

## Employee Voice to Supervisors

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*This article reports the results of two studies examining some factors that increase the likelihood that employees will voice to their supervisors. The way employees perceive that their supervisors manage employee voice was identified as a major cause of the likelihood that employees will voice upward. The Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale is presented along with data demonstrating its reliability and validity. Theoretical and applied implications of the results are discussed.*

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**KEY WORDS:** employee voice; responses to dissatisfaction; Hirschman's model.

### INTRODUCTION

What causes employees to voice work-related concerns and suggestions to their supervisors? Employee input has long been recognized as an important element of effective organizations (e.g., Likert, 1961; McGregor, 1960) and has received research attention from a variety of perspectives. Perhaps the most popular theory examining the dynamics of employee voice is Albert Hirschman's (1970) model of exit, voice, and loyalty. Hirschman proposed that employees respond to work-related problems in one of two ways: exit or voice. Employee exit occurs when employees terminate their employment relationship and leave the organization. Employee voice can occur in many different forms and strengths (see Gordon, 1988; Graham & Keeley, 1989) and includes filing grievances, submitting suggestions, and discussing problems with supervisors. Finally, the exit/voice decision was argued to be mediated by the degree of employee loyalty to the organization. More loyal employees were hypothesized to be more likely to voice and less likely to exit when they were dissatisfied. There has been a great deal of research inspired by Hirschman's model, and results have been generally supportive (e.g., Farrell, 1983; Leck, 1990; Minton, 1988; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983).

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The area where Hirschman's model has received the weakest support is in predicting employee voice (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Withey and Cooper (1989) argued that researchers have underdefined the voice construct and this may explain why the results of previous research on the dynamics of voice have been disappointing. Withey and Cooper also suggested that voice may be difficult to predict because it involves gauging the response of another person: the recipient of the voiced concern. One important recipient of employee voice is the employee's immediate supervisor. Because there is a difference in power between supervisors and employees, employees need to consider how their supervisors will manage employee voice before they speak up. Supervisors act as "voice managers" whenever they receive input from employees. The effect of employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers on the likelihood that employees will voice upward is an important factor that has not been explored in previous research on Hirschman's model (for an interesting parallel in industrial relations, see Dalton & Todor, 1982).

The purpose of this article is to explore the dynamics of employee voice in greater detail by examining the relationship between employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers and the likelihood that employees voice upward. In addition, this article extends Hirschman's model by identifying factors other than loyalty that predict when employees will voice.

### **Employee Perceptions that Influence Voice**

Concepts from the research and theories examining formal justice systems and formal communication procedures were used to identify factors that may influence employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers. Employees' decisions about whether to voice to their supervisors is analogous to decisions about whether to engage more formal justice systems such as nonunion grievance procedures. For instance, both supervisors and formal procedures: (a) are approached by people who choose to do so voluntarily; (b) are mechanisms for allocating resources and outcomes; (c) recommend action in response to submissions; and (d) provide learning experiences that influence how people will proceed with subsequent input.

A large body of research exploring the fairness of justice systems has developed in the last 15 years (for a review see Lind & Tyler, 1988). This research suggests that the perceived fairness of justice systems has a large influence on the level of satisfaction obtained by those using the procedures (see Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1987; Tyler & Caine, 1981; Tyler & Folger, 1980). Further, Leventhal (1976, 1980) suggested six fundamental rules that must be followed for any system of justice to be perceived as fair: (a) decisions must be made in a consistent way across people and over time; (b) the decision maker must not be biased; (c) decisions must be accurate; (d) decisions need to be correctable; (e) all parties influenced by a decision must be represented; and (f) the decisions must be ethical. Application of Leventhal's rules of justice systems suggests that supervisors who are effective voice managers should: (a) treat people consistently, both over time and across employees; (b) make correct decisions (c) be open to changing poor

decisions when they occur; and (d) gather input from all employees who will be influenced by the outcome of the decision.

In examining formal employee communication procedures, Aram and Salipante (1981) argued that in order to be effective these procedures must satisfy four requirements. They must: (a) produce fair outcomes; (b) be easy to use; (c) provide protection from recrimination; and (d) resolve complaints in a timely manner (also see Balfour, 1984; Scott, 1965). Application of Aram and Salipante's (1981) work suggests that the supervisors who are effective voice managers should: (a) produce fair outcomes; (b) be easy to approach; (c) not be retributive to employees who voice; and (d) respond to employee voice in a timely manner.

### THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Research on justice systems and formal communication procedures suggests many dimensions of effective voice management. Employees are predicted to be more likely to voice to their supervisors when they perceive that their supervisor: (a) makes consistent, accurate, and correctable decisions; (b) encourages participation by all employees; (c) is fair and unbiased in reaching decisions; (d) is easy to approach; (e) manages employee voice in a timely manner; and (f) is not retributive to employees who voice.

Employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers were not expected to be the only factor that predicted the likelihood that employees would voice to their supervisors. Three other factors that complement Hirschman's model were also investigated in this research: work satisfaction, satisfaction with supervision in general, and organizational commitment. In addition, we examined the effects of changing supervisors on employee likelihood to voice. We predicted that: (a) employees more satisfied with their work would be less likely to voice to their supervisors because they would have fewer issues concerning them at work; (b) employees more satisfied with the quality of their general supervision would be more likely to voice to their supervisors because of the positive supervisor-subordinate relationship; (c) employees more committed to the organization would be more likely to voice to their supervisors because they are more motivated to improve the quality of their organization (see Glauser, 1984; O'Reilly & Pondy, 1979); and (d) employees who had recently changed supervisors would be less likely to voice because they would be more uncertain about how their supervisors would respond to their input.

Employee voice to their supervisors was examined in two separate studies. The purpose of the first study was to demonstrate that employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers was an important determinant of their likelihood to voice. Causal relationships among the variables were examined in this longitudinal study. Study 1 also reports the initial development of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale, a measure of employees' perceptions of how their supervisors manage employee voice. The purpose of the second study was to develop and extend the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale. Replication is important because it

is a critical aspect of scale development; this study also explored the multidimensionality of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale.

## STUDY 1

### Method

#### *Subjects*

*Time 1.* Ninety-one supervisors, middle-managers, and professional employees (54 females, 34 males, 3 unknown) of the support services division of a Southeastern university participated in the study at Time 1. The response rate was 73%. Participants were members of one of six production service departments (line) or two support departments (staff). Production functions included areas as diverse as food preparation, student housing administration, campus bookstores, photocopier support, and university transit management. The mean age of the subjects at Time 1 was 38 years and the average length of time employed by the university was 10 years.

*Time 2.* Eighty-one employees (47 females, 34 males) participated in the study one year later at Time 2, for a response rate of 70%. No major organizational events (e.g., layoffs) occurred between the two data collection times. The mean age of the subjects at Time 2 was 37 years, and the average length of time employed by the university was 9 years. Fifty-seven employees participated in the study at both Time 1 and Time 2. When the employees who terminated their employment between Time 1 and Time 2 are taken into account, this represents a 78% repeat participation rate.

#### *Procedure*

*Time 1.* Subjects participated in the study as part of an evaluation of the division of the university where they worked. Employees were told that the questionnaire was part of the large project monitoring the division over the next calendar year, and that only data aggregated across departments would be made available to their managers. In order to match the responses of participants from one year to the next, employees were asked to record their name, supervisor's name, and some demographic information on a data sheet that was coded and stored separately from the questionnaires. Employees were guaranteed complete anonymity of their responses and were assured that only the principle researcher and his assistant would see their questionnaires.

Data-gathering sessions were conducted at various locations throughout the university. All supervisors, middle-managers, and professional employees were offered the opportunity to participate in the project by attending a session of their choice. When groups of employees arrived at a questionnaire session they were told the purpose of the project and were assured of the anonymity of their responses. They were then asked to complete a battery of questionnaires which in-

cluded an identity sheet; the Job Description Index (JDI) a measure of job satisfaction with five subscales [work itself, supervision, pay, promotions, and co-workers (Smith, Kendall & Hulin, 1969)]; the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ), a measure of affective commitment to an organization (Mowday & Steers, 1979); the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale; and the Likelihood to Voice Scale. After completing the questionnaires, employees were thanked for their participation.

*Time 2.* The procedure at Time 2 was the same as at Time 1. At a university location of their choice employees completed a battery of questionnaires including the identity sheet, JDI, OCQ, Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale, and the Likelihood to Voice Scale.

### *Development of Measures*

An 11-item Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale was created for this study (see Appendix). The statements on this scale reflected the behaviors of effective voice managers that were drawn from the literature review. Employees answered each of these items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale was quite reliable (Time 1,  $\alpha = 0.86$ ; Time 2,  $\alpha = 0.86$ ).

The eight-item Likelihood to Voice Scale measuring the likelihood that employees would voice to their supervisors was created for this study (see Appendix). The items on this scale asked employees to indicate how likely (1 = not very likely to 7 = very likely) they would be to voice eight different topics to their supervisor. The Likelihood to Voice Scale was quite reliable (Time 1,  $\alpha = 0.80$ ; Time 2,  $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

### *Validity of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale*

The JDI and OCQ were included in the study for two reasons. First, the OCQ, JDI Work Itself, and JDI Supervision scales were predicted to have effects on the likelihood that employees would voice. The second reason that they were included in the study was to validate the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale. Both convergent and discriminant validity were assessed. If the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale has strong convergent validity then it should correlate strongly with a conceptually close scale (JDI Supervision). Evidence of good discriminant validity would be weak correlations with scales that are conceptually unrelated (OCQ, the other 4 JDI subscales). Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed twice: once with the data at Time 1, and again with the data at Time 2.

The correlation between the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale and the JDI Supervision subscale was significant at both Time 1,  $r(91) = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and Time 2,  $r(81) = 0.70$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , indicating strong convergent validity. The correlations between the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale and the four other JDI subscales and the OCQ were considerably lower ( $r = 0.32$  or less; see Table I), indicating good discriminant validity. Because the Supervisor as Voice Manager and JDI Supervision scales are strongly correlated, it is important to understand how

**Table 1.** Correlations among the Supervisor as Voice Manager, Likelihood to Voice, Job Diagnostic Index, and Organizational Commitment Scales for Studies 1 and 2<sup>a</sup>

	Supervisor Likelihood as Voice Manager	to Voice	Job Diagnostic Index				Organizational Commitment Questionnaire	
			Work Itself	Super- vision	Promo- tion	Co- Workers		
Supervisor as Voice Manager	(0.86)	0.46 <sup>b</sup>	0.32 <sup>c</sup>	0.63 <sup>b</sup>	0.07	0.28 <sup>c</sup>	0.14	0.15
Likelihood to Voice	0.41 <sup>b</sup>	(0.85)	0.03	0.16	-0.20	-0.08	0.02	0.18
Job Diagnostic Index								
Work Itself	0.22 <sup>d</sup>	0.11	(0.70)	0.35 <sup>b</sup>	0.37 <sup>b</sup>	0.36 <sup>b</sup>	0.23 <sup>d</sup>	0.28 <sup>b</sup>
Supervision	0.70 <sup>b</sup>	0.36 <sup>b</sup>	0.19	(0.75)	0.23 <sup>d</sup>	0.22 <sup>d</sup>	0.22 <sup>d</sup>	0.06
Pay	0.27 <sup>d</sup>	-0.22 <sup>d</sup>	0.19	0.31 <sup>c</sup>	(0.71)	0.30 <sup>c</sup>	0.11	0.14
Promotion	0.32 <sup>c</sup>	-0.12	0.22 <sup>d</sup>	0.28 <sup>d</sup>	0.54 <sup>b</sup>	(0.85)	0.12	0.20
Co-workers	0.29 <sup>c</sup>	-0.08	0.31 <sup>c</sup>	0.17	0.29 <sup>c</sup>	0.21	(0.74)	0.18
Organizational Commitment	0.30 <sup>c</sup>	0.13	0.49 <sup>b</sup>	0.22	0.08	0.32 <sup>c</sup>	0.09	(0.88)

<sup>a</sup>Note: Correlations above and below the main diagonal are from Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. Mean reliability coefficients are in the main diagonal.

<sup>b</sup> $p < 0.001$ .

<sup>c</sup> $p < 0.01$ .

<sup>d</sup> $p < 0.05$ .

they are similar and different. The JDI Supervision subscale is a more general construct than the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale, and represents employees' generalized affect toward their supervisors. The Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale represents a series of cognitive judgments about how employees perceive that their supervisors manage employee voice. The ability of each scale to predict employee likelihood of voicing to their supervisor is discussed in the next section.

## Results and Discussion

Longitudinal studies allow the demonstration of causality between data collection periods and the exploration of relationships among the variables within each time period. The results are presented separately for the relationships among variables within Time 1 and 2, and for the causal relationship between Time 1 and Time 2.

### *Time 1: Predicting Employee Likelihood to Voice*

A multiple regression analysis including all employees who participated in the study at Time 1 was conducted to explore the predictors of employee likelihood to voice. The Likelihood to Voice Scale was predicted with the Supervisor as Voice Manager, JDI, and OCQ scales, yielding a significant regression equation,  $F(7,83)$

Table II. Multiple Regression Analysis of Employee Voice at Time 1 and Time 2

Variable	Time 1 Beta	Time 2 Beta
Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale	0.57 <sup>a</sup>	0.41 <sup>b</sup>
Job Diagnostic Inventory		
Work Itself	-0.04	0.12
General Supervision	-0.12	0.22
Pay	-0.18	-0.30 <sup>c</sup>
Co-Workers	0.02	-0.16
Promotions	-0.11	-0.14
Organizational Commitment	0.16	-0.02
<i>F</i>	5.18 <sup>a</sup>	5.70 <sup>a</sup>
<i>df</i>	7,83	7,73
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (adjusted)	0.25	0.29

<sup>a</sup>*p* < 0.001.<sup>b</sup>*p* < 0.01.<sup>c</sup>*p* < 0.05.

= 5.18,  $p < 0.0001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.25$  (see Table II). As predicted, the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale was a significant predictor of likelihood to voice, with employees who perceived their supervisors as effective voice managers also reporting a greater likelihood of voicing to them. None of the other scales significantly predicted employee likelihood to voice to their supervisors. The predicted relationships between employee likelihood to voice and satisfaction with the work itself, general supervision, and organizational commitment were not supported.

#### *Time 2: Predicting Employee Likelihood to Voice*

A multiple regression analysis including all of the employees who participated in the study at Time 2 was conducted in order to explore the predictors of employee voice at Time 2. The regression equation was significant at Time 2,  $F(7,73) = 5.70$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.29$ . As predicted, the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale was a significant predictor of the Likelihood to Voice Scale (see Table II). The predicted relationships between employee likelihood to voice and satisfaction with the work itself, general supervision, and organizational commitment were not supported. Employee satisfaction with pay was a significant predictor of likelihood to voice, with employees who were more satisfied with their pay less likely to voice to their supervisors. This finding must be treated with caution, however, both because it was not predicted and because it was only found at Time 2.

#### *Predictive Validity of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale*

Because the Supervisor as Voice Manager scale and the JDI Supervision subscale were strongly correlated, it is important to demonstrate that the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale has good predictive validity; that is, it explains variance

in the Likelihood to Voice Scale that is not explained by the JDI Supervision subscale. The Supervisor as Voice Manager scale was significantly more correlated with the Likelihood to Voice Scale than was the JDI Supervision subscale at Time 2,  $t = 3.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , but not at Time 1,  $t < 1$ . A multiple regression utility analysis (where the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale was entered into the regression equation after the JDI and OCQ scales were in the equation) revealed that the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale explained significant variance in the Likelihood to Voice Scale at both Time 1,  $F(1,83) = 19.88$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.18$ , and Time 2,  $F(1,73) = 7.24$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ,  $R^2 = 0.07$ . In summary, these results suggest that while the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale is highly related to the JDI Supervision subscale, it is an important and distinct construct.

### *Longitudinal Prediction of Employee Voice*

Multiple regression panel analysis (Maccoby, Snow, & Jacklin, 1984) was used to assess the causal relation between the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale and the Likelihood to Voice Scale. Multiple regression panel analysis was used because it overcomes a number of recent criticisms of cross-lagged panel correlations (see Maccoby *et al.*, 1984; Rogosa, 1980).<sup>4</sup> Cross-lagged panel correlations are also presented because they are the traditional method of analyzing longitudinal data (Kenny, 1975) and are quite visually accessible.

The 57 employees who participated in the study at both Time 1 and Time 2 were included in the longitudinal analysis. Twenty-two of these employees changed supervisors between Time 1 and Time 2 of the study; 35 had the same supervisor at both times. We predicted that the causal relation between the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale and the Likelihood to Voice Scale would be significant for employees with the same supervisor in both years. We expected *no* causal relation between the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale and the Likelihood to Voice Scale for employees who changed supervisors. We also assessed whether the Likelihood to Voice Scale predicted the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale for exploratory purposes.

Three dummy variables were included in the multiple regression panel analysis to represent whether or not employees changed supervisors: (a) a Changed Supervisor main effect term to identify whether or not employees changed supervisors between Time 1 and 2 (0 = changed supervisor, 1 = same supervisor); (b) a Likelihood to Voice Scale by Changed Supervisor interaction term (LV  $\times$  CS); and (c) a Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale by Changed Supervisor interaction term (SVM  $\times$  CS). The SVM  $\times$  CS interaction term should be significant if the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale is a significant cause of the Likelihood to Voice Scale. Employees who changed supervisors between Time 1 and 2 will score 0 on this interaction term while the scores on the interaction term for employees with the same supervisor in both years will increase as a function of their Time 1 Supervisor as Voice Manager score. A similar argument suggests that if the Likelihood to Voice

<sup>4</sup>While structural modeling is an appropriate method for assessing change, it was not possible to use in this study because it requires large sample sizes and multiple measures of each construct (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1978).

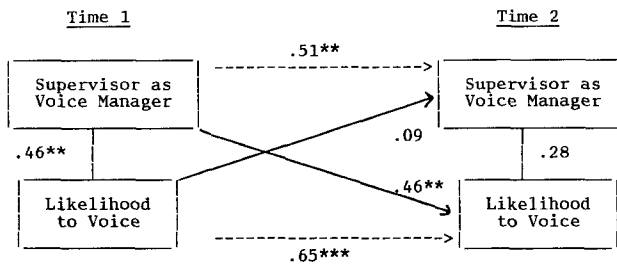


Multiple Regression Summary Table

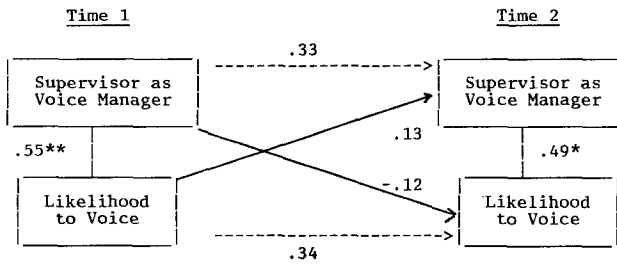
Time 1	Employee Voice	Time 2	Supervisor as Voice Manager
Likelihood to Voice (LV)	.43*		-.08
Supervisor as Voice Manager (SVM)	-.32		.33
Changed Supervisor (CS)	-2.17**		-.46
LV X CS	.75		-.45
SVM X CS	1.41*		.76
F(5,51)	7.15***		3.53**
R <sup>2</sup>	.35		.18

Correlations

Same Supervisor at Time 1 and Time 2



Different Supervisors at Time 1 and Time 2



\*\*\* p<.001 \*\* p<.01 \* p<.05

Fig. 1. Predicting Time 2 measures of the Supervisor as Voice Manager and the Likelihood to Voice Scales with Time 1 measures.

Scale is a significant cause of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale, then the LV × CS interaction term should be significant.

The multiple regression panel analysis predicting employee scores on the Likelihood to Voice Scale at Time 2 was significant,  $F(5,51) = 7.15, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.35$  (see Fig. 1). As predicted, the SVM × CS interaction term was positive and significant ( $\beta = 1.41, p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale was a significant predictor of scores on the Likelihood to Voice Scale among employees who had the same supervisors at both Time 1 and 2. This suggests that employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers has a causal effect on their likelihood to voice upward. Two other terms in the analysis were also signifi-

cant: (a) the Likelihood to Voice Scale at Time 1 was a significant predictor of Time 2 Likelihood to Voice scores ( $\beta = 0.43, p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that there is temporal consistency in the tendency to voice upward; and (b) the Changed Supervisor dummy variable was a significant predictor of the Time 2 Likelihood to Voice Scale, suggesting that employees who changed supervisors between Time 1 and 2 were less likely to voice upward at Time 2 ( $\beta = -2.17, p < 0.01$ ).

The multiple regression panel analysis predicting employee scores on the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale at Time 2 was significant,  $F(5,51) = 3.53, p < 0.01, R^2 = 0.18$ . None of the terms in the regression equation were statistically significant, however. As predicted, this suggests that employee likelihood to voice is not a cause of employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers.

Cross-lagged panel correlations are presented separately for employees with the same and different supervisors in Fig. 1. These data display the results of the multiple regression panel analysis in a more visual manner. The Supervisor as a Voice Manager Scale was a significant causal predictor of the Likelihood to Voice Scale for employees with the same supervisor at both times ( $r = 0.46, p < 0.01$ ), and was not a predictor for employees who changed supervisors ( $r = -0.12, n.s.$ ). The causal relationship was unilateral; the Likelihood to Voice Scale did not predict the supervisor as Voice Manager Scale for either group of employees. These results also indicated: (a) a significant correlation between the Likelihood to Voice scale at Time 1 and Time 2 ( $r = 0.65, p < 0.001$ ) for employees with the same supervisor at both times, suggesting that Likelihood to Voice is quite stable; and (b) a significant correlation between the Supervisor as Voice Manager scales for employees with the same supervisor at both times, suggesting that these perceptions are quite stable. Finally, the weak correlations between the Likelihood to Voice Scales at Time 1 and 2, and the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scales at Time 1 and 2, for employees that changed supervisors argues strongly that method variance cannot account for the major results of the study.

## Conclusions

Study 1 clearly indicated that employee perceptions of how their supervisors manage employee voice predicts the likelihood that employees will voice upward. Longitudinal analyses strongly suggested that causality was unidirectional: employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers caused their likelihood to voice upward. The Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale was also found to have strong reliability (internal consistency and test-retest) and validity (concurrent, discriminant, and predictive).

The longitudinal analysis also revealed that when employees change supervisors they appear *less* likely to voice to their new supervisors. This finding contradicts conventional wisdom that changing supervisors will “infuse new blood” into the organization and cultivate new approaches to old problems. Rather, employees seem to react with caution to a new supervisor and become less likely to voice upward. It is not clear how long this “wait and see” attitude lasts, but Study 1 suggests that changing supervisors may at least temporarily reduce the likelihood that employees will voice.

Contrary to our predictions, neither satisfaction with work nor organizational commitment were significant predictors of employee likelihood to voice. In other words, neither employees who were more committed to the organization nor employees who were less satisfied with their work were more likely to voice suggestions to improve their job and organization. Rather, employee perceptions of their supervisor as a voice manager was the critical determinant of their likelihood to voice.

Satisfaction with general supervision was also not a significant predictor of employee likelihood to voice upward in the regression analysis in Study 1 (although the JDI Supervision subscale and the Likelihood to Voice Scale were significantly correlated at Time 2). This suggests that while the general quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship may be somewhat related to the likelihood that employees will voice upward, the quality of this relationship alone is not sufficient to guarantee that employees will voice.

In conclusion, the lack of relationships between employee likelihood to voice and employee satisfaction and commitment may have been due to the measures used in this study. Future research is needed with alternate measures in order to verify the apparently small role that satisfaction and commitment play in predicting employee voice to their supervisors.

## STUDY 2

Study 2 was conducted to replicate and extend the major findings of Study 1. The subjects in Study 1 were all supervisors, managers, and professional staff; Study 2 investigates the relationship between employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers and their likelihood to voice for both management and nonmanagement personnel. A possible shortcoming of Study 1 is that only one organization was examined, and the findings of that study may be due to an artifact of that organization. In order to ensure that the results from Study 1 are generalizable to other organizations, employees from many organizations were recruited to participate in Study 2. Finally, we were concerned that the complexity of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale may have been underidentified in Study 1. While the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale had good validity in Study 1, it is possible that the true richness of employee perceptions of their supervisors may have been underidentified because only 11 items were included in the scale. We corrected this possible shortcoming in Study 2 by including additional items on the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale so that the multidimensionality of this construct could be investigated.

### Method

#### *Subjects*

Three hundred and eighty-nine employees (182 females, 202 males, 5 unknown) who were also part-time students in evening undergraduate and graduate business classes at a Canadian university participated in this study. The mean age

of the employees was 31 years and the average length of employment at their current organization was 6.2 years. There were 259 professional and supervisory employees in the sample, and 117 clerical and blue collar employees.

### *Development of Measures*

The 11-item Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale developed in Study 1 was included in Study 2. Twenty-six additional statements about employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers were added to the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale. These statements were written to represent better the dimensions of effective voice managers that we had drawn from the literature for Study 1. The eight item Likelihood to Voice Scale used in Study 1 was included in Study 2; it again had strong reliability,  $\alpha = 0.83$ .

### *Procedure*

Employees were approached during their evening university classes and were asked to complete a questionnaire assessing employee-supervisor communication. Participants were told that the questionnaire would take about 15 minutes to complete and that their participation was anonymous. Employees answered some basic demographic questions, the 8-item Likelihood to Voice Scale, and the 37-item Supervisor as Voice Manager scale. Subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation in the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Dimensions of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale*

The 37 Supervisor as Voice Manager items were factor analyzed using the principal components method.<sup>5</sup> A scree test suggested that two factors accounting for 43% of the total variance should be retained; these factors were rotated using the varimax criterion (see Table III). An item loading of 0.60 was used as the criterion for inclusion of an item when labeling a factor. The first factor, labeled Responsiveness, contained 14 items and seemed to represent the extent to which supervisors were perceived to be responsive to employee voice. The items defining this factor included "My boss gives high priority to handling employee concerns" and "I take concerns to my boss because he or she deals with them effectively." In general, items loading highly on this factor were related to fairness, effective decisions, promptness, and willingness to take action. The second factor, labeled Approachability, contained seven items and appeared to represent a continuum of

<sup>5</sup>Nunnally (1978) strongly recommends principal components analysis with a varimax rotation for this type of data. An oblique rotation yielded equivalent results.

Table III. Factor Analysis of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale—Study 2<sup>a</sup>

Item	Responsiveness	Approachability
<b>Responsiveness</b>		
My boss gives high priority to handling employee concerns.	0.77	-0.23
My boss is fair when I take a concern to him or her.	0.75	-0.20
I take concerns to my boss because he or she deals with them effectively.	0.75	-0.17
My boss takes action to correct the concerns that I speak to him or her about.	0.75	-0.14
My boss does not take action in response to my concerns. (R)	-0.72	0.29
My boss handles my concerns promptly.	0.66	-0.21
My boss is willing to support me if my concern is valid.	0.66	-0.16
My boss listens carefully to what I say when I bring in a concern.	0.66	-0.31
My boss does not make fair decisions when I bring in a concern. (R)	-0.65	0.31
My boss doesn't really listen to me when I bring in a concern. (R)	-0.64	0.27
My boss doesn't ever do anything about my concerns. (R)	-0.61	0.23
Often the concerns that I take to my boss are not handled until days have gone by. (R)	-0.61	0.23
Even when my boss knows that I am right, he or she will not support me when I bring in a concern. (R)	-0.60	0.36
My boss treats concerns reported from other workers and myself equally.	0.59	-0.05
<b>Approachability</b>		
I don't know what to expect when I take a concern to my boss.	-0.22	0.74
I don't know how my boss will react when I take a concern to him or her.	-0.22	0.74
I don't know how my boss will behave when I take a concern to him or her.	-0.19	0.67
It is difficult to take a concern to my boss.	-0.42	0.65
I do not know how to take a concern to my boss.	-0.16	0.64
I find it quite stressful to take a concern to my boss.	-0.20	0.63
I am not afraid to take a concern to my boss. (R)	0.04	-0.59
<b>Remaining items</b>		
Taking a concern to my boss would not cause future problems between my boss and me.	0.57	-0.43
I feel good after discussing a concern with my boss.	0.56	-0.26
My boss treats me the same way whenever I take a concern to him or her.	0.46	-0.33
I get to describe my concerns completely before my boss responds to me.	0.41	-0.25
My boss would not punish me for taking a concern to him or her.	0.36	-0.33
If I want to bring a concern to my boss there are clear steps to be followed.	0.20	-0.03
My boss usually stops me before I can say everything that I want to about my concerns.	-0.45	0.39
My boss is not very consistent in his or her responses to my concerns.	-0.53	0.40
I don't bother taking concerns to my boss because it is usually too late before he or she is willing to do anything about them.	-0.58	0.37
I feel exhausted after taking a concern to my boss.	-0.33	0.58
The daily activities of my job would become harder if I took a concern to my boss.	0.37	0.56

Table III. Continued

Item	Respon- siveness	Approach- ability
Taking a concern to my boss would cause future problems between my co-workers and me.	-0.16	0.54
I think that my boss would "make life difficult" for me if I took a concern to him or her.	-0.44	0.49
Opportunities for advancement at work could be reduced if I take concerns to my boss.	-0.39	0.43
My boss behaves similarly whenever I take a concern to him or her.	0.03	-0.18
It is not especially difficult or time consuming to go to my boss with a concern.	0.31	-0.35

<sup>a</sup>Note: (R) indicates a reverse-worded item.

how open supervisors were perceived to be to employee voice. The items defining this factor included "I don't know what to expect when I take a concern to my boss" and "It is difficult to take a concern to my boss." In general, items loading highly on this factor were related to uncertainty about how to approach supervisors, the stressfulness of voice, and uncertainty about how supervisors would react to employee voice.

In order to ensure the internal consistency of the Responsiveness and the Approachability subscales, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were calculated for each. Both the Responsiveness,  $\alpha = 0.93$ , and Approachability,  $\alpha = 0.85$ , subscales demonstrated strong internal consistency.

### *Predicting Employee Voice*

Both the Responsiveness,  $r(389) = 0.37, p < 0.001$ , and the Approachability,  $r(389) = -0.41, p < 0.01$ , subscales were significantly correlated with the Likelihood to Voice Scale. A significant multiple regression analysis confirmed that both the Responsiveness,  $\beta = 0.19, p < 0.001$ , and the Approachability,  $\beta = -0.30, p < 0.001$ , subscales explained unique variance of the Likelihood to Voice Scale,  $F(2,386) = 46.55, p < 0.001, R^2 = 0.19$ .

### **Conclusions**

Study 2 suggests that the relationship between employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers and their likelihood to voice upward generalized both to nonmanagement employees and to employees in various organizations. This strengthens confidence in the finding that employee perceptions of the way that their supervisors manage employee voice are an important determinant of employee likelihood to voice.

The results of Study 2 also suggested that the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale appears to have two dimensions: Responsiveness—the extent to which supervisors are perceived to be responsive to employee voice—and Approachability—the degree to which supervisors make the process of voicing more certain. Both of these dimensions accounted for significant unique variance in employees' propensity to voice to their supervisors. A 14-item Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale, with seven items on each of the two subscales, was drawn from Study 2 (see Appendix). In order to ensure that the 14-item Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale contained two subscales, a follow-up study of 236 employees of a Canadian bank was conducted. This study confirmed that the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale does in fact have two dimensions, and the factor analysis presented in the Appendix shows how the factor pattern in the replication study replicated perfectly the two dimensions identified in Study 2: Responsiveness and Approachability.

### GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Employee perceptions of how their supervisors manage employee voice is a major cause of employee likelihood to voice upward. Supervisors who are perceived to be approachable and responsive have employees who are more likely to voice. Employees who are uncertain about how to approach their supervisors and how their supervisors will react are less likely to voice upward.

There are important implications of this research for Hirschman's (1970) model of exit, voice, and loyalty. Previous research has had difficulty explaining voice behavior. This appears to have been due to an underdefinition of the voice construct and because employee perceptions of how their supervisors manage employee voice were not considered. Our study suggests that two additional factors, Responsiveness and Approachability, may be important predictors of employee voice, and should be added to Hirschman's model. In addition, to the extent that organizational commitment included loyalty, the results of Study 1 do not support Hirschman's proposed link between loyalty and voice.

There are many other theoretical and applied implications of the findings of this research. On the theoretical side, these findings suggest that the components of good justice systems identified by Aram and Salipante (1981) and Leventhal (1976, 1980) may be summarized with two general principles: the responsiveness of the justice system and the extent to which the justice system is approachable. The perception of responsiveness appears to incorporate Aram and Salipante's principles of fairness and timeliness, and Leventhal's principles of accuracy, representation, and bias-suppression. Approachability appears to incorporate Aram and Salipante's protection from recrimination and ease of use and Leventhal's principle of consistency.

There are probably other factors that are important determinants of employee likelihood to voice. A more complete model of employee voice behavior needs to be developed and tested. Especially deserving of future research are the following questions: What are the important personality correlates of employees who voice to their supervisors? Where do employee impressions of their supervisors as voice

managers come from? If a supervisor wants to change his or her image as a voice manager, what types of behaviors will be most effective to achieve this goal? Future research also needs to investigate the relationship between likelihood to voice and actual voice behavior. Our research has identified that employee perceptions of their supervisors as voice managers significantly influence the likelihood that employees will voice upward. We have not examined how likelihood to voice translates into actual voice behavior, however. While research has clearly demonstrated that intentions frequently translate into behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), the relation between intended voice and actual voice needs to be explored. In addition, the relation between the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale and other measures of supervisor-subordinate relations such as the Leader-Member Exchange scale (Graen, Liden & Hoel, 1982) also needs to be investigated. Finally, research needs to be conducted that explores how supervisors' behaviors are linked to subordinates' perceptions. We do not expect that this will be an easy task because subordinates do not necessarily share perceptions about how their supervisors manage employee voice, nor do supervisors manage voice from all employees equally.<sup>6</sup>

On an applied level, simply instructing employees to discuss their concerns with their supervisors is no guarantee that organizations will receive employee input. Supervisors need to be trained to recognize that employees are quite sensitive both to the responsiveness of supervisors to employee voice as well as to the process of voicing to a supervisor. Contrary to Hirschman's theory, ensuring that employees are committed to the organization and satisfied with their work does not guarantee that they will voice upward. Organizations also need to recognize that employees are less likely to voice to new supervisors, and that rotating supervisors may reduce the likelihood that new ideas are voiced. Perhaps the most tangible outcome of this research for organizations is the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale and the Likelihood to Voice Scale. Organizations can use these instruments to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of their supervisors as voice managers and to assess the extent to which employee voice is reaching decision makers farther up the hierarchy.

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<sup>6</sup>The average correlation between items on the Supervisor as Voice Manager scale for employees with the same supervisor in Study 1 was 0.11 at Time 1 and 0.13 at Time 2. This suggests little consensus about how supervisors manage employee voice among employees with the same supervisor. We would also strongly suggest that supervisors do not treat voice from all employees equally. Future research on the supervisor-behavior/employee-perception link will need to take this into account.



## APPENDIX

## Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale—Study 1

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1. My boss takes action to correct the concerns that I speak to him or her about.
  2. My boss treats concerns reported from other workers and myself equally.
  3. If I want to bring a concern to my boss there are clear steps to be followed.
  4. My boss is fair when I take a concern to him or her.
  5. Taking a concern to my boss would not cause future problems between my boss and me.
  6. I find it quite stressful to take a concern to my boss.
  7. My boss doesn't really listen to me when I bring in a concern.
  8. It is not especially difficult or time consuming to go to my boss with a concern.
  9. I do not know how to approach my boss with a concern.
  10. My boss doesn't ever do anything about my concerns.
  11. I get to describe my concerns completely before my boss responds to me.
- 

## Likelihood to Voice Scale

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1. How likely would you be to speak to your immediate supervisor about a concern over how another worker was doing his or her job?
  2. How likely would you be to speak to your immediate supervisor about a better way to do your job?
  3. If you knew a co-worker was not honest how likely would you be to speak to your immediate supervisor about it?
  4. If you had a gripe about something to do with your job, how likely would you be to speak to your immediate supervisor about it?
  5. When something at work irritates (bothers) you, how likely are you to speak to your immediate supervisor about it?
  6. If something about the policies and procedures of the university irritated or bothered you, how likely would you be to speak to your immediate supervisor about it?
  7. If an employee from another department did something to irritate or bother you, how likely would you be to speak to your immediate supervisor about it?
  8. If your immediate supervisor did something to irritate or bother you, how likely would you be to speak to him or her about it?
- 

## Factor Analysis of the Supervisor as Voice Manager Scale—Replication Study

Item	Responsive- ness	Approach- ability
Responsiveness		
My boss gives high priority to handling employee concerns.	0.83	-0.20
My boss is fair when I take a concern to him or her.	0.71	-0.22
I take concerns to my boss because he or she deals with them effectively.	0.74	-0.19
My boss takes action to correct the concerns that I speak to him or her about.	0.77	-0.17
My boss handles my concerns promptly.	0.74	-0.12
My boss is willing to support me if my concern is valid.	0.76	-0.26
My boss listens carefully to what I say when I bring in a concern.	0.70	-0.29

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## APPENDIX. Continued

Item	Responsive- ness	Approach- ability
Approachability		
I don't know what to expect when I take a concern to my boss.	-0.39	0.66
I don't know how my boss will react when I take a concern to him or her.	-0.29	0.73
I don't know how my boss will behave when I take a concern to him or her.	-0.36	0.74
It is difficult to take a concern to my boss.	-0.39	0.64
I do not know how to take a concern to my boss.	-0.13	0.75
I find it quite stressful to take a concern to my boss.	0.00	0.75
I am not afraid to take a concern to my boss.	0.15	-0.68

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