



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp)

# Social networks and employee voice: The influence of team members' and team leaders' social network positions on employee voice



Vijaya Venkataramani<sup>a,\*</sup>, Le Zhou<sup>b</sup>, Mo Wang<sup>c</sup>, Hui Liao<sup>d</sup>, Junqi Shi<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland, 4544, Van Munching Hall, College Park, MD 20742-2056, United States

<sup>b</sup> Department of Work and Organizations, University of Minnesota, United States

<sup>c</sup> Department of Management, Warrington College of Business Administration, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32608, United States

<sup>d</sup> Robert H. Smith School of Business, University of Maryland, 4506, Van Munching Hall, College Park, MD 20742-2056, United States

<sup>e</sup> Department of Management, Lingnan (University) College, Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou 510275, China

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 21 May 2014

Revised 19 November 2015

Accepted 2 December 2015

Available online 22 December 2015

### Keywords:

Voice

Social networks

Leadership

## ABSTRACT

We examine the role of employees' and team leaders' social network positions, an important, yet understudied class of variables, in affecting employees' voice behaviors. Using multi-level, multi-source data from 185 employees nested within 43 teams and their team leaders, we find that employees who hold central positions in the formal, workflow network in the team are more likely to speak up with ideas and suggestions. This relationship is weakened when they are central to the team's avoidance network. In addition to employees' own network positions, team leaders' positions in such informal networks also play a role in qualifying the employee workflow centrality–voice relationship. Specifically, the positive relationship between employees' workflow centrality and their voice is strengthened when their team leaders occupy central positions in the friendship network, but is weakened when they are central to the avoidance network in the team. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

Employee voice – the expression of challenging but constructive opinions, concerns, or ideas about work-related issues (Detert & Burris, 2007; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012) – has been increasingly recognized as a critical input affecting organizational functioning and well-being (Edmondson, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). In understanding this phenomenon, prior research has shown employee voice to be affected by a variety of factors such as employees' personal attributes (e.g., Crant, Kim, & Wang, 2010; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001), perceptions about and attitudes toward the organization (Fuller et al., 2006; Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008) and the behaviors of leaders (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012).

Although this prior research has made considerable progress, one important area that has, surprisingly, gone largely unexplored relates to the “effects of one's colleagues and relationships with

one's colleagues on the decision of whether to engage in voice” (Morrison, 2014, p. 191). Employee voice inherently challenges the status quo and points to needs for changing or improving processes and procedures that may have been instituted by other team members or the team leader and might potentially affect others' work. As a result, speaking up with one's concerns and ideas may entail substantial risk for employees (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998) unless they also have supportive relationships with their coworkers and leaders and know that speaking up is viewed as appropriate by them. Thus, the study of employee voice would be quite incomplete without understanding how social and relational factors at work may influence such behaviors.

In addressing this gap, the current paper uses a *relational*, social network framework in examining how employees' and their leaders' formal and informal relationships at work may impact employee voice. Compared to most other research in the social sciences (including that of employee voice) that takes an atomistic or “individual as an independent entity” perspective (i.e., focusing on individual attributes such as personality traits), network theory argues that an individual's behaviors (such as voice) can be best understood by taking a *relational* perspective (i.e., studying the nature of individuals' dyadic relationships and structural positions in the network of such relationships; Borgatti, Brass, & Halgin, 2014).

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [vvenkata@rhsmith.umd.edu](mailto:vvenkata@rhsmith.umd.edu) (V. Venkataramani), [zhou@umn.edu](mailto:zhou@umn.edu) (L. Zhou), [mo.wang@warrington.ufl.edu](mailto:mo.wang@warrington.ufl.edu) (M. Wang), [hliao@rhsmith.umd.edu](mailto:hliao@rhsmith.umd.edu) (H. Liao), [shijq3@mail.sysu.edu.cn](mailto:shijq3@mail.sysu.edu.cn) (J. Shi).

This is because interconnected social relationships strongly shape an individual's immediate environment by constraining or providing access to social and other resources that are unequally distributed in the social system, and that are *beyond* the effects of their individual attributes, such as dispositions, alone (e.g., Borgatti et al., 2014; Lin, 1982, 2001; Wellman, 1988). For example, employees' workgroup identification, an individual attribute, has been shown to be important for employee voice (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). However, regardless of identification levels, an employee who does not have many friends in the team may still feel constrained in openly challenging the status quo or voicing concerns or ideas, potentially because the employee may feel that other team members may not attach credibility to his/her ideas and therefore, would not support him/her. Thus, studying the effects of employees' positions in formal and informal relationship networks with coworkers adds a layer of richness and complexity to our understanding of employee voice in terms of highlighting situational opportunities and constraints beyond the effects of individual attributes and leader behaviors that have been the focus of prior voice research.

In examining the effects of such workplace relationships, we first examine how an employee's central position (e.g., connecting and mediating unconnected parts of the team; Freeman, 1979) in the formal workflow network, which exposes them to diverse aspects of the team's work practices, is related to their voice (e.g., Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010). However, being central in workflow network may not be sufficient unless such ideas are welcomed and supported by the broader team. Following Morrison's (2014) call, we go beyond merely work related interactions and also examine how employees' positions in the workflow interact with their positions in the informal positive and negative social networks in the team (i.e., friendship and avoidance networks). In doing so, we use social resources theory (Lin, 2001) as our underlying theoretical framework. Social resources theory argues that in addition to informational resources, network relationships provide access to social resources such as support, signal credibility to others and provide cues about the appropriateness of certain behaviors. Along these lines, we focus on friendship and avoidance networks because they form the understructure of most organizations and capture employees' access (or lack thereof) to important social resources outside of the formal work structure (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Chua, Ingram, & Morris, 2008; Labianca & Brass, 2006; Venkataramani & Dalal, 2007), which can be critical factors influencing employees' voice.

Further, given the important role of leaders in facilitating (or inhibiting) employee voice (Burriss, 2012; Detert & Treviño, 2010) and recent research that highlights the benefits of leaders' embeddedness in their team's informal social networks (e.g., Mehra, Dixon, Brass, & Robertson, 2006; Venkataramani, Richter, & Clarke, 2014), we also examine how leaders' positions in friendship and avoidance networks impact the relationship between employees' workflow centrality and their voice, beyond the effects of employees' own network positions. Fig. 1 illustrates our theoretical model.

The relational, network perspective we take in this study offers some important and unique insights into the employee voice literature beyond that of past research. First, as discussed above, taking a relational perspective highlights the fact that voice is not an isolated behavior driven solely by individual attributes, but is embedded in, and influenced by, an interconnected social structure of other relationships. Relatedly, this perspective illustrates how variations in access to scarce resources through social networks can provide opportunities and constraints *beyond* the effects of individual characteristics in affecting behavior (Wellman, 1988).

Second, and more important, using a relational lens highlights the importance of specific social mechanisms underlying employee

voice that have not received much attention in the voice literature. For example, as social resources theory (Lin, 2001) argues, social relationships can provide cues regarding the appropriateness of voice in specific situations. Similarly, central network positions affect one's recognition as a member of the team, and thereby public acknowledgement of one's ideas as well as one's claim to certain resources that support these ideas. Furthermore, social ties provide signals of an employee's social credentials (or lack thereof) to leaders and other organizational authorities (Lin, 2001), which can help in accessing additional resources in supporting their suggestions, thus increasing their voice behaviors. In addition to employees' own network positions, team leaders' embeddedness in the team's informal networks also serve to signal the salience of power differentials between leaders and members and whether the leader may be supportive of their speaking up and would be able to garner collective support in moving ideas forward. Applying this relational (as compared to an individualistic) lens to studying employee voice thus provides some unique insights beyond that of past research. Finally, this research contributes to the network and leadership literatures by examining the interactive effects of employee and leader network positions and illustrating how the effects of employee network relationships may be incomplete without also studying the role of other interpersonal relationships around them (cf. Venkataramani, Green, & Schleicher, 2010; Venkataramani et al., 2014).

## 2. Theory and hypotheses

### 2.1. Social networks and employee voice

A social network is the set of actors and the set of ties/relationships connecting them (Scott, 2000). Although multiple types of dyadic ties coexist within organizations, two broad subsets of such ties (based on the content of the relationship) have proven to be especially important in predicting many organizational outcomes (e.g., Brass, 1992; Ibarra & Andrews, 1993): instrumental ties (e.g., workflow, advice) and expressive ties (e.g., positive and negative). In this paper, we examine how employees' central positions in the network of formal, instrumental work ties—i.e., who interacts with whom in terms of providing inputs or outputs in completing the team's tasks—affect their voice, and how this effect of workflow centrality is qualified by their informal expressive positive and negative relationships. In addition to employees' own positions in the team's informal, expressive networks (i.e., friendship and avoidance networks), we examine team leaders' positions in such networks.

#### 2.1.1. Employees' centrality in the team's workflow network

Recent reviews of voice suggest that existing research has not empirically examined employees' exposure to different parts of the team's work processes and different types of work issues (Morrison, 2014; cf. Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010). In this regard, employees' structural positions (i.e., centrality) in the network of formal workflow interactions in the team can indicate such exposure. Centrality, as the term suggests, indicates the extent to which an individual is central or critical/important to the interactions in the network, and thereby have access to resources that flow in the network (Borgatti, 2005). For example, as part of their required work responsibilities, when individuals receive work inputs from different team members and provide them as (processed or unprocessed) outputs for other members, they serve as liaisons connecting these different individuals who may be from different parts of the team, or from different expertise areas. Without these central individuals, employees from different parts of the team would be disconnected. In other words, these central

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/888508>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/888508>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)