & Van Dyne, 2007; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997).

E. Prevention Focus

Prevention focus is one of two forms of goal pursuit that vary in self-regulation activities based on regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997). Prevention focus refers to the approaching or processes that support completion of tasks by strategically avoiding those things that may deter successful task execution. Individuals who adopt a prevention focus strategy are posited to strategically avoid behaviors that mismatch a goal or understand that might prevent the person from reaching the desired outcome (Higgins, 1997, 2000). That is, they try to make sure they do not have any errors of commission by increasing the salience of possible obstacles to avoid negative outcomes during task completion. In a prevention focus, goals are seen as duties and obligations and one is inclined to be vigilant to avoid any mismatches to goal attainment.

III. THEORY

A. Main Effect Hypothesis

SIP theory states that attitudes and behavior at work are the result of information available in the social environment of the workplace (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Humans are adaptive organisms and as such, adapt their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors based on the informational and social environment. Voice behavior, as a special type of organizational citizenship behavior, entails risks, by the way of challenging the status qua as well as the criticizing to the manager. Naturally, the challenging and aggressive contents usually make voice behavior threatening. Thus, the conduction of voice behavior depends on lots of predictive factors, including interpersonal factors and intrapersonal factors. According to the address of this study, we focus on intrapersonal factors. It's believed that how the manager, peers and even group think about the threatening conveyed through voice behavior does matter a lot. Drawing from the

literatures about voice behavior, friendly and positive response from the immediate manager is an extremely predictive factor of employees' voice behavior; shared perception of voice behavior also matters by providing cues about what should do and what should not do. Hence, supervisory behavior and voice climate are the very important sources of cues providing information about whether it is safe in the perspective of supervisor, who is higher hierarchically with authority, and whole group. That is, individual is likely to engage in voice behavior once they feel they are safe psychologically, the behavior is accepted by the group, won't go against with any explicit or implicit regulation within group, and won't course any unexpected result, such as bad evaluation, interpersonal conflict. Thus this is fit with the arguing of this study that contextual factor can easily determine the danger resulted by voice behavior. Therefore, SIP theory can be used to be the theory background of out hypothesis.

1) Voice seeking and voice behavior

We hypothesize that voice seeking is positively related to voice behavior because this supervisory proactive activity could reduce the psychological cost and danger of speaking up. According to the finding of Fast (2014), the supervisory voice aversion is likely to reduce the improvement-oriented employee voice. The supervisory voice aversion may signal that the manager associate the voice to potential threat, and engage in harsher reactions to voice when it is offered, even punish them for raising sensitive issues or for threatening the status qua. In contrary, the manager who seeks for voice from employees may signal that the voice is safe and encouraged by the leader and group.

2) Voice seeking and voice climate

Voice climate refers to the shared perception about whether it is safe and efficacy to voice within a group. It is not surprising that many contextual factors within group shape this climate. It is likely that leadership style and leader behavior play a very important role in the development of voice climate. On one side, supervisor is usually the target of voice behavior because they are the one who is with authority. On the other side, group leaders can send strong signals about the likely consequences of voicing (Detert & Trevino, 2010).

In this study, we argue that the supervisor voice seeking behavior can positively related to the shaping of voice climate. It is not surprising that the voice seeking behavior of supervisor can definitely send a strong signal that one's manager is approachable, and open to hear ideas and suggestions (Detert & Burris, 2007). In another word, a group with a supervisor ready and open to hear ideas and suggestions, can easily shape a safe and encouraging shared perception that voice is welcomed.

To summarize this, in this study we argue that supervisory voice seeking behavior is likely to shape a high-level shared perception of voice, in term to encourage employee to practice voice behavior:

Hypothesis 1: Voice climate mediates the relationship between supervisor voice seeking and voice behavior.

B. Leader-Member Exchange and Voice Behavior

It's easy to understand that whether to conduct voice behavior depends on lots of factors, including individual

factors, contextual factors, as well as inter-person factors. LMX usually is an index of relationship quality between supervisor and subordinate within one group. In this study, we argue that, LMX and voice behavior is positively related to each other. Employees with high-LMX relationships have more opportunities to speak up, exchange information or ideas with their supervisors, and use more communication channels compared to those in low-LMX relationships (Fairhurst, 1993; Krone, 1991, 1992).

Hypothesis 2: LMX is positively related to voice behavior.

C. Prevention Focus and Voice Behavior

Individuals who adopt a prevention focus strategy are posited to strategically avoid behavior that mismatch a goal or standard that might prevent the person from reaching the desired outcome (Higgins, 1997). They try their best to make sure that they do not make any mistake; they tend to notice and recall information related to the costs of loss, failure, or punishment (Higgins, 1992). That is, safe and following rules play very important role in their lives (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). Furthermore, prevention-focus individuals are concerned with what they ought to do, acting out of obligation and in accordance with expectations (Higgins, 1997, 1998). According to this, we argue that prevention-focus individual is like to avoid to voice. Voice behavior is naturally dangerous due to the 'challenging' and 'critical', as well as the truth that extra-role behavior, which is mismatch the goal of prevention focus. This suggests that employees with a prevention focus would fulfill explicit performance expectations and avoid conduct voice behavior. Thus, we predicted the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Prevention focus is negatively related to voice behavior.

D. Three-Way Interaction Hypothesis

The last hypothesis predicts a 3-way interaction of voice climate, LMX, and prevention focus on voice behavior. That is, we propose that LMX and prevention focus jointly moderate the relationship between voice climate and voice behavior. This prediction is theoretically grounded in the literature on social information process(SIP) theory, which helps us explain our model.

SIP theory is introduced as a mechanism by which to explain attitudes and behavior in organizations, in which the context in shaping of attitudes in the workplace is emphasized. It states that attitudes and behavior at workplace are the result of available in the social environment of the workplace (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Futher, SIP theory is based on the fundamental assumption that one can learn most about individual behavior by studying the informational and social environment with which that behavior occurs and to which it adapts.

According to SIP theory, social context in workplace play a very important role in the shaping of one's perceptions, attitudes, and behavior. That is, the social environment provides cues that are used by individuals to interpret events (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). The most relevant sources of influence for the purposes of the current study are direct supervisors, and organizational climate.

In what follows, we consider four possible scenarios: (1) high prevention-focus, high LMX; (2) high prevention focus,

low LMX; (3) low prevention-focus, high LMX; (4) low prevention focus, low LMX.

1) *High prevention focus, high or low LMX*

In hypothesis 4a, we propose that when prevention focus is high, LMX will have little effect as a moderator of the voice climate-voice behavior relationship. Individuals who is with high-level prevention focus, pay much attention to duty and responsibility, try their best to avoid make mistake. Voice behavior, as an extra-role behavior, does not match the rule of prevention-focus individual. Therefore, no matter how is the relationship quality with supervisor, prevention-focus individual won't choose to conduct voice behavior within group. Thus, we predict that when prevention focus is high, the relationship between voice climate and voice behavior is positive and won't be moderated by the quality of LMX.

2) *Low prevention focus, high LMX*

However, we expect different reactions from subordinates when prevention focus is low. Specifically, in hypothesis 4b, we propose that the combined effect of low prevention focus and high LMX can easily make one to conduct voice behavior within a group full of voice perceptions.

In this argue, low prevention focus means that individual won't treat duty and responsibility as the only rule to judge what should or what shouldn't do, and avoiding danger is not the goal. Based on this assumption, we can imagine that individual with high-level quality of LMX, has much more opportunities to share ideas and suggestions to his supervisor, and the unexpected results of voice might be minimized. This condition can definitely make the relationship between voice climate and voice behavior much stronger than the other scenarios. This hypothesis is consistent with SIP theory. According to SIP theory, contextual factor play a very important role to shape ones' behavior in a group. For an individual with low prevention focus, organizational climates and supervisory behavior are the most typical contextual factors. Thus, we argue that for an individual who is lack of prevention focus personality and high LMX the relationship between voice climate and voice behavior will be strongest among all the scenarios.

3) *Low prevention focus, low LMX*

Finally, we argue that, in hypothesis 4b, the combined effect of low prevention focus and low LMX might not such easily make one to conduct voice behavior even within a group full of voice perceptions. That is, compared with the one with low prevention focus and high LMX, the relationship between voice climate and voice behavior is much weaker for an individual with low prevention focus and low LMX.

In this argue, which is totally different with hypothesis 4b, the poor LMX is no longer a helping factor to the relationship of voice climate and voice behavior but a barrier to block it. According to the SIP theory, organizational climates and supervisory behavior are the most typical contextual factors to shape the behavior of subordinates. That is, even in a group full of voice climate, on one side, poor quality of LMX definitely shows the possibility that the challenging and even critical things conveyed by voice behavior may result something bad, like bad image, trouble maker. On the other side, poor quality with supervisor means there wouldn't be lots of

opportunities to give some ideas and suggestions to supervisors. Thus, in hypothesis 4c, we argue that the individual with low prevention focus and low LMX won't conduct much voice behavior even in a group with high voice climate.

Hypothesis 4, voice climate, LMX, and prevention focus 3-way interact to affect voice behavior, such that:

When prevention focus is high, the relationship between voice climate and voice behavior is positive in nature regardless of the level of LMX; When prevention focus is low, the positive relationship between voice climate and voice behavior is much stronger when LMX is high than that when LMX is low.

IV. DISCUSSION

There were two key findings in the present research: (1) supervisory voice seeking is a very important factor which can affect the subordinates' voice behavior, by way of shaping the voice climate within a group; and (2) there is a 3-way interaction of voice climate, LMX, and prevention focus on voice behavior. Individual without prevention focus but with high relationship quality with supervisors responded to voice climate with more voice behavior, whereas individual without prevention focus but with low relationship quality with supervisor responded to voice climate with less voice behavior. When prevention focus is high, though, LMX did not moderate the relationship of voice climate and voice behavior.

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