ER
31,5

538

Received 23 February 2009
Revised 28 April 2009
Accepted 28 April 2009

All powerful voice? The need to include “exit”, “loyalty” and “neglect” in empirical studies too

Matthew Allen

*Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester,
Manchester, UK, and*

Heinz-Josef Tüselmann

Manchester Metropolitan University Business School, Manchester, UK

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to set out and justify a broader, systemic typology that encompasses, and is built around, the notion of voice. This leads to the development of a number of insights that can result in the generation and testing of more accurate hypotheses on the links between voice mechanisms and workplace outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on different aspects of the concept of “power” and arguing that these are central to the notion of “voice”, the paper illustrates how “exit”, “loyalty” and “neglect” are also underpinned by power. A corollary of this is that these other concepts should routinely be included in studies of the links among voice and workplace outcomes.

Findings – The paper develops hypotheses that can enhance the understanding of the likely impact of voice policies on employees’ attitudes and behaviour as well as on firm performance.

Practical implications – The hypotheses suggest that, if employees perceive voice mechanisms in a negative way, they may respond in a variety of ways that can have a detrimental effect on firm performance. Understanding these different responses and the likely reasons for them can lead to more appropriate policy responses by managers.

Originality/value – The paper specifies the conditions under which relationships between voice, exit, loyalty and neglect will affect workplace outcomes in greater detail. This leads to a re-examination of factors that should be included in empirical assessments. Research findings may need to be re-evaluated as a result.

Keywords Employee behaviour, Employee attitudes, Workplace, Works councils, Trade unions

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Many recent studies have explicitly drawn upon the concept of “voice” as part of their analytical framework (Benson, 2000; Bryson *et al.*, 2006; Dundon *et al.*, 2004, 2005; Gollan, 2003, 2005; Upchurch *et al.*, 2006). Within these and other studies (Applebaum *et al.*, 2000; Becker and Huselid, 1998), the dominant approach is to see voice mechanisms as a system or as bundles; that is, the cumulative rather than the individual effects of voice mechanisms are considered (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004).

The authors are indebted to Paul Adler, Paul Edwards, Paul Gollan, Mick Marchington, Miguel Martinez Lucio and Adrian Wilkinson for extremely helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The authors also gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Hans Böckler Foundation.

Given the commonalities that underpin different voice mechanisms, this systemic approach is unsurprising. It is also one that has formed part of reviews of the voice concept (Dundon *et al.*, 2004; Hyman, 2005; Marchington, 2005, 2007; Wood and Wall, 2007).

This paper’s aim is to set out and justify a broader, systemic typology that encompasses, and is built around, the notion of voice. This leads to the development of a number of insights that can result in the generation and testing of more accurate hypotheses on the links between voice mechanisms and workplace outcomes. In addition, the conditions under which those relationships are likely to hold can also be specified in greater detail. As a result, our understanding of the likely impact of voice policies on employees’ attitudes and behaviour as well as firm performance would be enhanced.

The starting point for the following discussion is the importance that the notion of power either explicitly or implicitly plays in many assessments of voice mechanisms. Whilst this issue has been discussed before (Dundon *et al.*, 2004; Marchington, 2007), it is argued here that it is possible to deepen and extend this analysis by examining how the concept of power also underpins, within the context of employment, exit, loyalty and neglect. It will be contended here that this, in turn, calls for the elements of the exit, voice, loyalty and neglect (EVLN) framework to be disaggregated to a greater extent than has previously been the case. In addition, by re-focusing attention on these four elements, the ways in which voice mechanisms are related to a range of outcomes can be understood with greater clarity. This is likely to be of benefit to researchers and practitioners alike.

For example, the proposed framework may help to explain apparent anomalies in empirical studies. Whilst low-quit rates may, for instance, indicate that employees are satisfied with their working conditions and that, therefore, they are also likely to have low rates of absenteeism, this is not, for reasons that are discussed in greater detail below, always the case (March and Simon, 1958; for related findings, see Barker, 1993; Danford, 1998; Godard, 2001). Furthermore, the framework can enable the conditions to be specified under which employees’ neglect may increase; it can also provide a means of assessing how trade-offs between voice and, say, neglect may have an effect on workplace outcomes. This is discussed in greater detail below, as is the issue of employees’ perceptions of various voice mechanisms. These perceptions have, rightly, been the focus of recent research (Bryson *et al.*, 2006), as they mediate the relationships between voice and workplace outcomes. Yet, these are not the only factors mediating those relationships: exit, loyalty and neglect do so, too. The proposed framework may, therefore, help to capture the links between voice and various workplace outcomes in greater detail than is often the case in empirical studies. Hence, it may lead to more cogent explanations of workplace outcomes.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section argues that the concept of voice is underpinned by the notion of power, and that, within the context of employment, voice has two main characteristics: its information-sharing qualities and its form. The following sections focus, in turn, on the concepts of loyalty, exit, and neglect. They argue that power underpins, as it does the voice concept, these constructs, and that, as a result, different elements of them need to be treated separately in analyses. Finally, conclusions are drawn, hypotheses proposed and the implications of this framework for researchers and practitioners are set out.

2. Voice

The aim of this section of the paper is: first, to illustrate the centrality of power to the voice construct; second, to discuss how, within the employment relationship, different definitions of power can be applied to voice; third, to set out key sources of power, and, finally, to examine in greater detail the information-sharing qualities of voice and the forms that voice can take. In doing so, this section highlights themes that, as will be shown in subsequent sections, are of cardinal importance to loyalty, exit and neglect. In short, this section of the paper argues that the degree to which different voice mechanisms are powerful – in terms of the breadth and depth of employee voice – is highly likely to influence the amount and quality of information that employees share with employers. Such shared information will cover ways to improve the firm's products/services or production processes, and the exchange of information on workers' grievances (Dundon *et al.*, 2004, p. 1152; Marchington, 2007; Wood and Wall, 2007). Ultimately, the power of different voice mechanisms is likely to be associated with their form.

2.1 Power

The importance of power within the voice construct is evident within the two seminal texts on it (see also Butler, 2005; Dundon and Gollan, 2007; Dundon *et al.*, 2004; Poole, 1978; Terry, 1999; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2000 for other discussions of power in relation to different voice mechanisms). For instance, Hirschman (1970, pp. 4, 40-1), who, it should be noted, did not apply his model to employees within companies, unquestioningly assumed that, once consumers or "customer-members" of an organization had voiced their concerns, it could be expected that decision makers within the selling organization would search for the sources of those misgivings and would attempt to remedy the situation. In other words, Hirschman (1970, pp. 41, 78) presupposed that consumers had some power and they could expect to "marshal some influence". Whilst Hirschman's assumption may be a justified one to make in the context of organizations competing for members or customers in free markets, it may not be applicable to employees within companies (Hyman, 2005). This may be especially true if the concerns raised by employees are construed either as irrelevant by managers or as a threat to their authority within organizations, which can be seen, in fundamental terms, as hierarchies.

Freeman and Medoff (1984) recognized that power had to be dealt with far more explicitly in applying the exit, voice and loyalty model to the employment relationship. Freeman and Medoff (1984, pp. 107-108, emphasis added) noted, for instance, that "one reason for the lower quits under unionism is the *dilution of managerial authority*". Indeed, one of the reasons why Freeman and Medoff (1984, p. 9) chose to focus on unions (and not, for example, management-initiated voice mechanisms) as the most effective form of voice was because unions were seen as affording employees a degree of protection from any retaliation that managers may have sought to take against employees who had voiced their concerns. Such retaliation could, for instance, result in the firing of an individual worker who had revealed his or her grievances to the employer.

Unfortunately, Freeman and Medoff (1984) and others did not discuss in detail the notion of power explicitly. However, a useful way of framing the discussion is to disaggregate the concept. For instance, it can be broken down into: first, the range of

issues over which potential voice can be expressed; and second, the extent to which those who make use of potential voice mechanisms are able to exert an influence over those workplace issues. Thus, the power of different voice mechanisms should be conceptualized in terms of both areas covered and the degree of influence (Poole, 1978). The latter aspect may depend on the relative dependence of employers on the resources created or owned by employees. These two aspects of voice are closely akin to issues that have arisen in the related politics literature. (There are, of course, other conceptualizations of power; however, the aspects chosen here are, arguably, the most appropriate given the nature of the majority of empirical studies in this area.) In terms of the issues covered by voice mechanisms, managers may play an important role in determining what can and cannot be addressed by those voice mechanisms. This issue is, perhaps, at its acutest in relation to those mechanisms, such as staff associations and joint consultative committees (JCCs), that have been established by managers and whose remit is often set by managers. Thus, managers may be able to set the agenda – and, hence, what is subject to a decision and what is subject to a “non-decision” (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963). Thus, employees may be able to shape in a proactive way managers’ decisions or they may simply react to proposals put forward by managers or, indeed, they may be excluded from certain decisions.

In terms of the degree of influence of different voice mechanisms, Dahl’s (1957, p. 202) concept of power may be useful. He contended that: “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.” The emphasis within this definition on power over can, however, be construed to imply a zero-sum game. Whilst there are aspects of the employment relationship, such as a potential increase in responsibilities without a commensurate pay rise, that have this characteristic, others, such as changes in work organization that are initially not welcomed by employees, but that eventually lead to higher pay and productivity levels, do not. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to consider the notion of power in terms of “power to” as well. In other words, power should also be seen as the ability that actors – potentially, both managers and employees – may have to initiate and pursue mutually beneficial activities. Applying this concept of power to voice mechanisms has a number of important ramifications. It implies that voice mechanisms should be powerful enough to lead to a change in firm-level principles, policies and practices.

Along with legislation, managers’ attitudes towards voiced concerns and workers’ access to information, an important source of employees’ power is likely to be the degree to which employers are dependent on them and the difficulty that the employer would face in either replacing them or finding substitutes for them. If employers’ “resource dependence” (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978) on employees (either individually or collectively) is high, workers are likely to be powerful. Therefore, workplace practices and policies are likely to adhere more closely to their wishes, as employees may be able to ensure that changes, which the employer may not otherwise make, are implemented. This source of power has important implications for loyalty, exit and neglect, as is shown below.

Here, it will be argued that for a voice mechanism to be defined as such, it must be effective; that is, it must enable employees and/or their representatives who remain in a firm not only to make their views known, but also to influence workplace practices. Determining what is and what is not a voice mechanism is, therefore, an empirical question. To define voice in such a way that excludes a consideration of influence

would not enable researchers or practitioners to distinguish between mere talking shops, which enable employees to express their opinions, and those measures that lead to a change in workplace practices. Indeed, it is only by leading to a change in practices that voice is likely to lead to an increase in, for example, workplace trust, which is considered in more detail under loyalty. This does not mean, however, that, to be powerful, voice mechanisms must result in, for instance, practices that are entirely in accordance with employees' wishes; they must, however, have been altered in a discernible way.

This reference to "employees' wishes" raises the issue of Luke's (1974) third face of power; that is, the origins of employee preferences. However, this issue will not be addressed here as it would warrant a fundamentally different paper. In short, it would require an examination of both employees' and employers' preferences and the ways in which these are formed. This is beyond the scope of this paper. In addition, it would then be necessary to assess not only the different preferences between employers and employees, but also the areas in which these different views create the greatest tensions. Indeed, any resolutions of such tensions could, potentially at least, involve an analysis of the ways in which employees' preferences are shaped or moulded by the arguments and ideas of employers (and vice versa). This is a very different task to the one adopted in most empirical studies and conceptual frameworks on voice. Those studies have focused on various voice mechanisms and outcomes; they have not examined the establishment of, and changes to, employers' and employees' preferences.

Although defining voice mechanisms in a way that focuses on changed practices, etc. may seem to be applying a strenuous criterion to them, other authors have specified voice in a similar manner. For example, Marchington (2007, p. 234) has noted that voice gives workers a "direct say" in how the work they perform is organized. Indeed, Strauss (1998, p. 779) has written that "voice is meaningless if the message is ignored" (Kaufman, 2005, p. 568; Bailey, 2009; Butler, 2005; Hyman, 1997). Moreover, defining voice in this way has important implications for research, as it places the emphasis on assessing employees' evaluations of their impact on workplace practices. All too often, however, it is managers' assessments of employees' input into the decision-making process that is measured (Marchington, 2007). In addition, it would appear to be appropriate for studies, as is increasingly happening, to approach the effects of various voice mechanisms from the employees' perspective. This is especially true if the aim is to evaluate different forms of employee relations as well as workers' opinion of, and potential subsequent need for, various voice mechanisms (Bryson *et al.*, 2006; Edwards and Wright, 2001; Freeman *et al.*, 2007; Gollan, 2007; Pyman *et al.*, 2006; Ramsay *et al.*, 2000; Timming, 2007).

2.2 Information sharing

Information sharing was a cardinal aspect of Hirschman's voice construct. Hirschman's (1970, p. 33), for instance, noted that: "Voice has the function of alerting a firm or organization to its failings [...].". Clearly, then, the voice of customers or, *mutatis mutandis*, workers in a company aids the sharing of information between managers and employees; more specifically and mirroring Hirschman's arguments, voice in firms, *sensu stricto*, is concerned with the upward communication of information to managers from employees. This, necessarily, assumes that actors do not

have perfect information – that employees have information that managers do not. Consequently, voice is seen as a means by which these information asymmetries can be overcome.

Although Hirschman’s (1970, p. 4) definition of voice could also be construed as covering other means of communication, such as protests, by which a firm is alerted to its failings these are not defined here as voice, as they can be seen as a “negligent” and adversarial form of behaviour (see below). It should be noted that such labels do not connote a lack of legitimacy of such forms of behaviour. Protests are, indeed, a possible indication that potential voice mechanisms have failed or are absent. The definition of voice here is distinct from formulations of voice as “two-way communication” between employees and managers (Willman *et al.*, 2006). The latter definition may not be precise enough for a number of reasons. First, two-way communication could cover protests as well as suggestion schemes. Second, two-way communication assumes that managers enter into a dialogue; however, as shown below, “managerial response” (Freeman and Medoff, 1984) may depend upon the power of voice mechanisms. Moreover, two-way dialogue may imply that managers respond to employees’ concerns by talking about them, rather than by changing workplace practices. Third, two-way communication also presupposes that employees either collectively or individually voice their concerns. As noted above, however, this may not be the case if employees fear being reprimanded by managers (Freeman and Medoff, 1984).

Finally, it stresses neither the most important source and, hence, the direction of information flow nor the degree to which employees’ views are taken into consideration. In other words, if managers communicate that they are unwilling to change a company practice, even though employees have expressed their disapproval of it, this should not be deemed to be voice. It can, however, be deemed two-way communication. Similarly, whilst some forums that are seen as “talking shops” may facilitate two-way communication, they do not provide employees with a voice; that is, with a degree of influence over workplace principles, policies and, most importantly, practices. In other words, defining voice merely as two-way communication overlooks the cardinal importance of power in facilitating or hindering the exchange of information within the context of employment. The varying strengths of voice mechanisms are likely to be related to their form.

2.3 Forms of employee voice

Voice can be expressed by workers directly or by workers’ representatives collectively. This issue has been the most contentious, and is, again, underpinned either explicitly or implicitly by the different perspectives on the degree of power that employees need for their opinions not only to be voiced, but also to be acted upon by managers. There are major differences between researchers on the subject of who should have voice if it is to be effective (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Hirsch and Addison, 1986; Delaney and Godard, 2001; Wood and Fenton-O’Creavy, 2005). The first of the two main divisions is between collective and direct voice; the second is, within collective voice, between independent channels (trade unions or non-union structures, such as works councils) or “employer-sponsored structures” (Gollan, 2002, p. 325), such as JCCs. Despite this prevalent dichotomy, different forms of voice are not necessarily mutually exclusive: a combination of different forms of voice could be the most effective for organizations, as one form of voice may be able to complement, or mitigate the deficiencies of, another

3. Loyalty

Although applying Hirschman's concept of loyalty to the employment relationship might appear to be straightforward, it is not as the notion of power must, once again, be taken into consideration. If it is not, assessments of the influence of voice mechanisms on workplace outcomes may underestimate the role of power within the employment relationship. In Hirschman's model, loyalty was positively related to voice: the more loyal a customer is, the more likely he or she is to voice concerns rather than exit. Despite the importance of the concept to his model, Hirschman did not discuss loyalty at length. Hirschman (1970, p. 77) did, however, note that a customer-member's "special attachment to an organization [is] known as loyalty" (Boroff and Lewin, 1997, p. 53; Turnley and Feldman, 1999, p. 899). This definition will be applied here even though, as noted above, Hirschman applied his model to consumers; he did not apply it directly to employees within companies. The advantages of this definition are that it can distinguish between narrow job satisfaction and a broader sense of belonging/commitment to an organization. It, arguably, suggests a more deep-seated attachment. It can be interpreted to mean that a person can remain loyal to an organization even if current job satisfaction is low. This may be the case if a person is performing unfulfilling duties in order to benefit from credible promotional opportunities in the future.

Although employees who are more loyal might be expected – as more loyal consumers are – to voice their concerns more readily than those who are less loyal, this ignores aspects of power that are inherent in any employment relationship (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). Organizations can be seen in fundamental terms as hierarchies in which those higher up can direct those lower down. Therefore, expressions of disapproval as well as some suggestions for improving existing practices or products could be seen as attempts to undermine the authority either of individual managers or of the organization as a whole. In such a situation, those employees who voice their concerns may be seen as disloyal or as a disruptive influence by managers (Butler, 2005; Upchurch *et al.*, 2006). Hence, loyal employees may be less – rather than more – willing to express their unease about company practices for fear of appearing to criticize the organization and/or individual managers. Indeed, Boroff and Lewin (1997, p. 57) have found that less loyal employees were more likely than more loyal ones to file a complaint if they thought that they been treated unfairly.

By contrast, the relationship between loyalty and exit within the context of employment may, however, be the same as it is within the context of consumption. For instance, Boroff and Lewin (1997) noted that those employees who were more loyal had a lower propensity to leave than those who were less loyal. This latter finding is in line with Hirschman's expectations. It also supports the arguments made above: being more prepared to leave the organization, those employees who are less loyal may be more willing to accept the opprobrium that managers may attach to, from a managerial perspective, criticisms by employees of their actions. These results, therefore, underline the cardinal role played by power in underpinning voice and loyalty.

There is a further theoretical aspect of loyalty that should be addressed. As Hirschman (1970, pp. 77-8) was well aware, loyalty could be seen as both exogenous

and endogenous to voice. In other words, a person's or a group's degree of loyalty could both influence, and be influenced by, voice. If loyalty is to a certain extent exogenous – if different individuals do exhibit varying degrees of loyalty in the same situation – both researchers and practitioners need to take this into consideration. If loyalty is endogenous, the more effective voice mechanisms are, the higher the level of loyalty employees can be expected to have. Indeed, in much of the literature on voice, loyalty, in the form of trust, perceived justice, commitment and motivation, is seen as being dependent upon the actions of the company and, more specifically, upon the responsiveness of the firm to employees' concerns and suggestions (Dietz and Fortin, 2007).

In addition, firms may be able to influence employees' loyalty by their ability to offer, in a credible way, organizational careers to individuals. In other words, the power that a company may have to offer an employee the prospect of promotion is likely to have an impact on that person's loyalty. It can be expected that, in such circumstances, employees will not wish to jeopardize their career prospects by appearing to undermine either the organization or individual managers. Therefore, the power that a company has to offer – or to withhold – an organizational career would appear to be an important source of employee loyalty. An employee in such a situation may be able to do little to influence this type of decision directly. Other factors are, of course, likely to affect workers' willingness to voice any concerns that they may have. These may include status, the anticipated institutional response, and the attractiveness of employment outside the organization. The point here is that many studies of voice have overlooked this aspect of the EVLN model, and may, thereby, have inadequately assessed the extent to which companies can use their resources – beyond voice mechanisms – to gain acceptance for their workplace practices. Therefore, employee loyalty is likely to be influenced by the prospect of an attractive career within the organization as well as by the availability of rewarding jobs elsewhere.

4. Exit

According to Hirschman (1970, p. 4, italics removed), if “[s]ome customers stop buying the firm's products or some members leave the organization: this is the exit option”. Again, it may seem a relatively straightforward task to apply this concept to the employment relationship. This is not necessarily the case, however. Indeed, even if the concept is applied in a strict way, i.e. when employees leave an organization – to the employment relationship, difficulties arise. For instance, changing purchasing habits is easier than changing jobs for a number of reasons. First, it may be relatively easy to make assessments of well-known and widely available rival products in consumer markets. Information asymmetries about the existence of other jobs (some of which may only be open to candidates from within the employing organization), and the quality of the working environment (including, for example, the work-life balance) make switching employers more onerous.

Second, transaction costs are involved in the process of looking for other jobs. Indeed, looking for a job may have more tangible costs: employees may find that the opportunities available to them with their current employer are curtailed if it becomes known that they are actively seeking a job elsewhere. Transaction costs will also be incurred in changing jobs. These could be considerable if a person has to move home to accept the other job. Moreover, the increase in the number of dual-income households –

and hence the need to find two appropriate jobs in the same area – may impose severe constraints upon such moves. Third, it may not be possible to move back to the original employer if the new job does not meet expectations. Obviously, consumers can more easily switch their purchases back to the original supplier.

Therefore, the “external exit option” is not as readily available to employees as it is to consumers. Moreover, it indicates that exit should, within the context of employment, be seen, in behavioural terms, not just as quitting, but also as searching/applying for other jobs outside the organization (Naus *et al.*, 2007; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988). In attitudinal terms, it can, arguably, be seen as the consideration that an employee gives to quitting without taking any steps towards leaving the organization. Therefore, in sharp contrast to Hirschman’s (1970, p. 77) argument that, where exit is possible, voice is likely to be determined by “the extent to which customer-members are willing to trade off the certainty of exit against the uncertainties of an improvement in a deteriorated product”, it may, within the context of employment, be the case that the decision to quit will be strongly influenced by the extent to which employees are willing to trade-off the uncertainties and costs of exit against the certainties of staying. (Of course, some quits may not reflect dissatisfaction amongst employees with the employer, but may be caused by other factors, such as a desire to pursue a different career or to live in a different region or country.)

Therefore, exiting a firm may be a highly undesirable option. Indeed, it might not even be a practical option if opportunities for employment at other organizations do not, for instance, exist as a result of poor labour market conditions. This has important ramifications for researchers, and practitioners. Most notably, it means that dissatisfied employees, unlike disappointed consumers, may stay with an employer rather than quit. If employees, either collectively or individually, have a voice that enables them to influence workplace practices, they may stay and contribute towards improving working conditions. In this situation, the lack of an exit option may not pose a problem. If, on the other hand, employees do not have a voice (or if voice mechanisms are seen as ineffectual by employees or if employees who voice their views are deemed to be disloyal by employers) they may use what power they have to act in a “neglectful” way; that is, to behave in ways that are at odds with the organization’s goals (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). This underlines the importance of including the fourth category of the EVLN model in analyses.

Before discussing the concept of neglect, it is important to disaggregate the concept of exit in the employment context further. For instance, if the aim of voice mechanisms is to bring workplace policies and practices into alignment with the views of workers either individually or collectively, then, in much the same way that an individual may seek to improve his or her working conditions by changing employers, some workers may be able to do the same by moving up the hierarchy or by changing jobs within the organization. This can be seen as a form of exit described as “internal job mobility” (see Farrell (1983) and Rusbult *et al.* (1988) for earlier treatments of this aspect of exit). It is important to disaggregate this concept in this way because, in part at least, the notion of power – and, in particular, the asymmetric distribution of power in the employment relationship – is likely to influence an employer’s ability to offer employees the opportunities to change jobs within the organization.

The extent to which an employee can take advantage of such opportunities is likely to depend upon managers’ perceptions of that employee’s reputation. This reputation

is, in turn, likely to be shaped by the perceived levels of loyalty that the employee has shown towards the organization. Therefore, an employee's loyalty is likely to be one of the factors that contribute to promotion decisions. Conversely, a reputation for being neglectful is likely to harm an employee's promotion prospects. Loyalty, therefore, may be shaped not just by employers offering good career prospects, but also employees who wish to gain a favourable reputation amongst managers within their organization. This, as will be discussed below, has important implications for managers and researchers.

5. Neglect

Neglect was not a category that Hirschman or Freeman and Medoff or the majority of later researchers explicitly included in their analyses (Farrell, 1983; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988; Withey and Cooper, 1989). To be sure, Hirschman did address behaviour that, potentially, could be seen as neglectful; this behaviour was, however, subsumed under the voice construct. For instance, Hirschman (1970, p. 16) noted that voice “can be graduated, all the way from faint grumbling to violent protest”. However, protests would appear to have little to do with voice as their “properties” are fundamentally different: although both voice and protests communicate employees' attitudes to employers, protests do so in a predominantly adversarial way. That is not to say, however, that voice cannot be expressed confrontationally at times. It is, however, to suggest that the “starting points” for voice and protests differ radically (Edwards *et al.*, 1995; Hyman, 2005). Moreover, as noted above, voice should be seen as such only if it affects workplace or firm-level practices. Protests, on the other hand, may show that employees lack the ability to influence firm-level practices (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). In addition, defining voice and protests in this way enables voice to be bounded: not all forms of communication should be deemed to be voice.

Although Freeman and Medoff (1984) did not explicitly discuss neglect, they did state that disgruntled employees could either quit or engage in “quiet sabotage or shirking” (Freeman and Medoff, 1984, p. 11). Rather than treating sabotage or shirking as a relatively unimportant outcome, this paper will argue that such neglectful behaviour should be analysed in more detail, as employees, as indicated above, may not be able to change jobs as readily as consumers can alter their buying habits. Therefore, they may turn to negligent behaviour and express or hold negative attitudes towards their employer if they are dissatisfied and cannot leave an organization. This has important consequences for managers and organizations.

Neglect will be defined, here, as the wilful failure to perform duties either properly or with a sufficient level of care (Turnley and Feldman, 1999; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988, p. 601). This does not have to be covert. Neglectful behaviour may involve an employee showing a lack of interest or not engaging fully in work practices. The definition of neglect here does not have normative connotations. Neglect is different to the withdrawal of goodwill. Employees who are well motivated can be expected to try to exceed the level of performance required of them. Those who withdraw their goodwill may perform their duties adequately. By contrast, neglectful employees wilfully under-perform. Akin to some forms of “external exit”, neglect can, then, be viewed as negative behaviour. Defining neglect in this way means that it can cover not just shirking and protests, but also repeated lateness, the use of company resources for

personal matters, medically unjustified absenteeism, silent sabotage, and theft. It will also be defined to include negative attitudes towards the employing organization.

Although previous studies that have examined neglect have focused on behavioural outcomes, such as medically unjustified absenteeism and theft, it is equally possible to see neglect in attitudinal terms. Neglect may, therefore, also be expressed in terms of employees having a negative perception of the organization, a mental predisposition to distrust the actions and statements of managers, or a desire to thwart or hinder the attainment of declared organizational goals (Naus *et al.*, 2007). This may result in a discrepancy between the number of those who have thought about potential solutions to workplace problems and those who have voiced those solutions to managers. This, in turn, suggests that any assessment of voice mechanisms should attempt to capture levels of neglect amongst the workforce as this may: first, inhibit the use of these mechanisms; and second, have an impact upon workplace outcomes.

In addition, empirical studies should, in the same way that workers' "pre-existing" loyalty levels should be taken into consideration in empirical analyses, consider employees' predisposition to neglect. At present, not only are the links between voice mechanisms and neglect, in general, downplayed, but also testable empirical hypotheses that connect the extent to which neglect can be directly attributed to those mechanisms tend not to be specified in sufficient detail. The model proposed here suggests that analyses should focus not just on the extent to which employees can exercise power over workplace outcomes by acting in a neglectful way, but also that not all neglectful behaviour should be construed as attempts to alter particular workplace practices or policies. The motivation for the neglectful action should also be sought.

6. Conclusions and implications

This paper has sought to illustrate the importance of the notion of power not only to the voice aspect of Hirschman's exit, voice and loyalty framework, but also to the other two elements of it. Moreover, it has shown how that framework should be complemented by a "neglect" category. This paper has, in addition, shown that the individual elements of the EVLN framework should be disaggregated to a greater degree than is commonly the case. For instance, it might be hypothesized that if voice mechanisms are deemed ineffectual by employees and if the internal labour market does not enable employees to move to more satisfying jobs, employees are, where such opportunities exist, likely to quit the organization. Although research has attempted to assess the links between an employee's employment opportunities outside the organization and various outcomes (Addison *et al.*, 2001; Allen, 2006; Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Hyman, 2005), an individual's career prospects within an organization (March and Simon, 1958) have not been explicitly addressed to the same extent. Similarly, if the internal labour market enables employees to move to more satisfying jobs, employees may show higher levels of loyalty even if voice mechanisms are absent. However, loyalty tends not to be controlled for in assessments of various voice mechanisms on firm-level outcomes (see Luchak (2003) for one study that does incorporate a loyalty measure into the research design).

Moreover, the extent to which voice mechanisms are associated with different workplace outcomes, such as higher or lower productivity levels, can also be specified in greater detail. For instance, although Bryson *et al.* (2006) extended the use of the

voice framework to include employees’ perceptions of the different voice mechanisms within their empirical analysis, the extent to which those perceptions are shaped by other factors – such as, loyalty and internal and external exit – were not included. These omitted variables may bias the results if they are correlated with those factors included in the study. This may be the case if employers are willing to make a trade-off between voice mechanisms that constrain their decision-making abilities and the use of promotional prospects to gain employees’ loyalty. In other words, internal exit may be deemed preferable to powerful voice mechanisms. If employers can credibly offer organizational careers, this may also increase employees’ loyalty – even if they are dissatisfied with their current jobs and, potentially, view voice mechanisms in a negative way. Therefore, there are reasons why proxies for internal exit and loyalty should be included in such studies. Without them, any links that are found between various voice mechanisms and workplace outcomes will overlook important mediating factors. Employees’ perceptions of voice mechanisms are, in short, not the only mediating factors.

In addition, disaggregating the behavioural reactions that employees may have if they view voice mechanisms unfavourably may help to specify outcomes more precisely. For instance, if neglect is the result employees’ negative assessments of the voice mechanisms in a workplace, does this adversely affect productivity to a greater or lesser extent than external exit? Thus, different employee reactions may have different consequences for firms and may warrant different managerial responses to remedy them. Furthermore, how do these responses vary as external factors change? If exit becomes less prevalent during economic downturns, does this mean that neglect will increase? By specifying these relationships that are at the heart of the EVLN model with greater precision, these issues can be examined in empirical studies. They may, indeed, lead to a re-assessment of previous research findings.

References

- Addison, J.T., Schnabel, C. and Wagner, J. (2001), “Works councils in Germany: their effects on establishment performance”, *Oxford Economic Papers*, Vol. 53, pp. 659-94.
- Allen, M.M.C. (2006), *The Varieties of Capitalism Paradigm: Explaining Germany’s Comparative Advantage?*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Applebaum, E., Bailey, T., Berg, P. and Kalleberg, A. (2000), *Manufacturing Advantage – Why High-performance Work Systems Pay off*, ILR Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Bachrach, P. and Baratz, M. (1963), “Decisions and non-decisions: an analytical framework”, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 56, pp. 632-42.
- Bailey, M. (2009), “Can you hear us? The effectiveness of European works councils as a mechanism of employee voice for Hungarian workers of PrintCo”, *Employee Relations*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 197-218.
- Barker, J.R. (1993), “Tightening the iron cage: concertive control in self-managing teams”, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 408-37.
- Becker, B.E. and Huselid, M.A. (1998), “High performance work systems and firm performance: a synthesis of research and managerial implications”, in Ferris, G.R. (Ed.), *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management*, JAI Press, Stamford, CT, pp. 53-101.
- Benson, J. (2000), “Employee voice in union and non-union Australian workplaces”, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 453-9.

- Boroff, K.E. and Lewin, D. (1997), "Loyalty, voice, and intent to exit a union firm: a conceptual and empirical analysis", *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 50-63.
- Bowen, D.E. and Ostroff, C. (2004), "Understanding HRM-firm performance linkages: the role of the 'strength' of the HRM system", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 29 No. 2, pp. 203-21.
- Bryson, A., Charlwood, A. and Forth, J. (2006), "Worker voice, managerial response and labour productivity: an empirical investigation", *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 438-55.
- Butler, P. (2005), "Non-union employee representation: exploring the efficacy of the voice process", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 272-88.
- Dahl, R.A. (1957), "The concept of power", *Behavioral Science*, Vol. 2, pp. 202-10.
- Danford, A. (1998), "Teamworking and labour regulation in the autocomponents industry", *Work, Employment & Society*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 409-31.
- Delaney, J. and Godard, J. (2001), "An industrial relations perspective on the high-performance paradigm", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 11, pp. 395-429.
- Dietz, G. and Fortin, M. (2007), "Trust and justice in the formation of joint consultative committees", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 1159-81.
- Dundon, T. and Gollan, P.J. (2007), "Re-conceptualizing voice in the non-union workplace", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 1182-98.
- Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M.P. and Ackers, P. (2004), "The meanings and purpose of employee voice", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 15 No. 6, pp. 1149-70.
- Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M.P. and Ackers, P. (2005), "The management of voice in non-union organisations: managers' perspectives", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 307-19.
- Edwards, P. and Wright, M. (2001), "High involvement work systems and performance: the strength of variable, contingent and context-bound relationships", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 568-85.
- Edwards, P., Collinson, D. and Rocca, G.D. (1995), "Workplace resistance in western Europe: a preliminary overview and a research agenda", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 283-316.
- Farrell, D. (1983), "Exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect as responses to job dissatisfaction: a multidimensional scaling study", *The Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 596-607.
- Freeman, R.B. and Medoff, J. (1984), *What Do Unions Do?*, Basic Books, London.
- Freeman, R.B., Boxall, P. and Haynes, P. (Eds) (2007), *What Workers Say: Employee Voice in the Anglo-American Workplace*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- Godard, J. (2001), "High-performance and the transformation of work? The implications of alternative work practices for the nature and experience of work", *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 54 No. 4, pp. 776-805.
- Gollan, P.J. (2002), "So what's the news? Management strategies towards non-union employee representation at news international", *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 316-31.
- Gollan, P.J. (2003), "All talk, but no voice: employee voice at the Eurotunnel call centre", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 24 No. 4, pp. 509-41.

-
- Gollan, P.J. (2005), “Silent voices: representation at the Eurotunnel call centre”, *Personnel Review*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 423-50.
- Gollan, P.J. (2007), *Employee Representation in Non-union Firms*, Sage, London.
- Hirsch, B. and Addison, J. (1986), *The Economic Analysis of Unions: New Approaches and Evidence*, Allen & Unwin, Boston, MA.
- Hirschman, A.O. (1970), *Exit, Voice and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Hyman, R. (1997), “The future of employee representation”, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 35 No. 3, pp. 309-36.
- Hyman, R. (2005), “Whose (social) partnership?”, in Stuart, M. and Martinez Lucio, M. (Eds), *Partnership and Modernisation in Employment Relations*, Routledge, London, pp. 251-65.
- Kaufman, B.E. (2005), “What do unions do? Evaluation and commentary”, *Journal of Labour Research*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 555-95.
- Kochan, T. (2007), “What should governments do?”, in Freeman, R.B., Boxall, P. and Haynes, P. (Eds), *What Workers Say: Employee Voice in the Anglo-American Workplace*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, pp. 198-205.
- Kochan, T. and Osterman, P. (1994), *The Mutual Gains Enterprise*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.
- Luchak, A.A. (2003), “What kind of voice do loyal employees use?”, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 115-34.
- Lukes, S. (1974), *Power: A Radical View*, Macmillan, New York, NY.
- March, J.G. and Simon, H.A. (1958), *Organizations*, Wiley, New York, NY.
- Marchington, M.P. (2001), *Management Choice and Employee Voice*, CIPD, London.
- Marchington, M.P. (2005), “Employee involvement: patterns and explanations”, in Harley, B., Hyman, J. and Thompson, P. (Eds), *Participation and Democracy at Work: Essays in Honour of Harvie Ramsay*, Palgrave, London, pp. 20-37.
- Marchington, M.P. (2007), “Employee voice systems”, in Boxall, P., Purcell, J. and Wright, P. (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 231-50.
- Marchington, M.P. and Wilkinson, A. (2000), “Direct participation”, in Bach, S. and Sisson, K. (Eds), *Personnel Management: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed., Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 340-64.
- Naus, F., van Iterson, A. and Roe, R. (2007), “Organizational cynicism: extending the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect model of employees’ responses to adverse conditions in the workplace”, *Human Relations*, Vol. 60 No. 5, pp. 683-718.
- Pfeffer, J. and Salancik, G.R. (1978), *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*, Harper & Row, New York, NY.
- Poole, M. (1978), *Workers’ Participation in Industry*, Routledge, London.
- Purcell, J. and Georgiadis, K. (2007), “Why should employers bother with worker voice”, in Freeman, R.B., Boxall, P. and Haynes, P. (Eds), *What Workers Say: Employee Voice in the Anglo-American Workplace*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, pp. 181-97.
- Pyman, A., Cooper, B., Teicher, J. and Holland, P. (2006), “A comparison of the effectiveness of employee voice arrangements in Australia”, *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 543-59.

- Ramsay, H., Scholarios, D. and Harley, B. (2000), "Employees and high-performance work systems: testing inside the black box", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 38 No. 4, pp. 501-32.
- Rusbult, C.E., Farrell, D., Rogers, G. and Mainous, A.G. III (1988), "Impact of exchange variables on exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: an integrative model of responses to declining job satisfaction", *The Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 599-627.
- Strauss, G. (1998), "Worker participation – some under-considered issues", *Industrial Relations*, Vol. 45 No. 4, pp. 778-803.
- Terry, M. (1999), "Systems of collective employee representation in non-union firms in the UK", *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 16-30.
- Timming, A.R. (2007), "European works councils and the dark side of managing worker voice", *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 248-64.
- Turnley, W.H. and Feldman, D.C. (1999), "The impact of psychological contract violations on exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect", *Human Relations*, Vol. 52 No. 7, pp. 895-922.
- Tüselmann, H.-J., McDonald, F., Heise, A., Allen, M.M.C. and Voronkova, S. (2007), *Employee Relations in Foreign-owned Subsidiaries: German Multinational Companies in the UK*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Upchurch, M., Richardson, M., Tailby, S., Danford, A. and Stewart, P. (2006), "Employee representation and partnership in the non-union sector: a paradox of intention?", *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 16 No. 4, pp. 393-410.
- Willman, P., Bryson, A. and Gomez, R. (2006), "The sound of silence: which employers choose no employee voice and why?", *Socio-Economic Review*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 283-99.
- Withey, M. and Cooper, W. (1989), "Predicting exit, voice, loyalty and neglect", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 34, pp. 521-39.
- Wood, S.J. and Fenton-O'Creevy, M.P. (2005), "Direct involvement, representation and employee voice in UK multinationals in Europe", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 27-50.
- Wood, S.J. and Wall, T.D. (2007), "Work enrichment and employee voice in human resource management-performance studies", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 1335-72.

Further reading

- Sverke, M. and Goslinga, S. (2003), "The consequences of job insecurity for employers and unions: exit, voice and loyalty", *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 241-70.

Corresponding author

Matthew Allen can be contacted at: matthew.allen@mbs.ac.uk