

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE EFFECTS OF EMPLOYEE VOICE BEHAVIOR ON JOB SATISFACTION

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Abstract

Background: Research has indicated that voice behavior engages and empowers employees and helps them in dealing with organizational stress. Employee voice has mostly been conceptualized as a dependent variable. The empirical evidence on the effects of voice behavior for an individual is mixed.

Purpose: By synthesizing the existing literature, this study aimed to contribute to the literature a better understanding of the link between employee voice and job satisfaction.

Data: A total of 1635 peer-reviewed research papers were identified during the initial search. After removing the papers which were not relevant to answer the research question for this study, 46 papers remained. Application of the eligibility and MMAT criteria 23 full-text research articles were included in this review.

Results: The review of the literature shows considerable differences in findings related to the effects of the direct and collective voice. Direct employee voice is positively related to job satisfaction whereas no association, or at times negative association, was observed between collective voice and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was more strongly associated with employee voice for older employees compared to Gen Y employees. The HR and organizational strategies which encourage voice behavior result in higher job satisfaction. Employee silence leads to lower job satisfaction. The review also revealed that for female employees the voice buffers the negative job satisfaction that stems from a poor and hostile work environment.

Implications: Organizations should develop mechanisms which encourage their employees to share their opinions and raise concern which would not only positively affect their positive job attitudes but would also be beneficial for the organizations.

KEYWORDS: Employee voice, Job satisfaction, Employee silence, Director Voice, Employee participation, Systematic review, voice behavior, unionization, collective voice, employee involvement and participation (EIP)

1. Introduction

The degree to which employees in an organization communicate upward their ideas, opinions, suggestions and information about work-related issues and concerns can have great implications for an organization's productivity and performance. In order to make better decisions and to understand ground realities and business dynamics, senior managers need feedback and information from lower-level employees – the information that the managers might not acquire otherwise (1).

However, research evidence shows that employees are often hesitant to speak up, make suggestions to their supervisors or to their colleagues, particularly when the employees have potentially critical information to share (2,3). One reason why many employees remain reluctant to speak up is that making suggestions for improvement and challenging the status quo cost time and energy and is socially risky (4,5).

On the other hand, research has also indicated that voice behavior engages employees and empowers them (6) and helps them in dealing with organizational stress (7). Engaging in voice behavior could also help employees advancing their careers and job performance (8).

The conceptualization of the construct of employee voice is done as a behavior instead of an attitude or perception. LePine and Van Dyne, the leading scholars in voice research, defined employee voice behavior as “constructive change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation” (9 p326). Bringing potential work-related

problems to the attention of managers or sharing ideas about cost-cutting are some of the examples of employee voice behavior (10).

The majority of the research on employee voice sees the construct as positive, that is, opinions and suggestions for positive change and improvement (11). In terms of the conceptualization of voice behavior, most studies have considered it a dependent variable [see, for example, Mowbray et al.(12) and Nechanska et al.(13)] and engaging in voice behavior in the workplace has been linked with positive job attitudes (11,14). This perspective indicates that individuals who experience a better social exchange with their employers are inclined towards pro-organizational behavior resulting in suggestions for organizational improvement and efficiency (15).

As far as the association between employee voice and other performance outcomes is concerned, little research has been done in this area (5). However, some studies indicate that voice is likely to assert a positive impact on individuals which might enhance the feeling of control, leading to decreased stress and increased motivation, performance and work engagement (16,17). Morrison and Milliken(18) have argued that engaging in voice behavior may result in positive attitudes because employees are being able to express their views.

Notwithstanding these positive consequences, employee voice behavior can also lead to negative outcomes (1). Research evidence shows that speaking up might indicate that the employee is a complainer or troublemaker which may lead to undermining of his or her public image (2,3). The strongest support of this argument comes from the fact that individuals who act as whistle-blowers frequently experience retaliation (19).

Morrison(1) argued that the empirical evidence on the effects of voice behavior for an individual is mixed. Studies have reported a negative association between voice behavior and promotions and pay increase (20). On the issue of if employee voice leads to positive or negative outcomes for individuals, Burriss et al.(21) argued that the positive or negative effects of voice behavior depend on whether the individual and his or her supervisors have the same attitude towards voice behavior.

During the last decade, some researchers conducted meta-analyses and systematic reviews on different dimensions of employee voice behavior. Ng and Feldman(5), while conducting a meta-analysis on the voice behavior of people in the workplace, using a framework of conservation of resources, investigated voice behavior as a dependent variable which is influenced by job, social and organizational stressors and strains. Their research included studies up till 2010 and validated a negative association between work-related stress and employee voice behavior and a direct association between voice behavior and work performance.

The work of Morrison(1) integrated and reviewed the literature on employee voice behavior. The study provided an elaborative account of the construct of voice behavior and discussed its commonalities with other similar constructs. The study also discussed the motives, predictors and outcomes of voice behavior. While discussing the future direction of research in voice research, the study highlighted the need for research to better comprehend the outcomes of employee voice behavior.

Prominent scholars in voice behavior Maynes and Podsakoff(22) developed an extended view of the employee voice behavior which went beyond the “positive” aspect of voice. The authors proposed four different kinds of voice behavior, namely, supportive, constructive, defensive and destructive. After creating a new conceptual framework of voice behavior, the authors advanced and validated scales to measure each of the four-voice behaviors in their model. Another extended account of different dimensions and antecedents was provided by (23).

A systematic review was done by Noort et al.(24) which discussed employee voice behavior to prevent physical harm and accidents in the workplace. The authors used an ecological framework and discovered 48 articles, incorporated 256 safety voice antecedents, and 23 outcomes in their review. The study also integrated and synthesized the existing literature to understand the ecological nature and methodological issues in voice safety.

O’Donovan and McAuliffe(25) recently conducted a systematic review which discovered interventions aimed at team-building with emphasis on emotional safety and its linked constructs including employee voice and silence behaviors among healthcare workers. The review included studies conducted between 1999 and 2018 which discussed development, execution, and assessment of interventions related to psychological safety, employee voice, and silence.

The present study answers the call for “a need for a better understanding of the outcomes of voice” (1 p401). Most of the existing literature on employee voice behavior has studied the voice behavior as a dependent variable (5) or discussed it in the framework of other constructs such as workplace safety (24), HR practices, and performance systems (12) or considered it as the integration of other areas such as industrial relations and labor processes (13). By synthesizing the existing literature, this study aimed to contribute to the literature a better appreciation of the link between employee voice and an important outcome, that is, job satisfaction. This will allow future research to develop on what has been done before to unambiguously understand the relationship between employee voice behavior and job satisfaction in the workplace setting.

The main reason for focusing on job satisfaction in this review is that job satisfaction is considered one of the most crucial work-related attitudinal variables (26) which are related to decreased absenteeism, improved work-related commitment, and higher personal and organizational productivity (27–29). However, the impact of employee voice on satisfaction at work does not get sufficient attention (30). Moreover, involvement in work and the opportunity to have a say are considered essential prerequisites for satisfaction at work (31,32). However, on contrary, some studies have shown that higher levels of involvement in work do not necessarily result in job satisfaction (33,34).

The association between employee voice behavior and job satisfaction is still not clear. Particularly, when it comes to direct employee voice (i.e. without unionization), the current literature on employee voice and job satisfaction have shown that “the influence of direct employee voice can be two-sided” (26 p5). The review aimed to understand the association between employee voice behavior and job satisfaction where voice behavior is considered as an independent variable. Moreover, the empirical evidence on the effects of employee voice behavior on job satisfaction is mixed and inconclusive. Hence, a systematic review of the literature is undertaken to investigate the literature, reporting the effects of employee voice behavior on job satisfaction.

This systematic review of the existing literature will synthesize the content, findings, theoretical underpinnings and conclusions of studies conducted to investigate the association between employee voice behavior and job satisfaction. This systematic review aims to answer the following question: *What is the impact of employee voice behavior on job satisfaction?*

2. Methods

A systematic review was carried out to investigate the above research question. Systematic reviews are an important tool to synthesize the evidence available in the existing literature to answer specific research questions (35). The review was conducted in adherence to the PRISMA guidelines.

2.1 Eligibility Criteria

The research articles included in the study had to conform to specific criteria for inclusion. The language of the studies included was English. The studies should have been conducted in natural and field settings. Articles that conceptualized employee voice at the individual or collective level were also included. The research articles which conceptualized employee voice as a positive construct were included. Only quantitative studies were included. The studies that used either cross-sectional or longitudinal designs were also included. Doctoral dissertations and articles published in journals recognized by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) were also included.

2.2 Search Strategy

Electronic databases were searched during April 2021. Multiple keywords including “voice”, “employee voice behavior”, “voice behavior”, “job satisfaction”, “work satisfaction” were searched in ScienceDirect (Elsevier), Taylor & Frances, Sage, Springer, Emerald Insight, and Wiley online library. The title and abstracts of selected studies were examined on the basis of the eligibility criteria. The remaining full-text articles were included in the study after analyzing them in the light of MMAT.

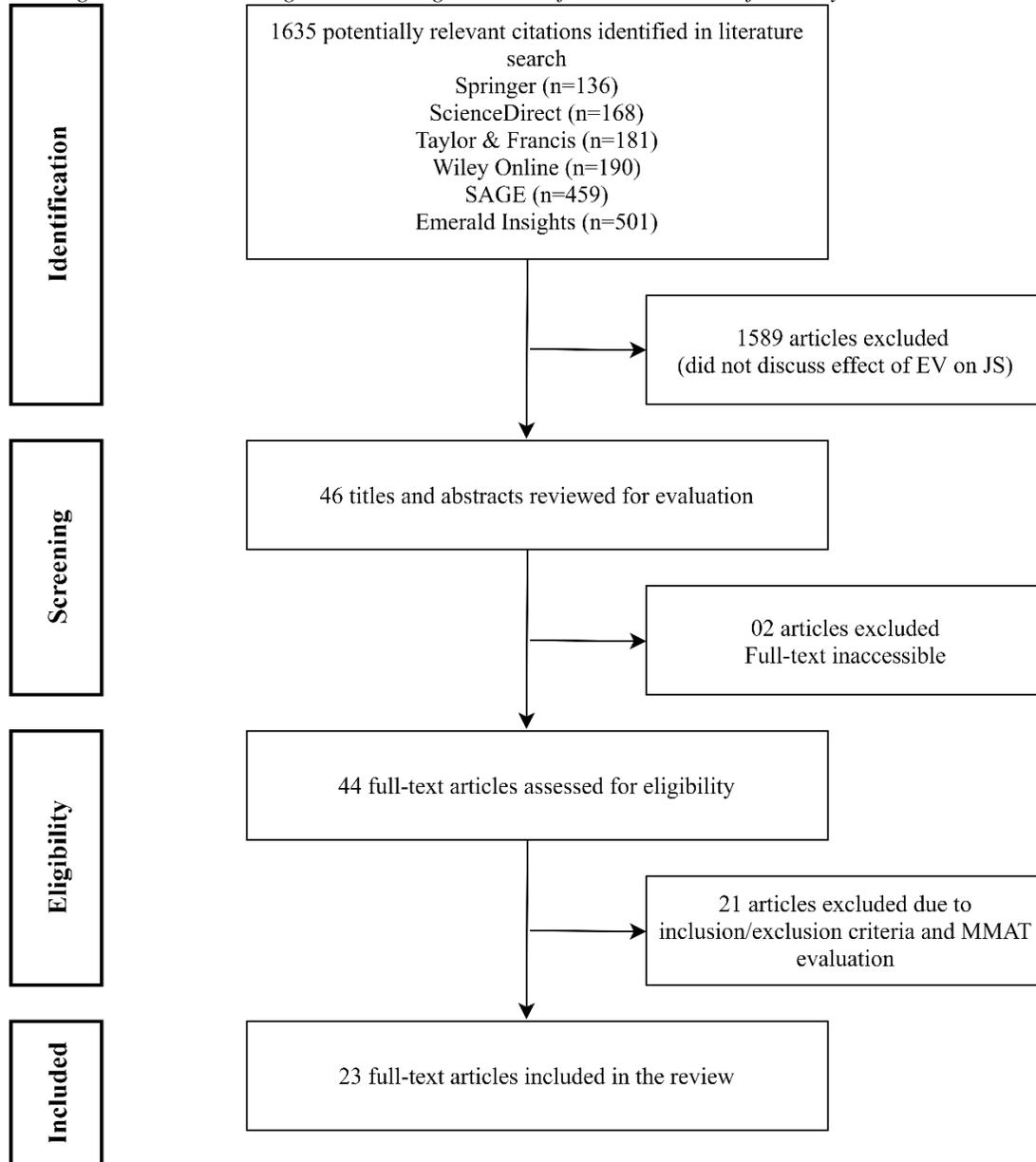
2.3 Data Collection

The selected full-text articles were used to obtain data for the review. The information obtained from the articles consisted of the names of the authors, publication year, region or country where the study was conducted, study design, variables, industry/sector, and sample size.

3. Results

A total of 1635 peer-reviewed research papers were identified during the initial search. After removing the papers which were not relevant to answer the research question for this study, 46 papers remained. Out of these 46 papers, two research articles were not accessible as they were quite recently published. Application of the eligibility criteria mentioned above and after the use 2018v of the Mixed methods appraisal tool (36), 23 research articles were included in this review. The process of selection of studies, following the PRISMA guidelines (35), is presented in Figure 1:

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram indicating selection of research articles for the systematic review



The information about the sample size, variables, country of study, industry, target population, scoring, method, and database/host of the 23 studies included in the review in the table presented in the appendix.

3.1 Statistical analysis

The research articles which are included in this review did not demonstrate substantial demographic or geographic heterogeneity. Out of 23 studies, 39% studies were conducted in the United States, 21% in China, and 17% in the United Kingdom. Similarly, 39% (n=9) focused on multiple sectors while 30% (n=7) studied the hotel and hospitality sector. The mean sample size was significantly large (n=10,349) because some studies used the data from

the country-wide surveys which are carried out by respective governments or large private institutions [see, for example, (45,49,54)]. Studies from 1992 to 2020 (28 years) were part of the review.

3.2 Different effects of direct and collective voice mechanisms

The review of the literature shows considerable differences in findings related to the effects of direct and collective voice, also called the representative voice, on work satisfaction. Koyuncu et al.(44) reported that employees who exhibited employee voice behavior displayed positive job attitudes including better job satisfaction and work engagement. Carr and Mellizo(45) showed that employee voice was positively related to job satisfaction and since having voice gives autonomy, it is a better predictor of job satisfaction than the increase in wages. Individuals who have the opportunity to communicate their opinions develop a feeling of meaningfulness which results in higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment (58,59).

However, when it came to the impact of collective voice the existing literature shows quite different results. Abraham et al.(49) have argued that having a strong grievances procedure is a close proxy of the voice provided by unions - also termed as union membership and union participation. The voice provided by unions was referred to as 'voice face' by earlier studies (60,61). Abraham et al.(49) reported that unionized employees showed lower job satisfaction.

Nawakitphaitoon & Zhang(26), who carried out the study in China, showed that direct employee voice is positively related to job satisfaction whereas no association was observed between collective or representative voice and job satisfaction. However, it has been argued that collective voice in China has not led to higher job satisfaction because the structure of workers' unions is still weak in the country (26).

Guest and Conway(46) argued that the main function of unions was to provide voice, hence, the union members showed lower job satisfaction than non-union employees. The work of Holland et al.(30) substantiated that direct voice is related to higher job satisfaction and collective voice was negatively associated with job satisfaction.

3.3 Influence of age on the relationship between employee voice and job satisfaction

Kim(39) and Kim et al.(50,54) have studied the effects of employee voice behavior on job satisfaction in terms of the age group of employees. Kim et al.(50) investigated the difference of impact of EV on JS between Gen Y employees, born between 1981 and 2001 (62) and older employees in the United States. The authors reported that job satisfaction was more strongly associated with employee voice for older employees compared to Gen Y employees. However, Kim(39) reported from the Chinese context that employee voice is positively related with job satisfaction for Gen Y.

These studies presented inconsistent justifications of their results which are subject to criticism and further discussion. Kim et al.(50) argued that employees of Gen Y have less knowledge, experience and interest in the organization (63), compared to older employees, and, consequently, have fewer ideas and opinions to share. On the contrary, Kim(39) argued that employees of Gen Y have a tendency to be more vocal in the workplace (64).

Comparing the influence of age on EV and JS in the United States and China, Kim et al.(54) showed that employee voice behavior much strongly affects job satisfaction in China than in the United States for Gen Y employees.

3.4 Role of HR and Organizational practices

A number of studies in the review point to the fact that when HR practices and organizational systems create a culture where employees can speak up and share their opinions, this has a positive impact on their job attitudes. Chow et al.(51) showed that the most important HR practice which enhances job satisfaction is employee voice. Similarly, Astvik et al.(41) emphasized that the organizational strategies which encourage voice behavior result in positive organizational outcomes including higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment and lower intention to quit.

McCabe and Lewin(65) explain that the construct of voice has two important elements: the ability to express complaints or grievances and be able to partake in the process of decision-making in the organization. Following this explanation, Atouba et al.(53) and Cavanagh(55) have shown that employees report higher job satisfaction when they are offered the opportunity to share their opinions and participate in decision-making.

Although some studies have used different terms to define voice as a means of participation, such as employee work participation (53) and employee involvement and participation (47,48), these studies have reported that when employees are given the opportunities to convey their ideas or dissent they exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction (47,48). Similarly, autonomy was observed to have played an essential role in the association between employee voice and job satisfaction.

According to Carr and Mellizo(45), autonomy has been observed to have an impact on the link between employee voice and job satisfaction. Deci and Ryan(66) explained that autonomy refers to the extent to which an individual is allowed to utilize his or her own knowledge to make decisions – a concept similar to workplace participation and involvement (65).

3.5 Employee Silence and Job Satisfaction

The literature on employee voice frequently discusses a related construct employee silence – a term which is the exact opposite of employee voice – has been found to be negatively associated with job satisfaction. Employee silence has been defined as employee behavior where the individual intentionally withholds information, suggestions, opinions, and concerns which are potentially important for the organization (2,18). Both Wang et al.(42) and Nikolaou et al.(40) have reported that employee silence, also called organizational silence, leads to lower job satisfaction. In support of their findings, the authors argue that employee silence results in cynicism, work stress, disengagement and dissatisfaction (67) coupled with feelings of lack of control and not being valued (40).

3.6 Moderating Role of Gender and Psychological Personality

The study by Settles et al.(56) investigated the effects of employee voice on the job satisfaction of female employees within the context of their work climate. The findings of the study revealed that for female workers voice buffers the negative job satisfaction that stems from a poor and hostile work environment. The authors argue that these findings are grounded in the belief that voice has a value-expressive function (68) which might not be associated with influencing the actual outcomes (69). Hence, the female employees who are able to express their opinions and speak up about their grievances report lower job dissatisfaction despite having a negative work climate (56).

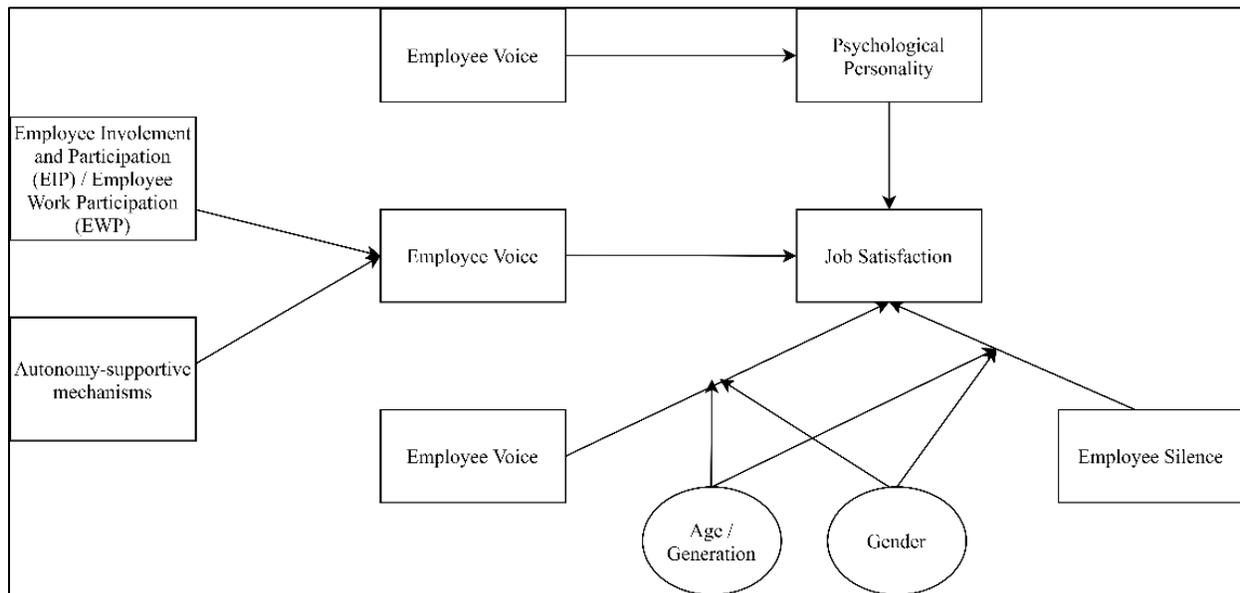
Song et al.(37) studied the effects of voice behavior on job satisfaction with psychological personality type (self-efficacy in this case) as a mediator. The authors argue that emotional mechanisms improve our understanding of the outcome of voice behavior (5). Previous studies have also investigated how individual characteristics such as how individuals feel or think to influence the outcome of employee voice (70). These findings are also validated by a meta-analysis by Zare and Flinchbaugh(71) who noted that psychological personality type consistently influences the outcome of voice behavior.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The review of the existing literature on employee voice behavior and job satisfaction has helped us better understand the relationship between these constructs. The findings of the review have important theoretical and managerial implications. From the theoretical perspective, it is critical to recognize that influence of employee voice does not take place in isolation. It is imperative to acknowledge the organizational and individual contexts (27) such as HR practices, organizational policies, work climate, individual characteristics, etc. Organizations should develop mechanisms that encourage their employees to share their opinions and raise concerns which would not only positively affect their job attitudes (16) but would also be beneficial for the organizations (15).

Moreover, the role of direct and collective voice mechanisms is also important. There is considerable support from the existing literature that direct voice is more effective than the collective voice in terms of its impact on positive job outcomes including job satisfaction. Synthesis of the literature on the relationship among voice behavior, related constructs and job satisfaction is summarized in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 2:

Figure 2: The proposed conceptual framework



The conceptual framework proposed in the review aims to investigate the effects of HR and organizational practices that improve the participation of employees and enhance autonomy on job satisfaction through the mediation of employee voice. The effects of employee voice on job satisfaction are also mediated by the psychological personality type. The model also proposes to evaluate the effect of employee voice on job satisfaction with the moderation of age and gender. Finally, the moderating effects of age and gender are also assessed for the relationship between employee silence and job satisfaction.

It is noteworthy that the majority of the studies included in the review were conducted in Western countries (US, UK, Australia, and Sweden) which have a different culture in terms of workplace behavior and voice mechanisms compared to more traditional cultures like China's (39). So, there is a need to further explore the impact of voice behaviors on job satisfaction in other cultures and work settings. Likewise, these studies primarily focused on the private sector. It would be useful to understand the influence of voice behavior for employees of public sector organizations that tend to have a more bureaucratic workplace environment.

Conflict of interest

There was no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Table: Summary of the 23 full-text articles included in the review

Sr #	Authors	Sample Size	Variables (relevant)	Country of Study	Sector/Industry	Target population	Scoring	Method	Database/Host
1	Holland et al.(30)	588	Promotive Voice Prohibitive Voice Job Satisfaction Self-efficacy (Mediator)	Australia	Multiple sectors	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM)	Springer
2	Song et al.(37)	10,434	Union membership (Voice face) Intention to leave Job satisfaction Organizational commitment	China	Banking	Bankers	10-point Likert scale	Regression Analysis	Springer
3	Huang and Gamble(38)	341	Employee voice Employee satisfaction	China	Retail	Floor/shop employees	5-point Likert scale	Structural equation model	Taylor & Francis
4	Nawakitphaitoon and Zhang(26)	1,838	Employee Participation Job Satisfaction	China	Multiple sectors	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Hierarchical multiple regression analysis	Taylor & Francis
5	Kim(39)	3,524	Union existence Job satisfaction Direct voice	China	Hospitality	Gen Y employees	5-point Likert scale	Moderated hierarchical regression analysis	Taylor & Francis
6	Nikolaou et al.(40)	549	Voice behavior Job satisfaction	Greece	IT	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Regression Analysis	Taylor & Francis
7	Astvik et al.(41)	46	HRM practices (Employee voice) Job satisfaction	Sweden	Multiple sectors	All employees	7-point Likert scale	Regression Analysis	Taylor & Francis
8	Wang et al.(42)	208	Employee voice job satisfaction	Taiwan	Hospitality	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Structural equation	Taylor & Francis

								modelling	
9	Liang and Yeh(43)	22,500	Wage Voice Autonomy Satisfaction with work	Taiwan	Manufacturing	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Regression Analysis	Taylor & Francis
10	Koyuncu et al.(44)	28,222	Unionization Job satisfaction	Turkey	Hospitality	All employees	4-point scale	Regression Analysis	Wiley Online
11	Carr and Mellizo(45)	1,022	Job satisfaction Employee voice arrangements Job autonomy	UK	Multiple sectors	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Regression Analysis	Wiley Online
12	Guest and Conway(46)	11,000	Employee involvement and participation (EIP) Job Satisfaction Organizational commitment	UK	Multiple sectors	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Linear regression	Taylor & Francis
13	Cox et al.(47)	17,665	Employee involvement and participation (EIP) Job Satisfaction Organizational commitment	UK	Multiple sectors	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Linear regression	Wiley Online
14	Cox et al.(48)	1,356	Silence/Voice Job satisfaction	UK	Multiple sectors	All employees	Silence/Voice: Index developed by Welander et al. (2019) JS: 7-point Likert scale	Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)	SAGE
15	Abraham et al.(49)	134,594	Unionization Demographic (gender) Job satisfaction	US	Multiple sectors	All employees	Panel data	Conditional logit estimation	SAGE
16	Kim et al.(50)	300	Employee work participation (EWP)	US	Hospitality	Gen Y and older employees	5-point Likert scale	Hierarchical regression	SAGE

			Job Satisfaction organizational identification						
17	Chow et al.(51)	1,862	Employee voice Employee job satisfaction	US	Hospitality	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Multi-group Structural Model Testing	Emerald Insight
18	Artz(52)	233	Employee silence Job satisfaction	US	Multiple sectors	All employees	ES: 7-point Likert scale JS: 6-point Likert scale	Structural equation modeling	Emerald Insight
19	Atouba et al.(53)	612	Organizational silence Employee satisfaction	US	IT	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Multiple regression analysis	Emerald Insight
20	Kim et al.(54)	211	Participation Job satisfaction	US/China	Hospitality	Gen Y employees	5-point Likert scale	Pearson correlation	Wiley Online
21	Cavanagh(55)	447	Employee voice Job satisfaction	US	Healthcare	Nursing staff	5-point Likert scale	Weighted least square estimators	Emerald Insight
22	Settles et al.(56)	135	Workplace Climate Voice Job satisfaction	US	Academia	Female scientists	5-point Likert scale	Hierarchical Multiple Regression analysis	SAGE
23	Kim et al.(57)	335	Employee voice Employee job satisfaction	US	Hospitality	All employees	5-point Likert scale	Structural equation modeling	Taylor & Francis