



The divergent effects of employees' sense of power on constructive and defensive voice behavior: A cross-level moderated mediation model

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Abstract

Previous studies mainly focused on the antecedents of voice, yet little research has investigated how sense of power divergently affected voice behavior with different contents. Following the recent literature on voice content and the approach/inhibition theory of power, we argue that sense of power positively influences constructive voice behavior through situational promotion focus but negatively affects defensive voice behavior through situational prevention focus. Moreover, we argue that supervisor openness moderates the relationship between situational regulatory focus and voice behavior. The results of a scenario-based study ($N=95$) and a time-lagged field survey ($N=375$) indicate that: (1) sense of power is positively related to constructive voice behavior and negatively related to defensive voice behavior; (2) situational promotion focus and situational prevention focus mediate the effect of sense of power on constructive voice behavior and defensive voice behavior, respectively; and (3) the indirect effects of sense of power on constructive and defensive voice behavior via situational regulatory focus are contingent on supervisor openness. The implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords Sense of power · Situational regulatory focus · Constructive voice · Defensive voice · Supervisor openness

In poverty, one should hold himself in a safe place; when prosperous, one should contribute to the wellbeing of all.

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With the increasing complexity of work procedures and environment dynamic, expressing work-related opinions or suggestion (i.e., voice behavior), has become an important method for employees to enhance their personal influence and control over their work environment (e.g., Maynes and Podsakoff 2014). One of the fundamental motivations for employees to engage in voice behavior is to have role perceptions that they can have influence over the organization (McAllister et al. 2007; Morrison et al. 2011). That is, the precondition for voice is to have control (Edmondson 1999; Liu et al. 2015), and can have a positive influence over the work settings (Ng et al. 2019). In this vein, to answer the question of “voice or not”, previous research has widely investigated the relationship between sense of power and voice behavior (e.g., Islam and Zyphur 2005; Kim et al. 2019; Morrison et al. 2015). However, little is known about “how to voice”, that is, as individual motivations to voice are different when they have different perceptions about their influence over the environment (Keltner et al. 2003), they would have different strategies to exert their influence and control over the organization.

Specifically, first of all, previous research and scholars seems to neglect the differences of voice content, which leads to mixed conclusions about the relationship between sense of power and voice behavior. It has been found that when employees have more influence over the environment, they voice more proactively as they don't pay much attention to the negative consequences of voice (Islam and Zyphur 2005; Morrison et al. 2015). But some other scholars also found employees with lack of control would also be motivated to voice, as they try to gain their control over the environment (Lam and Mayer 2014; Kim et al. 2019). Moreover, according to the approach-inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al. 2003), when people have more sense of power, they are sensitive to gains, and tend to achieve their goals with the behavioral approach system (Galinsky et al. 2008). For example, they might make suggestions for improving work performance by developing work procedure and policies. Whereas lack of power leads people to be more sensitive to potential loss, and tend to activate process associated with inhibitive system (Galinsky et al. 2008), such as making suggestions for defending changes in the workplace to avoid risks of decreasing job performance. However, exploration into the relationship between sense of power and voice is still needed.

Second, there lacks empirical evidence for the mechanism through which sense of power influences different contents of voice behavior. Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) found a U-shaped relationship between voice and personal control, and speculated there are two different motivations of voice: at low level of control, employees conduct voice behavior with the motivation to avoid dissatisfactory work conditions; at high level of control, employees engage in voice with the motivation to improve the work condition. We thus predict that due to high or low level of sense of power, individuals are also different in motivations for improving the environment to increase performance or preventing from deterioration to avoid loss, and further different in voice content. According to the approach-inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al. 2003), when employees perceive high sense of power, they are more willing to improve the organizational environment to achieve higher job performance, which might lead to more constructive voice, such as advocating new skills, procedures or work system. On the contrary, when employees perceive low

sense of power, they defend changes in the work environment to avoid the potential risk of decreasing performance, and tend to have more defensive voice, such as opposing changes to work policies and practices. This phenomenon also needs to be further examined.

Third, the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions for the impact of sense of power on voice still needs more investigation. With different levels of sense of power and different kinds of individual motivations, scholars have called for more specific and detailed evidence about how and when sense of power leads to different voice contents (Li et al. 2017). Based on the approach-inhibition theory of power, individuals with more sense of power focus on opportunities, while lack of power leads to more concern about threats. However, people might have different perceptions of opportunity and threat in different contexts, which brings different boundary conditions when speaking up. However, relevant research is still limited.

Hence, we conducted two empirical studies to explore how and when sense of power influences voice behavior with different contents (i.e., constructive voice influence and defensive voice). Our research contributes to existing literature in several ways. First, this study probes into whether sense of power influences the voice content. Different employees possess different amount of resources and subsequently perceive different levels of sense of power. Employees with high sense of power tend to express constructive suggestions that may change the environment and benefit the organization, which is called constructive voice behavior (Maynes and Podsakoff 2014). Employees with low sense of power worry about the change of environment that may decrease their performance, and thus tend to express ideas or opinions that oppose the change, even some changes are valuable or necessary, which is defined as defensive voice behavior (Maynes and Podsakoff 2014).

Second, this study introduces the approach/inhibition theory of power to describe the divergent effects of sense of power on voice contents. Based on this theory, individuals with high sense of power are sensitive to gains, focus on potential benefits, and tend to take approaching actions to improve the current environment and to expand resources. Individuals with low sense of power are sensitive to losses, focus on potential risk, and tend to take avoidant actions to prevent the current status from deterioration and to maintain the limited resources (Keltner et al. 2003).

Third, our research builds a model that depicts the divergent impacts of sense power on constructive and defensive voice via situational self-regulatory focus, together with the mitigating effect of supervisor openness as a contextual factor. This study proposes that supervisor openness amplifies the positive impact of employees' situational promotion self-regulatory focus on constructive voice behavior, and the positive impact of situational prevention self-regulatory focus on defensive voice behavior. By testing a cross-level moderated mediation model, this research reveals the psychological mechanism of how individuals' sense of power influences the content of their voice behavior in the workplace, which may provide suggestions of motivating employees to engage in voice behavior for management practice. Figure 1 illustrates conceptual model.

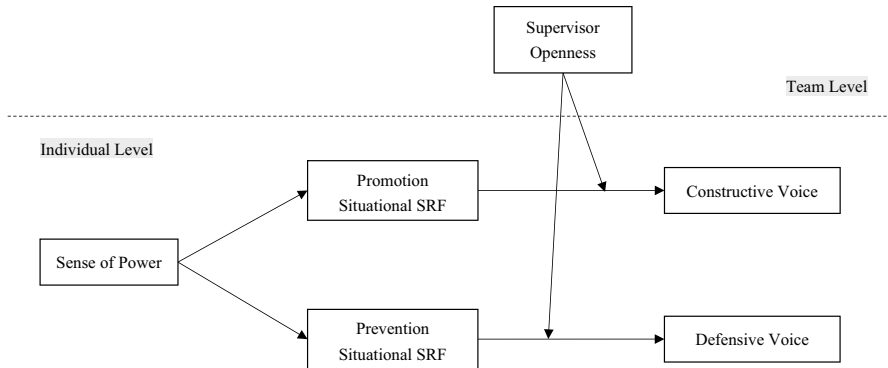


Fig. 1 Hypothesized model. Note: SRF refers to self-regulatory focus

Theory background and hypotheses

Approach/inhibition theory of power

Power refers to an asymmetric control over valuable resources and an ability to conduct rewards and punishments (Keltner et al. 2003). The definition of power by Keltner et al. (2003) is widely accepted (Galinsky et al. 2003; Magee and Galinsky 2008), while adopting this definition is unable to differentiate the real power from the perceived power (Galinsky et al. 2006; Anderson and Galinsky 2006; Smith and Trope 2006). Particularly, to shape individuals' behavior, the perception of power rather than power itself is more directly determinant. For example, some scholars argued that, in daily life, people's sense of power is more functional to predict their behavior than their actual power (e.g., Haidt and Rodin 1999; Smith et al. 2008). Therefore, sense of power that reflects subjective state, was selected as the independent variable. Following the previous definition by Anderson et al. (2012), we defined sense of power as the perception of one's ability to influence another person or other people.

According to the approach/inhibition theory of power, high power is associated with gains (e.g., rewards and freedom) and is unconstrained by the environment, activating individuals' approach-related tendencies. In contrast, low power is associated with loss (e.g., loss and punishment) and is constrained by the environment, activating individuals' inhibition-related tendencies (Keltner et al. 2003). Based on the approach/inhibition theory of power, individuals with high sense of power tend to change the current status to improve the workplace for high performance, and thus they are more likely to express opinions of changing the conditions, by which they can acquire more opportunities and gains, such as constructive voice. On the contrary, individuals with low sense of power tend to avoid uncertainty that may lead to deterioration and bring them lower performance. Hence, they are more likely to provide suggestions about avoiding deterioration, by which they can prevent personal losses from uncertainty, such as defensive voice. Therefore, following the approach/inhibition theory of power, this study aims to portray the mechanisms and

contextual conditions of employees with different levels of sense of power engaging in voice behavior with different contents.

Sense of power and voice

Researchers have indicated that individuals with power are more approach-oriented (Morrison et al. 2015), are indifferent to the impacts of their behavior on others (Keltner et al. 2003), and tend to engage in voice behavior (Islam and Zyphur 2005). Meanwhile, findings from Galinsky et al. (2003) have shown that employees with high power are motivated to improve the current situation. Therefore, employees with high power are more concerned about how to improve the situation in their unit or organization, and are more motivated to make work-related suggestions to improve the functioning of their work environment (e.g., introducing new production technologies, innovating existing methods of work, and implementing new production systems), comparing with employees with low power.

Scholars have also found that employees who lack power are avoidance-oriented (Keltner et al. 2003). Consistent with this view, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) found that sense of control has a nonlinear effect on voice behavior and argued that lack of control motivates employees to voice their dissatisfaction to their supervisor. Hence, employees who lack power are concerned to prevent losses in their workplace and express work-related ideas in order to avoid negative consequences (e.g., opposing the introduction of new technologies, disagreeing with the implementation of new systems, and disapproving of changing the existing workflow to avoid uncertainty).

Hypothesis 1a: Sense of power is positively related to constructive voice.

Hypothesis 1b: Sense of power is negatively related to defensive voice.

Mediation role of regulatory focus

Following regulatory focus model, individuals adjust their behavior by satisfying different needs while pursuing different goals. And in this process of self-regulation, individuals exhibit two dispositions: situational promotion focus and situational prevention focus (Crowe and Higgins 1997). Individuals with situational promotion foci are sensitive to positive signals, care about self-improvement, and tend to take promotion strategies to achieve ideal results, such as engaging in OCB (Lavelle 2010); individuals with situational prevention foci are sensitive to negative signals, care about responsibility and safety, tend to take prevention strategies to avoid adverse results, such as performing duties in case of punishment (Barrick and Mount 1991). Different from chronic regulatory focus that is more stable, findings from regulatory focus theory indicated that situational self-regulatory focus is a state that can be temporarily stimulated by contextual factors (Higgins 1997).

Extensive empirical work has indicated that situational promotion focus is triggered by individual need for nurturance and is related to their ideal selves, such as their accomplishments and aspirations, while situational prevention focus is triggered by individual need for security and is related to their ought selves, such as their obligations and responsibilities (Brendl et al. 1995; Brockner and Higgins 2001; Kark and Van Dijk 2007; Shah and Higgins 2001). As such, individuals with high power are unconstrained by environmental factors, and are more inclined to pursue their ideal selves, with their situational promotion focus triggered. However, individuals lacking power are constrained by environmental factors, and are more committed to achieving their ought selves, with their situational prevention focus triggered.

Situational regulatory focus that is triggered by individual sense of power is likely to result in the corresponding type of voice. Studies have shown that situational promotion focus and situational prevention focus lead to different behavioral tendencies. Specifically, situational promotion focus is positively related to rewards, eagerness, advancement (De Dreu et al. 2008; Wallace and Chen 2006), and approach-related behavior. Meanwhile, situational prevention focus is positively related to threat, error avoidance, vigilance (Crowe and Higgins 1997; Förster et al. 2003), and avoidance-related behavior. Therefore, promotion-focused individuals tend to express suggestions for improving their situations to enhance their power. Meanwhile, in order to mitigate potential losses and avoid uncertainty due to the change, prevention-focused individuals are inclined to communicate their concerns regarding how to maintain the current situation in their workplace.

Based on the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al. 2003), individuals with high sense of power are more sensitive to potential acquisition, and they tend to consider how to change the current status for high performance. This process activates their situational promotion self-regulatory foci. At this point, individuals are more likely to engage in constructive voice behavior, such as reforming the manufacturing techniques, improving workflows, and introducing new devices, to facilitate productive performance. In contrast, individuals with low sense of power are more sensitive to potential losses, and they are concerned to consider how to avoid the deterioration of the current status to prevent from potential losses. In this process, their situational prevention self-regulatory foci are activated. At this point, they are more likely to exhibit defensive voice behavior, such as opposing manufacturing techniques reformation, workflow change, or new devices, in order to avoid that potential uncertainty may lower their job performance.

Hypothesis 2a: Situational promotion focus mediates the relationship between sense of power and constructive voice.

Hypothesis 2b: Situational prevention focus mediates the relationship between sense of power and defensive voice.

Moderation and moderated mediation role of supervisor openness

The impact of regulatory focus triggered by sense of power on voice behavior is enhanced or weakened by leaders' attitude toward their subordinates' voice behavior. Supervisor openness means that leaders consider employees' suggestions or concerns (Tröster and Van Knippenberg 2012), through which employees' purposes of opportunity acquisition or threat avoidance by expressing their work-related ideas can be realized. According to previous research, the interaction of message framing and regulatory focus together affect persuasion effectiveness (Lee and Aaker 2004), and scholars have found that employees engage in voice behavior according to their interpretation of external information cues, such as their leader's mood (Liu et al. 2015) and attitude toward subordinates' suggestions (Detert and Burris 2007).

With supervisor openness, employees may perceive that their supervisors seriously consider their suggestions or concerns. Accordingly, they are more likely to voice to achieve their purposes of changing the situation to facilitate potential gains or maintaining the situation to avoid potential loss. In this case, individuals with situational promotion regulatory foci stimulated take voice behavior as a way to obtain potential benefits, and provide suggestions for changing the current status, such as improving workflows and introducing new techniques, in order to improve performance. Meanwhile, individuals with situational prevention regulatory foci activated take voice behavior as a tool for avoiding potential losses, and thus actively express opinions about preventing the status from deterioration, such as opposing new techniques or devices. However, when supervisor openness is low, for individuals whose situational promotion or prevention regulatory foci are stimulated, voice behavior is not a concern to the supervisor. They are then unable to achieve their purposes of acquiring gains or avoiding losses by voice behavior, and engagement in voice behavior therefore is inhibited. Previous study has also shown that when supervisor openness is high, employees may think their suggestions are valued by their supervisor and express work-related ideas (Lebel 2016).

Hypothesis 3a: The positive relationship between situational promotion focus and constructive voice is moderated by supervisor openness such that the relationship is stronger when supervisor openness is higher.

Hypothesis 3b: The positive relationship between situational prevention focus and defensive voice is moderated by supervisor openness such that the relationship is stronger when supervisor openness is higher.

The indirect effects of sense of power on voice behavior mediated by situational regulatory focus is contingent on leaders' attitude toward their subordinates' voice behavior. Individuals with high sense of power are unconstrained by the environment and are more likely to focus on gains. Their situational promotion self-regulatory foci are thus stimulated. Meanwhile, supervisor with high openness pay more attention to the ideas or suggestions toward uncertainty from employees, which then may lead to expected positive outcomes. When supervisor openness is high, employees realize their suggestions are valued and executed by their supervisor. That is, it is very likely for high power employees to gain extra benefits by suggesting. In

this case, employees with high power take voice behavior as an approach to obtain potential benefits, and then actively engage in constructive voice behavior in order to capture the opportunity and improve performance in the environment. For example, they may suggest changing workflows, introducing new processing technics or new policies, and thus improve their own job performance by changing the work environment. In contrast, when supervisor openness is low, employees with high power perceive that their initiatives for changing the environment will not be accepted or valued by the supervisor. And in this case, it is difficult to achieve purposes of obtaining resources by voice behavior. Therefore, their motivations for enhancing performance by suggesting improving environment or work conditions are inhibited. Previous studies have also shown that one's belief about the social worth of his/her ideas to the unit or the organization is an important predictor of voice behavior (Liang et al. 2012). Specifically, when supervisor openness is high, employees are more likely to perceive that their voice may help the organization, and then engage in more voice behavior (Lebel 2016).

Meanwhile, individuals with low sense of power are restrained by the environment and focus on losses, and their situational prevention self-regulatory foci are activated. When supervisor openness is high, employees with low power realize that their suggestions may be accepted and executed. In this case, employees with low power may find that their purposes of avoiding uncertainty can be achieved by expressing suggestions rather than being silent. Therefore, low power employees may take voice behavior as a tool for avoiding losses and actively engage in defensive voice behavior, such as opposing workflow changes, new processing technics or new policies, in order to avoid job performance decreases due to uncertainty caused by changes. In contrast, when supervisor openness is low, employees perceive that their suggestions may not be endorsed by their supervisor, and realize that it is difficult for them to achieve the goals of avoiding losses by expressing their defensive ideas. That is, it is difficult for them to achieve the goal that they can prevent decreasing performance from the uncertainty by expressing defensive opinions. Hence, their engagement in voice behavior is inhibited. Researchers have found that individual can adjust their voice behavior according to the outside environment, and employees often have to "read the wind" (Liu et al. 2015) and assess the feasibility of voice behavior in their workplace. When employees perceive that their supervisor may ignore their suggestions, which means that voice behavior is invalid for the organization, employees may choose to keep silent even though there are problems in the organization (Tangirala and Ramanujam 2012).

Hypothesis 4a: The indirect effect of sense of power on constructive voice through situational promotion focus is stronger when supervisor openness is higher.

Hypothesis 4b: The indirect effect of sense of power on defensive voice through situational prevention focus is stronger when supervisor openness is higher.

We tested these hypotheses in two complementary studies. In Study 1, we conducted a scenario-based study, with an imitation of real workplace, to examine whether sense of power positively influences constructive voice through situational

promotion focus, and negatively affects defensive voice through situational prevention focus in student task groups. To replicate the results in a natural setting and explore the moderating role of supervisor openness, we then conducted a time-lagged, multi-source survey (Study 2) at a construction company.

Study 1: Scenario-based study

Task setting and procedure

We conducted a scenario-based study with 112 graduate students enrolled in a business administration course. In the first week, all the students were randomly assigned to 16 groups with an average group size of seven. Over 8 weeks, students were asked to interact intensively with their group members to finish a group task that contributed to 10% of the course grade. Group member's performance on the task was determined by two parts: group performance evaluated by the lecturer, and individual member performance assessed by team leader. As all the groups worked on the task with identical instruction and objective, we were able to reduce interference that could be introduced by different task characteristics or group tenure. This design also enabled us to control for individual performance, ruling out the alternative explanation that ability rather than sense of power results in voice behavior.

When all the groups were formed in the first week, we randomly appointed group leaders, deputy team leaders, and team members for each group. Before the group task was laid out, we measured chronic self-regulatory focus of each participant (except team leaders). Six weeks later, we asked participants to report their sense of power. At the end of the group task, participants were asked to report their situational regulatory foci. Meanwhile, we asked team leaders to evaluate constructive and defensive voice behavior of other members in their groups.

Sample

As we asked group leaders to evaluate their group members' voice behavior, 16 group leaders were not considered as focal participants. One of 96 team members was excluded because he quit the task, providing a sample of 95 participants (58.9% are male). The average age was 20.8 ($SD = 1.74$) years.

Measures

Sense of power Following a previous study (e.g., Fast et al. 2012), we used the 8-item scale developed by Anderson et al. (2012) to measure sense of power ($\alpha = 0.83$). Sample items included "In daily work, I feel like I have a great deal of power" and "My wishes don't carry much weight in our daily work", with the latter item being reversely scored. All the items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*).

Situational self-regulatory focus Was measured using the 18-item Situational SRF questionnaire (Kark et al. 2015). This questionnaire was based on the Lockwood et al. (2002)'s chronic self-regulatory focus questionnaire and adapted from Kark and Van Dijk (2009)'s conception of situational self-regulatory focus, which has proved to be of good reliability. Of the 18 items, half measured situational prevention focus ($\alpha=0.91$) and the other half measured situational promotion focus ($\alpha=0.89$). The responses ranged from 1 to 5 (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample item was "As a member in our group, I am worried that I will not meet my work obligations and responsibilities in my daily work" (situational prevention focus).

Constructive voice and defensive voice We measured constructive voice and defensive voice using the scale developed by Maynes and Podsakoff (2014). Five items measured defensive voice ($\alpha=0.88$). Sample item included "He/she vocally opposes changing how things are done, even when changing is inevitable". Five items measured constructive voice ($\alpha=0.79$). Sample item included "This employee frequently makes suggestions about how to improve work methods or practices". All the items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*).

Control variables As previous studies indicated that chronic regulatory focus may influence independent and dependent variables (Kark et al. 2015), we controlled for employees' chronic regulatory focus when testing the mediating effect of situational self-regulatory focus. We adopted a chronic self-regulatory focus questionnaire developed by Lockwood et al. (2002). Five items measured chronic prevention focus ($\alpha=0.90$) and five items measured chronic promotion focus ($\alpha=0.80$). All the items used a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample item included "In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes when completing tasks". In addition, we controlled age and gender of participants, following previous research (Anderson and Berdahl 2002).

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations in individual level (study 1)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Power	4.06	0.72	(0.83)						
2. Situational promotion focus	4.11	0.82	0.38**	(0.89)					
3. Situational prevention focus	4.12	1.05	-0.21*	0.02	(0.91)				
4. Constructive voice	3.94	0.85	0.23*	0.35**	0.11	(0.79)			
5. Defensive voice	3.74	1.04	-0.22*	-0.16	0.27**	0.01	(0.88)		
6. Chronic promotion focus	4.57	0.66	0.02	0.20	-0.04	0.21*	0.03	(0.80)	
7. Chronic prevention focus	4.19	0.95	-0.22*	-0.30**	0.18	-0.25*	0.03	-0.24*	(0.90)

$N=95$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. Internal consistency coefficients are reported in brackets on the diagonal

Table 2 Direct and indirect effects of sense of power on constructive voice, defensive voice(study I)

Variable name	Situational promotion focus	Situational prevention focus	Constructive voice	Defensive voice
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>		
Controls				
Age	0.06 (0.05)	0.11 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.06)
Gender	-0.02 (0.16)	0.23 (0.21)	0.13 (0.17)	0.05 (0.22)
Chronic promotion focus	0.24* (0.12)	0.17 (0.11)	0.26* (0.13)	
Chronic prevention focus				-0.03 (0.12)
Direct effects				
Sense of power	0.39** (0.11)	-0.32* (0.15)	0.31* (0.12)	-0.33* (0.16)
Situational promotion focus			0.32** (0.11)	
Situational prevention focus				0.25* (0.10)
Mediating effects				
Power → PRO → Constructive voice			Point estimate [95% CI]; 10,000 bootstrapping sampling	
Power → PRE → Defensive voice			0.12 [0.021, 0.294]	-0.08 [-0.225, -0.005]

N = 95. * *p* < 0.05; ** *p* < 0.01

PRO refers to Situational promotion focus; PRE refers to Situational prevention focus

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of all the variables. The regression results indicated that sense of power was positively related to constructive voice behavior ($\beta=0.31$, $p<0.05$) and negatively related to defensive voice behavior ($\beta=-0.32$, $p<0.05$) when controlling for age and education level.

We tested the mediating effects hypotheses using the macro PROCESS for SPSS developed by Hayes (2018). As shown in Table 2, with 10,000 bootstrap sampling, 95% confidence interval (CI), and participants' age, gender, and chronic promotion regulatory focus controlled, the results demonstrated that sense of power was positively related to participants' situational promotion focus ($\beta=0.39$, $p<0.01$). Furthermore, individuals who experienced more power tended to express constructive ideas due to their situational promotion focus being triggered ($\beta=0.12$, 95% CI [0.021, 0.294]). Meanwhile, with participants' age, gender, and chronic prevention regulatory focus controlled, individuals' sense of power was negatively related to their situational prevention focus ($\beta=-0.32$, $p<0.05$). Furthermore, individuals who experienced lack of power tended to express defensive ideas due to their situational prevention focus being triggered ($\beta=-0.08$, CI [-0.225, -0.005]). Thus, these results supported Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Discussion

This study reveals the relationship between sense of power and constructive and defensive voice behavior. Findings from this study has indicated that individuals with more power tend to express more constructive ideas to improve their current situation and facilitate potential gains, whereas individuals who lack power are inclined to express more defensive ideas to maintain the status quo and avoid potential loss. These results are consistent with the approach/inhibition theory of power, which suggests that powerful individuals are sensitive to potential gains and exhibit more approach-related behavior and that powerless individuals are sensitive to potential loss and engage in more avoidance-related behavior. Furthermore, the findings indicate that sense of power is positively related to constructive voice through situational promotion focus, and negatively related to defensive voice through situational prevention focus.

By this scenario-based study, we tested the divergent effects of sense of power on constructive and defensive voice and the mediating effect of situational promotion self-regulatory focus, but replicating these findings in a different sample is also important. To provide more explanatory power, Study 2 replicates and extends the findings of Study 1 by exploring the contextual factors affecting the relationship between sense of power and constructive and defensive voice via situational regulatory focus.

Study 2: Field study

Sample and procedure

We collected supervisor-subordinate dyadic data from a construction company in Mainland China. First, we obtained a list of workers and their team information from the company. We then randomly selected and invited 82 supervisors and 460 subordinates for participation. In the process of measuring, we asked them to a conference room during nonworking hours, explained the purpose of this research, and noted that their responses would be kept confidential and only used for research. Afterward, each participant received an envelope containing our questionnaire. The supervisors were asked to rate their subordinates in terms of voice behavior and the subordinates were required to report their sense of power, regulatory focus, and perceived leader openness.

We adopted a two-phase time-lagged design. In the first round of data collecting, we measured employees' chronic self-regulatory focus, sense of power, and their perceptions of supervisor openness. After 6 weeks, subordinates were asked to evaluate their situational regulatory focus, while supervisors assessed their subordinates' constructive and defensive voice behavior. A total of 460 workers in 82 teams participated in this study, with 386 workers (84%) of 82 teams completing the surveys in the first phase. The final sample included 453 participants, involving 375 workers and 78 team leaders (97.6% response rate). 90% of the workers were male. The mean age of participants was 38.3 years and the average tenure was 12.9 years. And 89.9% of them finished junior high school education or below.

Measures

To measure *sense of power*, we used the same scale as that used in Study 1, with the items measured on a 5-point Likert scale ($\alpha=0.88$). To measure *situational self-regulatory focus*, we adopted a 5-point Likert-type scale. Nine items measured situational prevention focus ($\alpha=0.83$) and nine items measured situational promotion focus ($\alpha=0.80$). Moreover, *constructive voice* and *defensive voice* were measured using the same 5-point Likert-type scale as that used in Study 1. Five items measured defensive voice ($\alpha=0.83$) and five items measured constructive voice ($\alpha=0.86$).

To assess *supervisor openness*, we used the three-item scale from Ashford et al. (1998), which has demonstrated good reliability in several studies (e.g., Detert and Burris 2007; Lebel 2016). Employees rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*). Sample items included "My supervisor uses my suggestions" and "Considers ideas from subordinates" ($\alpha=0.73$).

Perceptions of supervisor openness were aggregated on the team level. We computed r_{wg} for each group and the average r_{wg} for 78 groups was 0.83 ($Mdn=0.92$), with ICC (1)=0.22 and ICC (2)=0.57. A significant amount of between-group

variance ($F(77, 374)=3.01, p<0.01$) provided further support for aggregation of perceived supervisor openness.

Control variables Situational self-regulatory focus was hypothesized to mediate the relationship between sense of power and constructive and defensive voice. Furthermore, researchers have found that chronic regulatory focus would influence both independent and dependent variables and cause false correlations between them (Kark et al. 2015). Therefore, we controlled for employees' chronic regulatory focus when testing this mediating effect. We used the same 5-point Likert-type scale as that used in Study 1 with 10 items. Five items measured chronic prevention focus ($\alpha=0.82$) and five items measured chronic promotion focus ($\alpha=0.73$).

Data analysis

Considering the nested data we collected and the cross-level moderated mediation model to test, we first used PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes 2018) to test the mediating effect of situational regulatory focus, then used Mplus 7.0 (Muthén and Muthén 2012) to test the cross-level moderation effect, and finally tested the moderated mediation effect of supervisor openness using R (available at <http://www.r-project.org/>). Mplus 7.0 (Muthén and Muthén 2012) was used to estimate a null model in which no predictors were specified for any variables. ICC (1) of constructive voice was 0.28, and ICC (1) of defensive voice was 0.27, which suggested that the data was suitable for cross-level analysis.

Results

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of the variables.

As shown in Table 4, sense of power was positively related to situational promotion focus ($\beta=0.15, p<0.01$) and constructive voice behavior ($\beta=0.11, p<0.05$), but negatively related to situational prevention focus ($\beta=-0.16, p<0.01$) and defensive voice ($\beta=-0.12, p<0.05$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 1b were supported. When chronic promotion focus and situational promotion focus were integrated into the regression model, situational promotion focus was positively related to constructive voice behavior ($\beta=0.19, p<0.01$) and the direct effect of sense of power on constructive voice became non-significant ($\beta=0.06, n.s.$). Along with 95% bootstrapping confidence intervals (10,000 repetitions), this result indicated that employees' sense of power motivates them to express constructive ideas about changing the current environment to enhance their control by triggering their promotion focus ($\beta=0.03, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.006, 0.062]$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was supported.

Similarly, when chronic prevention focus and situational prevention focus were integrated into the regression, the result indicated that situational prevention focus was positively related to defensive voice behavior ($\beta=0.15, p<0.05$) and the direct

Table 3 Means, standard deviations, and correlations in individual level (study 2)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Power	3.53	0.78	(0.88)							
2. Situational promotion focus	3.75	0.62	0.19**	(0.80)						
3. Situational prevention focus	3.72	0.62	-0.21**	-0.05	(0.83)					
4. Constructive voice	4.05	0.77	0.11*	0.19**	0.06	(0.86)				
5. Defensive voice	3.82	0.77	-0.12*	0.01	0.15**	0.19**	(0.83)			
6. Supervisor openness	5.60	0.96	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.12*	0.01	(0.73)		
7. Chronic promotion focus	4.17	0.48	0.06	0.09	0.01	0.28**	0.18**	0.04	(0.73)	
8. Chronic prevention focus	3.89	0.77	-0.02	0.00	0.13*	0.05	0.10	0.13*	-0.07	(0.82)

First, there are many variables to test and a cross-level analysis to conduct, which brings many large tables. Second, no matter if we added control variables (age, gender, education, and tenure) into the model, the results of hypothesized effects have no significant changes. Therefore, the effects of control variables are not reported in the tables in Study 2

N = 375. * *p* < 0.05; ** *p* < 0.01. Internal consistency coefficients are reported in brackets on the diagonal

Table 4 Direct and indirect effects of sense of power on constructive voice, defensive voice(study2)

Variable name	Situational promotion focus	Situational prevention focus	Constructive voice	Defensive voice
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>		
Controls				
Chronic promotion focus			0.42* (0.08)	
Chronic prevention focus				0.08 (0.05)
Direct effects				
Sense of power	0.15** (0.04)	-0.16** (0.04)	0.11* (0.05)	-0.12* (0.05)
Situational promotion focus			0.19** (0.06)	
Situational prevention focus				0.15* (0.07)
Mediating effects				
Power → PRO → Constructive voice			Point estimate [95% CI]; 10,000 bootstrapping sampling	
Power → PRE → Defensive voice			0.03 [0.006, 0.062]	-0.02 [-0.062, -0.001]

PRO Situational promotion focus, PRE Situational prevention focus

N = 375. * *p* < 0.05; ** *p* < 0.01

Table 5 Multilevel moderated mediation effect of supervisor openness

Outcome	Moderator: Supervisor openness	Stage		Indirect ($P_{M1X} * P_{Y1M1}$)	Effect 95% CI of Indirect effect, 20,000 bootstrap sampling
		First (P_{M1X})	Second (P_{Y1M1})		
Constructive voice	Low (-1 SD)	0.147** (0.05)	0.014 (0.07)	0.002 (0.05)	[-0.017, 0.045]
	High (+1 SD)		0.440** (0.11)	0.065* (0.06)	[0.017, 0.108]
	Diff			0.063* (0.03)	[0.009, 0.095]
Defensive voice	Moderator: Supervisor openness	First (P_{M2X})	Second (P_{Y2M2})	Indirect ($P_{M2X} * P_{Y2M2}$)	95% CI of Indirect effect, 20,000 boot- strap sampling
	Low (-1 SD)	-0.164** (0.05)	0.045 (0.12)	-0.007 (0.02)	[-0.054, 0.025]
	High (+1 SD)		0.239 (0.15)	-0.039 (0.03)	[-0.088, 0.001]
	Diff			-0.032 (0.04)	[-0.081, 0.028]

P_{M1X} refers to the path from sense of power to situational promotion focus; P_{M2X} refers to the path from sense of power to situational prevention focus

P_{Y1M1} refers to the path from situational promotion focus to constructive voice; P_{Y2M2} refers to the path from situational prevention focus to defensive voice

Diff refers to the cross-level moderated mediation effect difference between supervisor openness with high level and low level

CI refers to confidence interval. Confidence intervals were calculated using the Monte Carlo method
 $n=375$; $N=78$. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

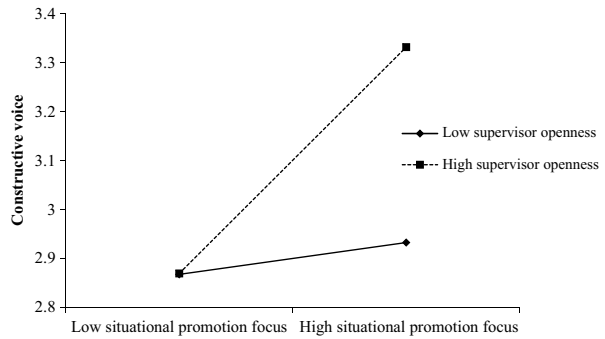
effect of sense of power on defensive voice became non-significant ($\beta = -0.09$, n.s.). That is, employees' sense of power motivates them to express defensive ideas about maintaining the current situation to sustain their status quo by triggering their situational prevention focus ($\beta = -0.02$, 10,000 repetitions, 95% CI [-0.062, -0.001]). Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

As shown in Table 5, supervisor openness moderated the effect of situational promotion focus on constructive voice behavior ($\gamma = 0.426$, 95% CI [0.141, 0.711]). Specifically, employees with situational promotion focus engage in more constructive voice behavior when supervisor openness is high ($\gamma = 0.440$, 95% CI [0.170, 0.710]) than when it is low ($\gamma = 0.014$, 95% CI [-0.120, 0.148]). The interacting effect of supervisor openness and situational prevention focus on defensive voice behavior was not significant ($\gamma = 0.194$, n.s., 95% CI [-0.234, 0.622]). Therefore, the results supported Hypothesis 3a, but rejected Hypothesis 3b.

To visualize the moderating effect of supervisor openness, we plotted the interaction of situational promotion focus and supervisor openness on constructive voice behavior using the hierarchical linear modeling method (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). As seen in Fig. 2, employees with situational promotion focus triggered tend to express more constructive ideas to their supervisors when supervisors are perceived as open.

To test the moderated mediating effect of supervisor openness, we used Mplus 7.0 (Muthén and Muthén 2012) to calculate relevant parameters and adopted

Fig. 2 Interactive effects of the situational promotion focus and supervisor openness on constructive voice



Monte Carlo simulation based on these parameters (Preacher et al. 2011; Preacher et al. 2010). The results with 1,000 bootstrap sampling and 95% CI by Mplus indicated the effect of supervisor openness on the random slope between sense of power on constructive voice via situational promotion focus was positive ($\gamma=0.063$, $p<0.05$) and the effect of supervisor openness on the random slope between sense of power on defensive voice via situational prevention focus was nonsignificant ($\gamma=-0.032$, n.s.), as shown in Table 5.

Moreover, as shown in Table 5, with 95% CI and 20,000 bootstrap sampling via Monte Carlo simulation method, the indirect effect of sense of power on constructive voice through situational promotion focus was positive and significant when supervisor openness was high ($\gamma=0.065$, CI [0.017, 0.108]), whereas the indirect effect was not significant when supervisor openness was low ($\gamma=0.002$, CI [-0.017, 0.045], n.s.). In addition, the results of Monte Carlo simulation revealed that the difference in the multilevel indirect effect between high supervisor openness (+1 *SD*) and low supervisor openness (-1 *SD*) was significant ($\gamma=0.063$, CI [0.009, 0.095]). The indirect effect of sense of power on defensive voice via situational prevention focus was nonsignificant no matter when supervisor openness was high ($\gamma=-0.039$, CI [-0.088, 0.001]) or low ($\gamma=-0.007$, CI [-0.054, 0.025]). The difference in the indirect effect between supervisor openness at high level (+1 *SD*) and supervisor openness at low level (-1 *SD*) was nonsignificant ($\gamma=-0.032$, CI [-0.081, 0.028]). Therefore, the results supported Hypothesis 4a, and rejected Hypothesis 4b.

Discussion

In Study 2, we replicated and extended Study 1. The results showed that situational promotion focus mediated the relationship between sense of power and constructive voice behavior, and situational prevention focus mediated the relationship between sense of power and defensive voice behavior. As predicted, supervisor openness strengthened the relationship between sense of power and constructive voice behavior via situational promotion focus.

However, the results failed to support Hypotheses 3b and 4b. We speculate that individuals with low sense of power are restrained by the environment, and perceive more threats, which leads to more psychological pressure. Therefore, they may take defensive voice behavior to reduce pressure. Even if supervisor openness is low, they are still inclined to express defensive ideas. This process may counteract the contextual impact of supervisor openness. Previous study has also shown that employees with pressure are more likely to express their opinions of the environment to relieve their psychological pressure (Iacovides et al. 2003).

General discussion

This study explores why and when power enhances or impedes voice behavior. Our findings indicate divergent effects between power and voice behavior with different contents. The results also demonstrate that situational self-regulatory focus mediates the effect of sense of power on constructive voice behavior and defensive voice behavior. Furthermore, our findings indicate that supervisor openness to their employees' suggestions significantly moderates these underlying mechanisms from power to voice behavior. Scholars have found that the behavioral patterns of powerful people may be more complicated (Maner et al. 2007; Williams 2014), such that they may not voice their opinions even with power motivation. Our findings demonstrate that employees with high sense of power tend to communicate constructive ideas to their supervisors especially when their supervisors are open consider their suggestions. In contrast, employees lacking power tend to express defensive ideas to their supervisors no matter how supervisors consider their ideas.

Theoretical implications

First, this study introduces the approach/inhibition theory of power into research on voice behavior and reveals instrumental function of individual voice in the workplace. Based on characteristics of voice, previous studies mainly focused on antecedents of voice behavior, such as ex-role behavior (e.g., Avey et al. 2012; Burriss et al. 2008), a challenge to current status (Liang et al. 2012; Ng et al. 2019; Liu et al. 2015), and benefits to the organization (LePine and Van Dyne 1998; Liu et al. 2010). These studies took voice behavior as a type of behavior that would benefit the organization but to some extent ignored its instrumental function. Although scholars argued that voice behavior can help improve individual status (McClean et al. 2018; Weiss and Morrison 2019) and acquire personal interests (e.g., Bodewyn and Brewer 1994), there still lacks empirical evidence. And following the approach/inhibition theory of power, this study introduces situational regulatory focus into the hypothesized model to explain how voice behavior helps employees achieve their performance goal, and thus deepens the generative mechanism of voice behavior.

Second, this study focuses on constructive voice behavior and defensive voice behavior, and further explores the different impacts of employees' sense of power

on these two types of voice behavior. Previous studies have shown that individuals with high sense of power would engage in more voice behavior (Harlos 2010; Islam and Zyphur 2005). However, some scholars have argued that powerful individuals who tried to maintain their positions would still make conservative decisions (e.g., Williams 2014) and kept silent about work-related issues. This study reveals that employees with different levels of sense of power also have different foci, and thus their purposes of voice are different, which leads to voice behavior with different contents. In recent years, scholars have appealed for exploration into the generative mechanism of voice behavior based on its contents, while there is still a lack of empirical evidence (Li et al. 2017; Morrison 2014). This study indicates that sense of power may promote constructive voice and restrain defensive voice, which provides theoretical and empirical extension for specifying and detailing the generative mechanism of voice based on its contents.

Third, this study reveals the cross-level moderating role of supervisor openness. Scholars have found that supervisor openness could enhance employees' psychological safety and then motivate them to exhibit voice behavior (Detert and Burris 2007). The findings of this study extend this point of view by showing that supervisor openness amplifies the indirect effect of employees' sense of power on constructive voice behavior via situational promotion self-regulatory focus. However, the indirect effect of employees' sense of power on defensive voice behavior through situational prevention self-regulatory focus is not affected by supervisor openness. We speculate that individuals with low sense of power generally have more psychological pressure due to the environmental constraints, and they may take defensive voice as a way to relieve pressure, which counteracts the impact of supervisor openness. Researchers have also argued that employees tended to express their opinions when they had more psychological pressure (Iacovides, Fountoulakis, Kaprinis, & Kaprinis, 2003). To sum up, this study extends the scope of research on the impact of supervisor openness on employees' voice behavior emerging.

Practical implications

First, by identifying a contingent relationship between sense of power and constructive voice behavior via situational promotion focus, we provide insights for management practice. The findings show that sense of power can strengthen employees' constructive voice, and at the same time weaken employees' defensive voice. And thus, for practice, managers are supposed to encourage employees to engage, empower employees and give them discretion to make them perceive power. For example, leaders can enhance employees' sense of power by empowering, which encourages employee to engage in proactive behavior, such as voice behavior (Zhong et al. 2011). These deeds motivate employees to exhibit constructive voice behavior, and further improve organizational performance. And if managers focus on avoiding potential threats, they may choose to emphasize employees' obedience by pushing harsh policies. These deeds weaken employees' sense of power and motivate them to engage in defensive voice behavior. Specifically, if managers are intentional to implement change, they can motivate employees to exhibit more constructive voice

behavior (e.g., proposing introducing new techniques, new policies, and new workflow, or proposing improving environmental conditions) by empowering them to let them perceive higher sense of power. But, if managers intend to avoid risks and uncertainty, they can motivate employees to exhibit more defensive voice behavior (e.g., opposing introducing new techniques, or new workflow) by letting them perceive lower sense of power.

Second, the findings show that situational promotion self-regulatory focus mediates the relationship between sense of power and constructive voice behavior, while situational prevention self-regulatory focus mediates the relationship between sense of power and defensive voice behavior. Therefore, managers can take steps to motivate employees' situational promotion self-regulatory focus or situational prevention self-regulatory focus, to obtain constructive or defensive voice from them. Specifically, if managers intend to chase strategic opportunities, improve organizational effectiveness, and extend team or organizational competitive advantages, they can advocate the positive side of organizational opportunities including the benefits that introducing new policies or techniques can bring to the organization, or exhibit transformational leadership, in order to motivate employees' situational promotion self-regulatory focus that further leads to more constructive voice behavior from employees. Previous studies also have shown that transformational leadership could promote employees' situational promotion self-regulatory focus (Kark et al. 2015), and situational promotion self-regulatory focus motivated employees to express suggestions that might improve the status quo (Lin and Johnson 2015). Otherwise, if managers intend to avoid risks and uncertainty that may bring the organization losses, they can advocate the threats that the organization is faced with, calling for the exploitation of current policies, the effectiveness of current workflows and techniques, and the stability of the status quo, or they may choose to exhibit more transactional leadership. Both of these two practices motivate employees to exhibit defensive voice behavior. Previous studies have shown that transactional leadership enhanced employees' situational prevention self-regulatory focus (Kark et al. 2015), and situational prevention self-regulatory focus resulted in suggestions that circumvent problems (Lin and Johnson 2015).

Third, the findings show that supervisor openness amplifies the indirect effect of sense of power on constructive voice behavior and has no impact on the indirect effect of sense of power on defensive voice behavior. This result implies that external factors are necessary. For example, supervisors should be open to employees' voice, and listen to employees' opinions and suggestions to enhance their motivations for voice behavior. Specifically, if managers have intentions to improve organizational effectiveness by change, they are supposed to be more open to employees' suggestions, to make employees perceive that their ideas are treasured by them. Meanwhile, if supervisors neglect employees' opinions or suggestions, employees with high sense of power are less likely to provide ideas for changing the environment, while employees with low sense of power may still oppose to organizational initiatives such as changing workflows or introducing new systems and technologies, which may bring overall pressure and low performance. Therefore, when employees perceive low sense of power or their situational prevention self-regulatory foci are

activated, leaders should pay more attention to their psychological pressure, try to relieve them and avoid decreasing job performance or satisfaction.

Limitations and future directions

We emphasize three limitations of this research. First, the results reject Hypotheses 3b and 4b. It is contended that the relationship between power and defensive advice is complicated. We speculate that individuals with low sense of power may have more psychological pressure due to the environmental constraints. Therefore, they may engage in defensive voice behavior for relieving the pressure. And no matter if his/her suggestions are endorsed by supervisors, they comfort themselves by exhibiting defensive voice behavior. Previous evidence has also shown that regardless of endorsement of voice behavior, employees with more psychological pressure expressed their opinions for reducing pressure (Iacovides, Fountoulakis, Kaprinis, & Kaprinis, 2003). Consequently, we call for more research to probe into this issue that focuses on the generative mechanism of individuals' voice behavior with low sense of power.

Second, we take sense of power as our focal variable because it is more common in organizations and more directly related to voice behavior. However, as a gatekeeper and agent of a unit, supervisor leadership style plays an important role in shaping subordinates' behavior. Researchers have indicated that transformational leadership triggered situational promotion focus, whereas active transactional leadership stimulated situational prevention focus (Kark et al. 2015). We speculate that transformational leadership and transactional leadership may have different effects on the two types of voice behavior (i.e., constructive and defensive voice behavior). Therefore, future research may benefit by identifying the effects and mechanisms of leadership styles on constructive voice behavior and defensive voice behavior.

Moreover, we call for research exploring the effects of other potential contingent factors on the relationship between sense of power and voice behavior with different contents. Researchers have demonstrated that individuals tended to express their ideas more freely when they perceive psychological safety (Detert and Burris 2007; Edmondson 1999; Liang et al. 2012) or when their voice behavior is encouraged (Morrison et al. 2011). Future research may explore the factors that foster the relationship between sense of power and employees' constructive voice and defensive voice behavior, such as psychological safety or voice climate.

Conclusion

In summary, our findings indicate that individuals with high sense of power in the workplace tend to behave more constructive voice due to their situational promotion focus, whereas those who lack power tend to exhibit more defensive voice behavior due to their situational prevention focus. This association between sense of power

and constructive voice via situational promotion focus is stronger when supervisors are open.

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