

A Systematic Literature Review of the Organizational Voice

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Abstract

This paper investigates the related literature on employee voice to propose an integrated concept of employee voice across different management areas, e.g., human resources, industrial relationships, and organizational behavior. The initial search provided 115 papers; however, the final investigation was conducted on 49 articles drawn from organizational behavior. Despite various conceptualizations of employee voice in different management disciplines, there is no evidence on different voice mechanisms as an integrated concept. The research method is a systematic review of articles based on the Wetten framework in the 1970-2019 time efficiency of employee voices in different management areas. This systematic literature review concludes that employee voice research contributes to understanding voice behavior. This study also highlights some domains, such as understanding the concept of employee voice, upon which future research can be built.

Keywords: employee voice, human resource management, organizational behavior, industrial relations

Introduction

Rapid environmental changes are regarded as one of the most central challenges of the organizations, while they are constantly making efforts for success due to the extensive and increasing competition (Salamzadeh et al., 2019). It is believed that successful organizations utilize human forces as a competitive advantage (Kantur, 2016). Since organizations are increasingly reliant on their employees' knowledge and ideas in today's competitive and indeterminate environment, employee voice is recognized as a crucial issue (Song et al., 2021). Therefore, the employees' constructive comments and suggestions are of great importance for the organizations that seek to maintain their position within the highly competitive conditions (Kok et al., 2016). This issue is fundamental in the management context (Song et al., 2021); however, there is a lack of research exploring antecedents leading to such forms of voice in a single model (Chamberlin et al., 2017). Regarding the employees' positive perspective in the organization that emphasizes employee voice, the respective managers try to implement voice channel potential as the competitive advantage (McCloskey & McDonnell, 2018). Hence, employees' trust, along with reliable managers, can lead to employees' participation, motivation, and innovative suggestions; in other words, it is essential to provide appropriate context and infrastructure for the employee voice in order to achieve organizational goals (Sifatu et al., 2020). As a result, most firms prefer to investigate the programs capable of improving their employees' participation (Salamzadeh et al., 2021). Besides, employee voice can help identify organizational mistakes and management

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weaknesses. Such job engagement improves employees' ability to generate ideas and discover deficiencies because of employees' continuous involvement and dedication to their work (Jha, 2021). Voice behavior can refer to a means of self-enhancement because the efficacious voice is associated with competence and influence (Wei et al., 2015).

Moreover, researchers argue that it is difficult to gain a competitive advantage through a set of multi-talented employees with high levels of satisfaction and commitment. For this purpose, it is necessary to consider maximum employee participation (Takeuchi et al., 2007).

In recent years, managers and researchers have increasingly focused on employee voice due to its effect on obtaining competitive advantage (Yan, 2018), which might be accomplished through employees' extensive ideas within an economic prospect (Royer et al., 2008). Besides, awareness of competition principles can lead to constant learning, progress, and achievement of occupational objectives (Miao et al., 2020). Accordingly, the emergence of innovative behaviors (through voice) among the employees can create a competitive advantage for the organization (Ju et al., 2019). The employee voice can also help the management improve decision-making about the obstacles and challenges that employees may face in the growth and development of their companies (Hosseini, Saeida Ardekani, Sabokro, & Alhosseini Almodarresi, 2021).

According to the issues mentioned above, employee voice has been one of the most critical issues in recent years, but there is no evidence for comprehensive and integrated voice mechanisms (Wilkinson et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that there is burgeoning literature on voice spread across various organizations (Ellmer & Reichel, 2021). Voice research includes different areas of industrial relations (ER), labor process theory (LPT), human resource management (HRM), and organizational behavior (OB). Furthermore, researchers have also extensively investigated the concept of voice in terms of the workplace (Barry et al., 2018). Despite a general interest in voice, there are various research programs and fundamental meanings and conceptualizations (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Perspectives about the nature and investigation of voice differ dramatically across disciplinary boundaries. While there have been explicit efforts to draw research together in integrative reviews of the field (Čiarnienė et al., 2021), voice has been largely examined in self-contained and self-referential areas (Liu et al., 2021). Thus, voice studies do not occasionally highlight awareness of developments in other fields (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Different disciplines related to the concept of voice, including human resources management, administrative sciences, economics, organizational behavior, psychology, and legal issues, have developed various conceptualizations of employee voice (Kaufman, 2015). In addition, academicians have little knowledge regarding the studies, theories, or theoretical background of the concept of voice (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). As a result, there is a need to synthesize the concepts drawing on such disciplines. Authors can confirm that providing a synthesis of existing concepts of employee voice is regarded as the innovative objective of the study under investigation. Since a multitude of analyses and research has been done on the concept of voice in the form of different shapes and patterns, the concept of employee voice has become a multidimensional term in different disciplines with a variety of meanings for policymakers, scholars, and lawyers (Poole, 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to perform an integrated review of the literature about the employee voice because there are various definitions for the concept of employee voice. Furthermore, considering the significance of the role of management in defining the employee voice, several studies from both disciplines of organizational behavior and human resource management have examined the relationship between management and voice behavior, the conceptualization of human resource management, and organizational behavior of voice, which are regarded consistent (Donaghey et al., 2014).

According to previous studies, two main criticisms can be made in this regard. The first is the lack of systematic research, which means there is a gap in the research literature accordingly. The second criticism is related to the lack of a holistic and comprehensive view of the definition of employee voice. This study aims at reviewing related articles from 1970 to 2019 to integrate different conceptualizations of employee voice according to the three domains of industrial relations, human resource management, and organizational behavior. This article also explains the difference between voice in different parts of management (HRM, OB, and IR) separately. Findings of this study can also contribute to the literature on employee voice to help cover the theoretical gap accordingly. However, due to the small number of comprehensive research on employee voice in different management areas, it is recommended that other researchers employ the proposed integrated framework in this research, along with an interpretive approach, as an inclusive reference for future studies in this field. More empirical studies are required to evaluate and confirm the accountability of the major finding of this study in both the Iranian context and those of the other countries.

The following section introduces the methodology implemented in this paper. Afterward, Discussion and Conclusions sections are given. Then, the paper ends with some recommendations for forthcoming inquiries.

Literature Review

Social exchange theory indicates that relationships evolve throughout time, and the formation of a relationship relies on adherence to exchange rules (Abdelmotaleb et al., 2021). Social exchange theorists believe that employees will be encouraged to propose constructive and fundamental suggestions if they are satisfied with their job or feel emotionally committed to their employers (Hosseini, Saeida Ardekani, & Sabokro, 2021). This is considered as a response to the positive behavior that is perceived in their occupational relationships (Choi, 2007). Nonetheless, employees are less likely to cooperate and may also seek to punish the employer if their expectations are left unmet (Charkhkar et al., 2021). Therefore, respecting and maintaining mutual relationships in social exchange can lead to significant consequences such as employee voice in an organization (Chen et al., 2018). Researchers would focus on the literature and argue that voice is a combination of individual motivation and organizational norms (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). Hence, voice refers to a complicated phenomenon, particularly in multicultural workplaces with diverse values, beliefs, experiences, and attitudes (Afsar et al., 2019).

On the other hand, employees may consider their ideas or information harmful and stressful because of the lack of perception of others' cultures, priorities, and change-oriented processes (Chou & Barron, 2016). Consequently, systematic development of different forms of voice can help prepare the ground for employees to be partly involved in decision-making activities; meanwhile, some managers would provide more freedom to employees in the management of organizations (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Thus, employee voice is the critical stimulus in high-quality decision-making and organizational success (Estell et al., 2021). As a result, it is essential to review the voice literature within different fields.

Voice in Organizational Behavior

By the early 1990s, the field of organizational behavior (OB) had presented different conceptualizations and investigated a wide variety of constructs regarding the concept of voice or any related interpretations (Mowbray et al., 2015). Given the changing and competitive organizational environment in the world and the imposed challenges, it is

therefore essential for organizations to develop flexibility, reaction, novelty, and efficiency to deal with such external changes (Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018). As a result, employee voice is regarded as a crucial subject in the organizational behavior literature, where voice is considered the expression of employees' desires and choices to convey their opinions to the management in favor of the organization (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). In the organizational behavior theory, voice refers to a fundamental concept because it highlights the improvement of critical conditions and returns to former stages of performance (Tajpour, Salamzadeh, & Hosseini, 2021). Morrison (2011, 2014) claimed that the overall conceptualization of OB is regarded as an extra-role behavior for voice.

On the other hand, OB researchers argued that voice is recognized as a primary behavioral role by employees (Brinsfield & Edwards, 2020). In this regard, Tangirala et al. (2013) concluded that voice is more common among employees with a high-task orientation; thus, they are expected to be involved with voice. However, authors of organizational behavior define voice as an individual manifestation for problem-solving, while several industrial economists define it as equivalent to unions and collective bargaining (Addison, 2005).

Organizational voice behavior is distinct from preventative behaviors such as conscious or news-related behavior; the purpose of the news is to prevent the practice from continuing rather than providing constructive comments (Mowbray et al., 2020). In contrast, organizational voice expresses ideas about improving the current work process (Boxall et al., 2018). In this regard, it can be stated that organizational voice differs from organizational opposition since the latter includes reporting issues related to conscientiousness or ethics in relevant departments (Kok et al., 2016). Besides, the concept of complaint should also be distinguished from the organizational voice in behavior, because complaining behavior refers to dissatisfaction with the current situation; so, there is no need to propose a change (Holland et al., 2019). Voice behavior differs from the role of employees, as employees are expected to perform their duties (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). In dissociating the dissatisfaction, the OB perspective inclines to be wary of other perspectives' expression of integral components of the voice (Donaghey et al., 2014). Discussions in this area link employee voice to improvements and outcomes such as employee participation (Gruman & Saks, 2014). Creating semi-independent working groups also clarifies employees' division of labor, planning, participation monitoring, production flow and speed, and even redesigning work plans and goal setting, which ideally motivate greater participation (Welbourne, 2011). These shared factors of voice have been considered in the management approach of organizational behavior, which focuses on issues related to people's verbal communication in the organization and is very constructive for managers (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011).

It is also believed that a body of research has investigated the relationship between the impact of employees and management on organizational behavior (Townsend et al., 2020). For example, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) asserted that administrative counseling could improve the perception of influence and power, particularly when the employees identify the managers in a high position. However, their perceived expectation from the leader led to the promotion of expressing ideas in the absence of counseling, which highlighted the influence of participatory leadership as a means of increasing employees' contribution and representation at the workplace (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Management researchers also encourage organizational behavior researchers to consider expressive behavior, including issues related to the individual's work. That is because expressive behavior uses formal and informal mechanisms (Brinsfield & Edwards, 2020).

Van Dyne and LePine (1998) have defined the employee voice in the organizational behavior so that voice can challenge the current situation (Van Dyne et al., 2008). Voice refers to extra-role behavior. That is to say, it is voluntary, and there are no formal, voice-

related rewards. These concepts have been incorporated into many of the definitions offered by researchers in organizational behavior, and have led to the integrated definition of organizational behavior from employee voice as “cautionary exchange of suggestions, ideas, opinions, or concerns regarding different issues at the workplace accompanied by the intention of improving organizational performance” (Morrison, 2011).

Some researchers, including Van Dyne et al. (2008) and Tangirala et al. (2013), have suggested that organizational behavior researchers should decide to reevaluate their position on voice despite the extra-role that can be studied and defined in resource management. Therefore, it provides a more precise definition for human management resources (Mowbray et al., 2015). Finally, management researchers have concluded that voice analysis is rooted in the work of psychology and organizational behavior perspectives (Brinsfield, 2013). Studies related to organizational behavior have shown that adopting an overly individualistic, psychological, managerial, and unrealistic view of employee voice is inappropriate (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Since micro-studies of organizational behavior regarding the external environment of organizations are disregarded in the literature, it forms models and results in outcomes that are primarily susceptible to ethnocentrism since their interpretive power has particular psychological motivations, attitudes, norms, and forms (Kaufman, 2015).

Voice in Human Resource Management

Researchers had not mapped voice, as an organizational behavior, to different structures until the 1990s; at that time, the conceptualization of human resource management and organizational behavior in the voice was not different (Donaghey et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2014). Nevertheless, in the 1990s, an interdisciplinary boundary was formed that effectively created a set of disciplines regarding the employee voice literature still evident today (Mowbray et al., 2015). From a human resource management perspective, McCabe and Levine (1992) can be credited with this categorization because they had primarily suggested that it was necessary to announce “voice” and “participation” in current employment and expand the concept of voice through the inclusion of participation beside complaints (Mowbray et al., 2015).

Allen(1984), on the other hand, shows that the early advances in human resource management in voice were made by Albert A. Hirschman (1970)’s definition of voice: “Any effort to change, rather than escape an unpleasant situation, either through an individual or collective request to management that is directly responsible; it can also be sought by requesting a higher authority to make management changes and also based on different measures or protests that might organize public opinion” (Hirschman, 1970; Mowbray et al., 2015). The concept of employee voice may also refer to a measure that can prepare the group of employees through communication with management, by the addition of this concept (Freeman & Medoff, 1984) and the potential to affect the decisions noticeably (Budd, 2004). This is defined as a reinforcing behavior that highlights constructive opposition requiring reform and improvement instead of emphasizing criticism (Kok et al., 2016). From a human resource management perspective, voice makes innovative proposals for amendment and recommends revisions to standard procedures, particularly if the others object (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

The development of the term employee voice and re-attention to this field was supported by the declining trend of unionism, the emergence and growing importance of human resource management in organizations, and individual voice agreements (Dundon & Gollan, 2007). It accelerated the emergence of new forms of employee voice in organizations. We can refer to self-governing teams, proposing plans and open-door policies, which were more

participatory (Donaghey et al., 2014). In this regard, human resource management researchers conceptualize the employee voice as two elements that include issues such as the employees' or unions' criticisms to management about occupational matters. It can result in the accumulation of dissatisfaction and contribution to the decision-making process by their representatives (McCabe & Lewin, 1992). In terms of human resource management, content and motivation for voice can be regarded as issues that might benefit or influence employees or the business, and the focus is on formal voice and the practice of official arrangements and mechanisms (Mowbray et al., 2015).

Human resource management is often defined as work relationship management and is, therefore, recognized as cross-disciplinary (Wilkinson et al., 2010). Thus, it can be said that voice is within a working relationship that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Morrison (2011) also excludes the findings of human resource management from his study and argues that human resource management does not conform to the way he conceptualizes the field of voice organizational behavior, i.e., voice behavior is optional (Mowbray et al., 2015). A recent study by Morrison (2014) confirmed factors related to the literature on human resource management, including the mechanisms of formal voice. Then, the author suggested that respective researchers take macro variables like economic conditions, labor market circumstances, or industry (Morrison, 2014).

In human resource management, employee voice focuses on employee involvement in the decision-making practice and improving employee outcomes and organizational consequences, e.g., satisfaction with the career and commitment to the organization (Pohler et al., 2020). There is also general agreement in human resource management since the employee voice is recognized as a scope to express oneself (Mowbray et al., 2015). As a result, employee voice in human resource management is often used interchangeably with employee engagement, participation, and commitment (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Van Dyne and LePine (1998) also found that the proposed definitions were dissimilar to the earlier descriptions of voice, particularly the definitions that were developed in the studies regarding human resource management because they described dissatisfaction and contribution in decision-making as well as legal processes (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Thus, this change created two separate streams of voice literature, namely, social-oriented voice and justice-oriented voice in organizational behavior. As a result, motivation for voice is different from participation, dissatisfaction, or organizational citizen behavior as it has led to such different conceptual currents in human resource management and organizational behavior (Mowbray et al., 2015). Voice refers to the flexible or formal expression of ideas, thoughts, suggestions, and alternate approaches concerning a particular target inside or outside of the organization, which intends to change an unpleasant state of affairs and expand the existing functioning of the organization or group (Rasheed et al., 2021).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the exploitation of these terms might indicate the extent of the employees' influence. This exchange of expressions created confusion concerning the employee voice concept in human resource management and has neutralized the construction of an integrated concept of employee voice. Therefore, its construction is much broader and more flexible than the construction of employee voice organizational behavior (Strauss, 2006). As a result, different approaches have been implemented in the HRM and OB disciplines regarding the studies on voice. In other words, HRM and OB disciplines have proposed distinctive descriptions for employee voice (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of Human Resource Management and Organizational Behavior Conceptualizations of Employee Voice

Concept	Human resource management	Organizational behavior
Form	System	Behavior
Motivation	Social-oriented dissatisfaction	Social-oriented Justice dissatisfaction
Expectations	Extra-role	Extra-role in role
Stakeholders	Organization employee	Organization
Mechanism	Formal	Informal
Content and kind	Participation in solving the aforementioned problem, complaints	Suggestions for changes and improvement, expressing work-related concerns which are inappropriate for the organization, linking and relating the different ideas with one another
Focus	Participating in decision-making	Unit/ Organizational improvement

*Adapted from Mowbray et al. (2015)

Nonetheless, a more management-oriented schema regarding political and economic changes can direct employee voice toward meeting the employer's objectives. Thus, this has encouraged scholars from both HRM and OB to consider the managerial view of voice (Mowbray et al., 2015). Finally, in human resource management, voice is regarded as the discretionary manifestation of attitudes, views, recommendations, or other approaches. They can pursue a particular goal inside or outside the organization in a state of protest to change and develop the existing performance of the organization, group, or individual (Bashshur & Oc, 2015). For this reason, human resource management researchers distinguish formal and informal voices. Informal voice is mainly studied in organizational behavior, and includes representing collective employees through occupation groups or non-union organizations like advisory boards or labor councils. Formal voice, primarily investigated in human resource management, highlights the mechanisms that seek employee participation; they should be widely used in task-based participation, protests about impartial behavior, and suggestions of necessary solutions (Marchington, 2007). Human resource management researchers have contributed to the study of organizational behavior, highlighting that managerial interactions occur in formal approaches and systems. They can also contribute to the feedback process if they attempt to develop an inquiry of the different goals.

Voice in Industrial Relations

Industrial relations practitioners and researchers have long been interested in employee participation and intervention, although the technical terms have had many definitions and concepts (Wilkinson et al., 2013). Since the late 19th century, studies on the broad areas of industrial relations have struggled to understand the impact of unions in promoting workplace inclusion through providing a representative voice (Townsend et al., 2020). Therefore, researchers believe that the concept of employee voice is highly changeable and can be used in various ways with different meanings for different groups (Hosseini et al., 2020a). The authors of industrial relations have used several specific terms that include participation and involvement as well as empowerment, engagement, and industrial democracy (Budd et al., 2010). However, employee voice has been expanded in industrial-organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and human resources (Kaufman, 2015). Nevertheless, Freeman and Medoff (1984) have established employee voice based on human resource management and industrial relations. They believed a voice mechanism is appropriate for both the employer and the employee. This mechanism has several advantages and disadvantages.

On the one hand, employee participation can positively affect quality and efficiency, while creating problems (Gollan & Wilkinson, 2007). In other words, Freeman and Medoff (1984) considered occupational unions as the paramount factor in providing the vote because these unions were independent of any interference from employers who wanted to determine the legitimacy of the vote themselves (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). As Benson (2000) points out, "A few reviewers argued that autonomous unions are the real source of sound."

Voice is also known to express interest and views in political systems (Kok et al., 2016). The political science literature, which often expresses voice as a legal aspect, links the voice concept to industrial citizenship, legal protection, or democratic humanism (Wilkinson et al., 2015). How employees express their views, expectations, and concerns about their working conditions is a critical issue in industrial relations, and considerable literature has been developed over the past decades (Kaufman, 2015). In the industrial relations literature, trade unions are more likely to capture employee voice regarding participation in productivity (Mowbray et al., 2015).

The concept of industrial democracy asserts that employee contribution is a paramount democratic right that enables employees to expand the measure to control decision-making of the organizational managers (Foley & Polanyi, 2006). Some people employ organizational democracy to describe a form beyond the individual voice as a mass communication channel (Harrison & Freeman, 2004). It also emphasizes the concept of freedom of expression and human dignity (Budd, 2004). Besides, labor democracy permits employees to promote their capabilities and values and play a more significant role in society (Foley & Polanyi, 2006). Therefore, industrial relations climate led to lower intention to leave by highlighting employee voice. On the other hand, intimidating industrial relations climate led to higher intention to quit emphasizing employee silence (Jiang & Yao, 2020).

Kaine (2020) examines Freeman and Madoff's theory, which expresses that collective voice can be sufficient due to the formation of unions, while in developed countries, the formation of such unions is entirely meaningless. Kaine argues that voice is considered by the union in terms of its reducing role of collective interaction, which is an instance of the collective voice. This means that the unions have been significantly adapted and transformed. While some scholars have criticized Freeman and Medoff's view of the power of collective unity as an old or ambiguous concept for introducing union (Hirsch, 2004), other forms of collective voice have changed and transcended boundaries. Collective interactions have emerged and addressed more employee issues and problems, including individual, workplace, industry, national, and international levels (Heery, 2009). In addition, Kaine (2020) states that what matters is the extent to which unions or employees achieve a certain level and framework for the voice. Thus, the union voice is too dynamic to go beyond the process of paying and complaining, safety, training, and learning in the workplace, and is among the many issues that Freeman and Medoff address (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Table 2 provides different explanations of IR and OB disciplines regarding employee voice.

Voice research in IR mainly concerns collective-level systems seeking employee input, which occur through formal mechanisms including unions, occupational councils, etc. On the other hand, the related research in OB concentrates on the individual-level systems of expressing opinions and is believed to occur through informal communications with supervisors and co-workers. As a result, studies in IR highlight the structural enablers and inhibitors to voice. On the other hand, OB research focuses on detecting individual (e.g., insights) and micro-level contextual (e.g., team environment) enablers and inhibitors. Moreover, it is reported that employees in OB consider their voice as of no importance for the organization, and they may even find it risky to voice their ideas (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Finally, in an economy in which trade union participation is meager and declining, and in an

economy (such as the Chinese economy) in which government-funded unions act as a bearing belt for national economic policy, employers believe that unions are more in line with business goals and support the goals of large corporations or national goals (Kok et al., 2016). Independent unions often participate in company-level negotiations hoping that both parties will benefit from these meetings (Rittau & Dundon, 2010).

Table 2. Comparison of Industrial Relations and Organizational Behavior Conceptualizations of Employee Voice

Concept	Industrial relationships	Organizational behavior
The first level of analysis	Comprehensive, integrated, and collective	Personal
Prime focus on analysis	Structures and voice systems	Voice as a behavioral action
How voice happens	Formal interaction	Informal interaction
Primary activators	Structural	Both personal and contextual
Basic focus on analysis	Union and non-union workers	All, e.g., experts and managers from average to top-level
Input	Employees' interest, complaint	Suggestions, ideas, opinions, information related to the problems
Motivation	Personal interests, correcting and improvement	Advertising and improving
Relating to employment	Opposing	Primarily illegal
Interests	Conflict and paradox	Full harmony
Who controls voice	Management	Employees
Why voice is important	Protecting employees, promoting democracy in the workplace	Improving the organizational effectiveness, preventing or correcting the wrong actions
Voice replacement	Output	Silence

* Adapted from Wilkinson et al. (2019)

Adverse Effects or Weak Points of Voice

Diverse elements, including the lack of managers' openness to voice, opposing occupational designs, employees' detachment, degrading recruitment procedures, discriminatory and influenced flow of information to workers, as well as perceiving employees' participation as the objectionable trouble for the organization can lead to the perception of the ineffectiveness of voice among employees (MacMahon et al., 2018). Moreover, some employees may decide not to share their ideas with managers since they would like to avoid opposing the superiors or engaging in occupational disagreement (Garg & Anand, 2020). Nonetheless, Sholekar and Shoghi (2017) argued that voice development might be hindered by the absence of proper organizational culture. Organizations should consider voice and silence as inseparable strategies. As a means of strategic interactions within an organization, organizational voice can help promote the institution. Despite several studies on employee voice, some studies still highlight employee silence in organizations due to conceptual misperceptions and constant uncertainties that hinder knowledge development (Wilkinson et al., 2021). In addition, the definitions, manifestation, and evaluation of organizational voice and silence can lead to employee silence (Cunha et al., 2019; Sherf et al., 2021).

Voice Conceptualization in Industrial Relations, Organizational Behavior, and Human Resource Management

In organizational science, employee voice is considered a behavior and not a concept or attitude (Ng & Feldman, 2012). According to research, voice is defined as the variable-oriented and structural communication to improve the situation (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). Introducing potential problems to the supervisor and offering cost-saving suggestions to managers are among the voice behaviors (Tajpour & Hosseini, 2021). If employees feel respected and their suggestions are being seriously considered, they feel free to express their views (Detert & Burris, 2007). In most studies done after Van Dyne and LePine (1998), research focuses on motivational aspects, backing organizational voice and discourse related to developing existing work processes or practices that support the organization (Kok et al., 2016).

Organizational behavior researchers put great emphasis on direct and informal voice, stating that “formal mechanisms for employees individually and collectively do not refer to cautious voice behavior and are not regarded as the source or effect of that behavior” (Morrison, 2011).

In contrast, industrial relations researchers focus on formal and indirect collective mechanisms and believe that it leads to the elimination of employee dissatisfaction (Hosseini et al., 2020b). They also state that employee voice refers to “Expressing individual dissatisfaction, collective expression of the organization, participation in managerial decisions and showing mutual relations and cooperation” (Dundon et al., 2004). The literature on industrial relations considers the purpose of voice to benefit employees, which addresses grievances and provides new ideas and suggestions for changes related to the existing sale in line with the interests of the company (Mowbray et al., 2015).

Eventually, human resource researchers have concentrated on formal and direct forms of voice, arguing that employee voice aims to propose opportunities for employees to strengthen their decision-making processes in occupational and organizational issues, including organizational performance and employee work experiences (Harley, 2020). Thus, human resource management has examined the employee voice from the perspective of systems, i.e., mechanisms and structures appropriate for managing employee contribution to the decision-making practice.

Methodology

Given that systematic literature review (SLR) is appropriate to associate the studies published concerning various disciplines, the authors employed a deep-rooted SLR approach in this study (Higgins et al., 2015). For this purpose and as outlined in Figure 1, Tranfield et al. (2003)’s guiding principles were used in order to help conduct a satisfactory systematic analysis of a body of related research on employee voice, which can considerably improve the validity, rigor, and generalizability of the outcomes compared to the conventional, ad hoc literature reviews (Wilson et al., 2017). At first, researchers determined the intentions of the research and the conceptual margins. The principal objective of this study was to analyze and appraise the existing literature on employee voice. In various management areas, it is intended to investigate themes and inclinations in the settings, methods, perceptions, and outcomes of the literature. Accordingly, an extensive series of disciplines and journals were examined. For this purpose, we decided to look through the most reliable and related journals by employing Academic Journal Guide (AJG), which has established a list of well-known journals in management and business in 2020 (Prouska & Kapsail, 2020). In addition, we searched through the journal lists in the Web of Science (WOS) database using pertinent keywords.

Given that employee voice covers diverse fields, the researchers decided to implement a comprehensive definition.

Although employee voice has different meanings and concepts, most definitions and concepts highlight that the purpose of voice is to convey a message from sender to receiver, which voluntarily seeks constructive and positive changes (Alfayad & Arif, 2017).

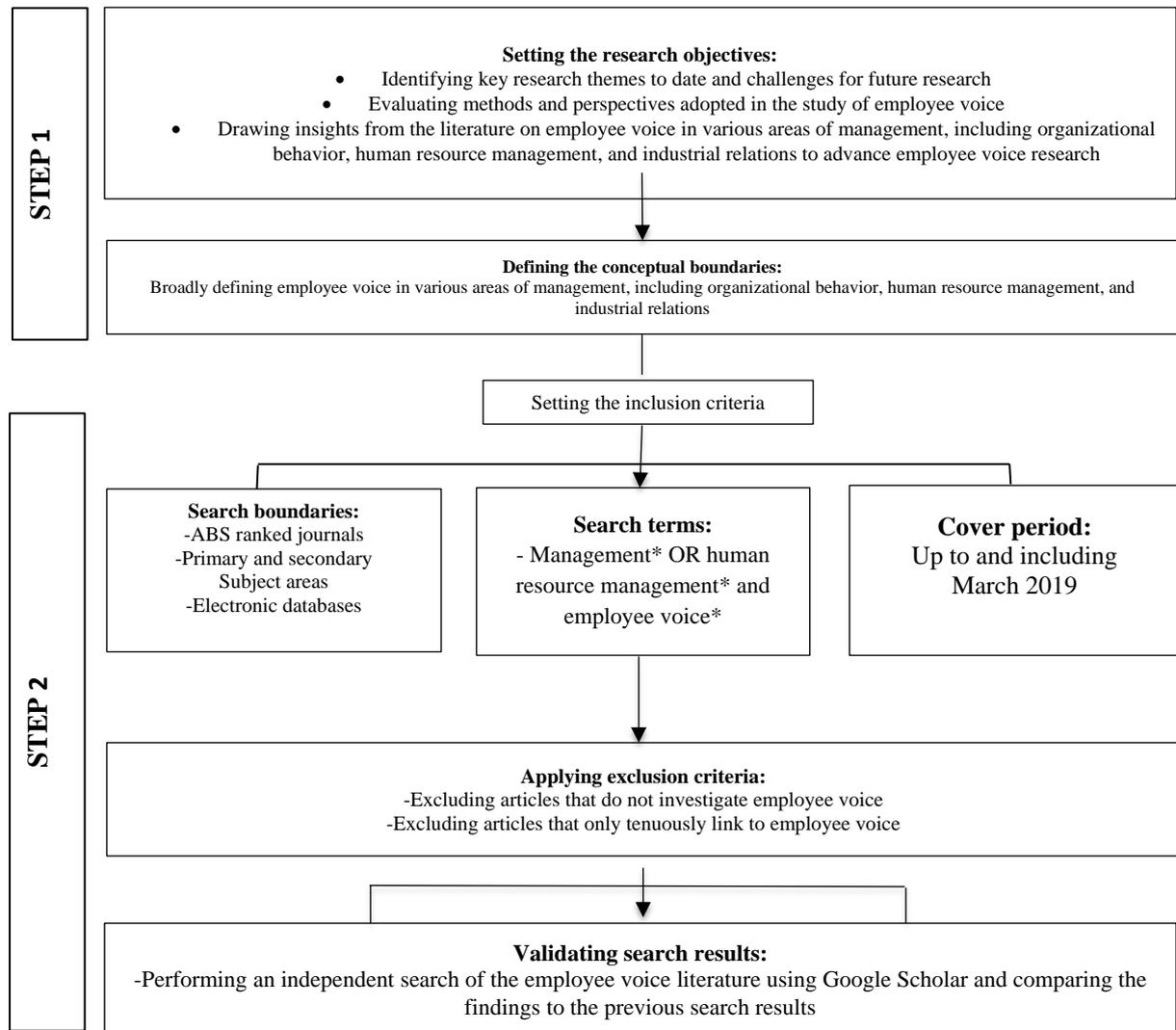


Figure 1. Steps in the Systematic Literature Review (Source: Authors' Elaboration)

Data Collection and Analysis

Step 1: first, the main research question was determined as “how is employee voice conceptualized from 1970 to 2019?” Then, research questions in systematic analysis were developed, beginning with asking questions about the identification of the nature of the research subject. Next, researchers tried to specify the scope of research within the study population, time range, and measurements, which is considered one of the strengths of systematic analyses. In addition to creating a comprehensive view, this helps the researcher conduct the study to pursue the research objectives within the research framework. The research questions were framed according to the framework (What), the methodology (How), the relationship between the variables (Why), the community (Who), time constraints (When), and the setting (Where).

Steps 2 and 3: Many inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted to seek relevant, accessible inquiries on employee voice in various areas of management, including organizational behavior, human resource management, and industrial relations.

The statistical population of this study included all scientific documents and databases in the field of employee voice from 1970 to 2019. In the sampling section, the most relevant studies were selected using the purposive sampling method (which ruled that the subject of the article should be related to the employee voice regarding the concepts of industrial relations, organizational behavior, and human resource management). In surveying the issue in this field, 49 studies were selected that directly elaborated employee voice discussed in various management areas. For this purpose, the following inclusion criteria were taken into account: full-text studies in academic journals, as well as empirical articles, provided that they were published in English language journals. On the other hand, we decided to exclude the book reviews, essays, conference proceedings, and unpublished dissertations. Besides, the journals whose language was not English were disregarded as well.

Step 4: The keywords of our research included employee voice, organizational voice, voice in organizational behavior, voice in human resource management, and voice in industrial relations. Articles were searched in Science Direct, Emerald, Sage, and some other databases. The credibility of the journals was also assessed by their indexing in the database (WOS) and based on a high impact factor, particularly an impact factor (IF) of higher than 0.5. To select the relevant articles based on the algorithm observed in Figure 2, it is evaluated as follow:

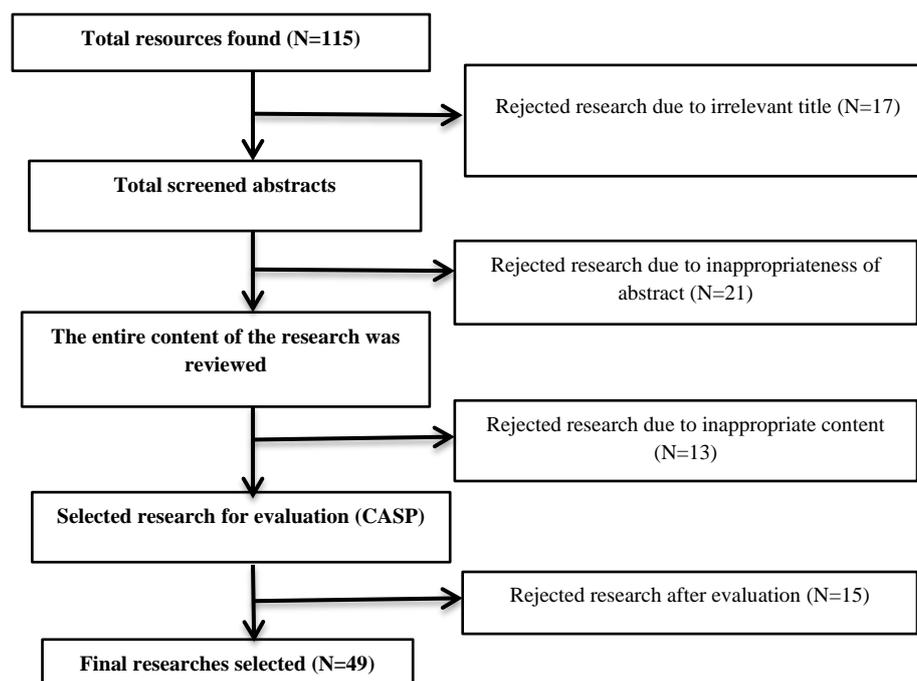


Figure 2. Algorithm for Selecting the Final Articles (Source: Authors' Elaboration)

Step 5: Upon further reviewing the articles, we prioritized those providing a perception of employee voice contract assessment and content. Following further examination, a final number of 49 relevant articles were obtained from 13 countries (see Table 4). These studies were published in 45 journals, mainly in the International Journal of Human Resource Management (n=9). Other related journals include the Human Resource Management (n=3), British Journal of Industrial Relations (n=3), and Academy Of Management Journal (n=7).

The overview of papers was independently screened by all the authors to ensure that we have included all pertinent articles in this study. As a result, 49 articles were selected

according to the assessments. Moreover, a subsequent search was conducted through scholar.google.com to endorse search results (Wilson et al., 2017) and minimize the risk of probable exclusion of related studies due to the rigidity of the review process. Table 3 includes the list of journals in which the selected articles in the final sample were published. Rather than limiting the search to management journals, this SLR screened through seven subject classifications that were expected to include employee voice research, including Employee Voice and Small Business Management, Voice and Social Behavior, and Human Relations and Voice.

Moreover, other related studies that were not obtained by this method have been identified and applied for analysis due to the review of target papers. Given that the present review has investigated a relatively small number of studies, it is regarded as a strength point because it paves the way for the thorough engagement of every study; therefore, it can lead to the detection of the desirable themes (Korsgaard, 2013). Baldacchino et al. (2015) claimed that even small sample sizes are enough for SLRs; Pret and Cogan(2019:601) believed that “it is crucial to include the topics pertinent to the field based on the rigor ... of the search criteria and also to identify the scientific quality of findings.” Consequently, the exploitation of firm selection criteria indicated that all the incorporated studies were related and had high quality.

Table 3. Subject Associated Journals that Have Published Employee Voice Research

Field: Source titles of journals	Record count	% of 49
International Journal of Human Resource Management	9	18%
Academy of Management Journal	7	14%
Human Resource Management	3	6%
British Journal of Industrial Relations	3	6%
Journal of Organizational Behavior	3	6%
Social Behavior and Personality	2	4%
Human Relations	2	4%
Human Resource Management Journal	2	4%
Journal of Industrial Relations	2	4%
Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	2	4%
Leadership Quarterly	1	2%
Personnel Review	1	2%
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	1	2%
Industrial Relations	1	2%
Business Ethics Quarterly	1	2%
Employee Relations	1	2%
European Journal of Industrial Relations	1	2%
Industrial Labor Relations Review	1	2%
Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations	1	2%
Chinese Management Studies	1	2%
Journal of Labor Research	1	2%
Journal of Management	1	2%
Journal of Management Development	1	2%
Journal of Organizational Behavior Management	1	2%

*Adapted from Web of Science in March 2020(Source: Authors' elaboration)

Both authors of the present study reviewed and coded the selected papers. These studies were first cataloged according to pre-determined categories, namely: (1) Names of the authors, (2) Publication year, (3) Journal title, (4) Perspective, (5) Key findings, (6) Industry, (7) Methods, and (8) Country context. The primary coding was performed to propose Table 4, which provides an overview of the sample. It is also noteworthy that there was an acceptable level of agreement between the raters (78%).

The main goals of elaborating on this kind of review technique were to pinpoint the potential gaps and extract the outlines within the available literature.

Results

The findings of the review are shown in this section. Firstly, it describes the overall patterns in the literature, such as research methods, publication distribution, as well as settings and standpoints. Secondly, the existing basic themes are discussed and organized, given their coverage (Table 4).

Table 4. A Summary of the Previous Studies About Employee Voice (Source: Authors' Elaboration)

NO.	The writer of the article and the year of publication	Perspective	Key finding	Main method	Country
1	Nechanska et al., 2020	HRM	This article studied OB, IR, and LP perspectives to develop a multi-level conceptual framework that HR audiences can practice to understand employee voice and silence.	Qualitative	Ireland
2	Belizón, 2019	IR	This article examines how employees express their opinions, expectations, and concerns about their working conditions	Quantitative	Spanish
3	Barry et al., 2018	HRM-OB	This article concludes that the concept of stupidity management prevents employees from expressing a dissenting voice, which results in inferior managerial communications and inadequate decision-making procedures.	Qualitative	Australia
4	McCloskey & McDonnell, 2018	HRM	According to the survey, it was shown that if the message is meaningless and straightforward, people will add their comments to it and reveal the content collected with their comments, and they cannot take advantage of the opportunity given to express comments.	Case Study	Ireland
5	Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018	OB	In the study of organizational behavior, employee voice is a vital issue because the challenges posed by global competition and rapidly changing organizational environments highlight the importance of organizational innovation, flexibility, productivity, and response to changing external conditions.	Quantitative	USA-Korea
6	Hu & Jiang, 2018	HRM	Findings suggest that organizations promote employee voice by implementing HR policies and practices that focus on employees' personal and family needs and consider employees' moral identity.	quantitative	China
7	Kok et al., 2016	HRM	Sharing employees' opinions, views, and interests on a particular topic is called the organizational voice.	Qualitative	Turkey
8	Barry & Wilkinson, 2016	OB	We argue that the OB conception of voice is at best partial because its definition of voice as an activity that benefits the organization leaves no room for considering voice as a means of challenging management, or indeed simply as being a vehicle for employee self-determination.	Qualitative	Australia
9	Kaufman, 2015	HRM-OB-IR	The structure of the organization determines the distribution, exercise of authority, power, and rights and responsibilities of subordinates. It also determines the interests in decision-making, the degree of influence and participation of employees, and the ethical values of the organization, as well as the ethical obligations of employees.	Qualitative	Australia
10	Mowbray et al., 2015	HRM-OB	It has identified the conceptual differences in employee voice in human resource management and organizational behavior.	Qualitative	Australia
11	Wilkinson et al., 2014	HRM	When employees show activity and are not like robots doing just a simple, repetitive task, it can be concluded that organizations are growing and evolving.	Qualitative	Australia
12	Wilkinson et al., 2014	IR	The concept of employee voice is highly variable and can be used differently with different meanings for different groups.	Qualitative	Australia

Publication Distribution

Researchers have examined employee voice for more than 42 years (see Figure 3). The primary articles assessed how employees voice in various areas of management, including OB, HRM, and IR. Although academicians have constantly examined the subject, this has not led to a discussion among the scholars. Along some other related articles, this study proved to substantially impact the existing discussions.

Hirschman (1970) is regarded as one of the pioneering studies on employee voice, which had a considerable impact on the existing literature. Moreover, the following articles were found to be the most frequently cited studies: (1) Hirschman (1970) with 28062 citations, (2) Dyne et al. (2003) with 1696 citations, (3) Morrison (2011) with 900 citations, (4) Dundon et al. (2004) with 452 citations, and (5) Hsiung (2012) with 313 citations. After the publication of such critical studies, there was growing attention to employee voice; besides, more than half of the selected papers were published within the last five years.

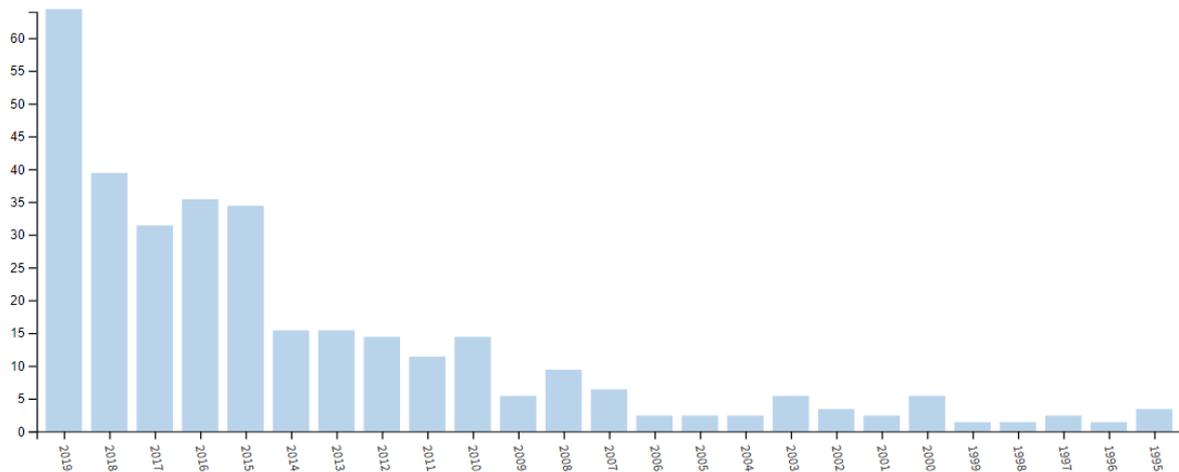


Figure 3. Employee Voice Publication Distribution

*Adapted from Web of Science in March 2020 for 1970-2019 Period (Source: Authors' elaboration)

As shown in Table 4, employee voice research has been published in several highly ranked journals, including the International Journal of Human Resource Management.

Research Methods and Approaches

The present systematic literature review (SLR) has led to the identification of several methodological approaches. Given the empirical nature of the selected articles on employee voice, it can be concluded that there is a lack of conceptual articles in the literature. According to Wilson et al. (2017), this is acceptable for emerging studies in different disciplines of social sciences; however, the related knowledge can only be developed through further theoretical analyses as well as conceptual guidelines. The findings of the present SLR indicated that the implementation of the qualitative approach ($n = 32$) is more common in the studies on employee voice than the quantitative approach ($n = 17$).

It is also noteworthy that all the selected qualitative studies have employed observation and a review of the related literature for data collection (e.g., Boxall et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2014). Furthermore, it can be concluded that only a few studies have used the focus group approach to collect data.

On the other hand, all the selected quantitative studies in this SLR have employed secondary data as well as single-point surveys for data collection (Hu & Jiang, 2018; McCloskey & McDonnell, 2018, respectively). In addition to further quantitative studies to enrich the related literature, the respective theoretical constructs have to be evaluated for their generalizability and reliability.

Given that researchers (n=7) are recently attracted to alternative paradigms (e.g., interpretivism and constructivism), it can be concluded that implementing a variety of paradigms in this area can lead to arguments and discussion, which might pave the way for fresh perceptions and theories.

Research Contexts and Perspectives

This systematic literature review was conducted on the articles that have investigated employee voice in different contexts. For instance, a great number of these studies were conducted in the US (n = 19), followed by Australia (n = 13), Europe (n = 9), and Asia (n = 8).

The findings also indicated that the majority of the selected articles (n = 27) had investigated the correlation of employee voice in different scenarios e.g., organizational behavior, human resources management, as well as industrial relations. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive studies to investigate different aspects of employee voice in more detail. It is also recommended that the researchers from other disciplines such as psychology, business, sociology, etc., reflect on and investigate the concept of employee voice.

Discussion

Examining the previous studies from 1970 to 2019 shows that scientists have felt the need to develop an integrated definition of employee voice that combines organizational behavior, human resource management, and industrial relations disciplines (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Mowbray et al., 2015). Thus, Wilkinson et al. (2014) described employee voice as “measures and means by which employees try to have something to say and possibly inspire organizational affairs work-related issues and define the interests of managers and owners effectively” (Guzman & Espejo, 2019: 81). Many researchers have recently highlighted the prominence of the perception of voice. According to the literature, employees assert that they can easily propose their ideas and concerns to the management. Consequently, they will develop positive perspective toward the organization and establish practical behaviors because they believe they can have an impact on decision-making activities (Ganjali & Rezaee, 2016). It can be concluded that the concept of voice connotes different meanings in management, which is due to the differences in the conceptualization and definitions of voice.

Regarding different concepts of voice in various disciplines, the authors of the present study concluded that such concepts are related to each other; hence, voice can be considered as the neutralizer of the effects of power on management performance or even as a part of a mutual benefit procedure. Besides, voice is regarded as a constructive behavior that can lead to organizational development. Organizations should promote their capabilities of creating scarce, invaluable, and irreplaceable resources to develop and implement their competitive advantage. Employee voice refers to a competitive advantage that is difficult to duplicate; hence, organizations would implement the concept of employee voice to make decisions, improve the employees' performance, and then resolve some management issues. These results are consistent with the findings of similar studies by McCloskey & McDonnell (2018), Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012), and Wilkinson et al. (2014).

Moreover, the concept of voice is implemented within IR, HRM, and OB domains to improve communications between target parties to enhance business processes and organizational performance. The findings of the present study also indicate that employee voice can be considered as a communicative strategy that might lead to the accomplishment of competitive advantage and constant development of the organizations where the employees are allowed to voice their ideas and opinions about their job. It is noteworthy that sharing ideas and experiences can cause a competitive advantage for the organization, which in turn develops collaboration. Personal image is shaped, voice is conceptualized, and particular identities are highlighted through interactions (Hosseini & Sabokro, 2021). In addition, motivational and ethical behaviors can form a bidirectional relationship to propose advantages to employees and managers (Budur, 2020). Therefore, it can have a positive impact on intra-organizational affairs such as employees' fulfilment, performance, and commitment (Budur & Porturak, 2021; Tajeddini, 2010). Such findings are in line with results of other related studies by Barry and Wilkinson (2016), Harrison and Freeman (2004), Morrison (2011), and Wilkinson et al. (2010, 2011).

Several studies have been conducted on voice in decision-making in different disciplines such as OB, HRM, and IR to assess whether employees express their voice or remain silent. Human resource management studies typically assume that the goal is to express opinions throughout the management. Therefore, it is crucial to take into account the concept of trust in management in order to be able to build a supportive environment for voice. For this purpose, managers should emphasize voice to encourage employees to help the organization obtain a competitive advantage (Tajpour, Hosseini, & Alizadeh, 2021). It is necessary to promote employees' trust, employ reliable managers, and provide appropriate infrastructure and context to create an environment of participation, motivation, and collaboration. This can lead to the achievement of organizational objectives. Besides, it is believed that employees can avoid a workplace characterized by suspicion and get involved in a variety of positive activities (Niazazari et al., 2016). Consequently, leaders and managers in organizations may identify such employees who demonstrate participatory manners. Therefore, the managers' behaviors are a critical factor that affects the employees' risk-taking regarding voice. This can also confirm findings of other studies (Kok et al., 2016; Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2014). The findings of this study have direct practical implications for economic and commercial impact on organizations. Results indicate that management inspires employee voice behavior leading to higher innovation in organizations. If managers and organizations promote and implement employee voice appropriately, it might result in improving and introducing new technologies and products, which will uplift innovation performance. Therefore, organizations must align the interests of their employees with the firm and its stakeholders to motivate them and provide a safe environment for them to share their voice. Managers should attempt to adjust their human resources management practices to elicit their employees' voice. This study highlights the concept of employee voice so that managers can understand employee motivation. It is therefore recommended that managers should help their employees become involved and share their knowledge and experiences. Accordingly, passionate employees' ideas and suggestions can contribute to the improvement of their organizations. Based on this, the conceptual framework of the research was designed by the authors of this study.

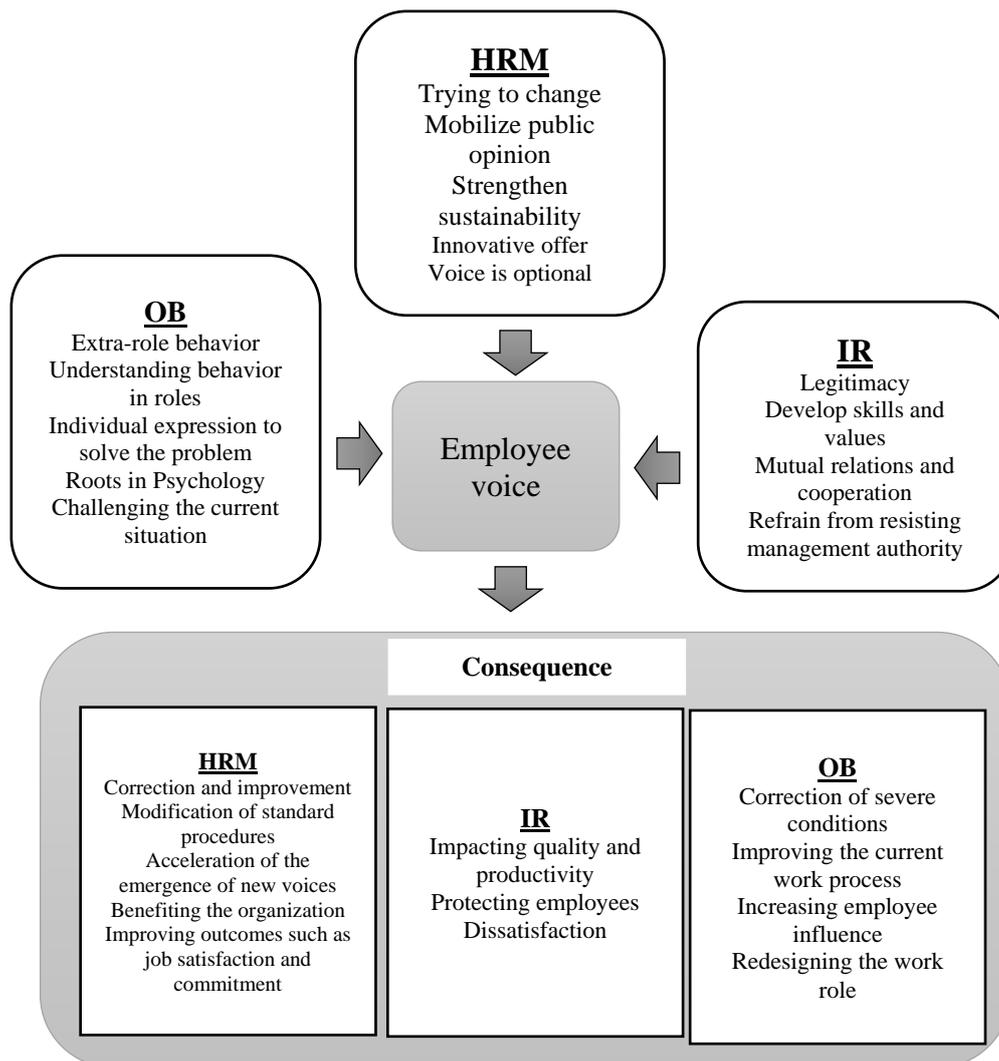


Figure 4. A Framework of Employee Voice in the Management (Source: Authors' Elaboration)

Conclusion

The literature on employee voice in management shows that there are some domains where researchers in human resource management and organizational behavior can complement each other in order to move toward a shared conceptualization of voice. According to the review of articles in various fields of management, researchers have concluded that informing and allowing employees to make work decisions can help make better decisions as well as reach greater understanding and commitment in organizations. In this regard, the researchers have investigated 49 articles within different management domains (e.g., human resources, industrial relations, and organizational behavior) published between 1970 and 2019. Compared to the concept of participation, employee “voice” might not convey a sense of involvement and effectiveness. Meanwhile, employees can propose and implement their ideas and suggestions through voice, as a means of communication within an organization.

Studies on voice can include various areas of research such as job approaches, working situations, procedures, and policies; they can be conducted within direct/indirect, individual/group, and formal/informal methods. Moreover, IR researchers have questioned studies in the OB domain in terms of conceptualizations (Wilkinson et al., 2019). They claimed that OB scholars have mainly focused on individual voice behaviors and have disregarded classical foundations of the concept (Kaufman, 2015). Most OB studies have

employed managers' interests and paid little attention to employees' conditions and their benefits (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). On the other hand, HRM studies emphasize voice as employees' legitimate right by which they can get involved in decision-making activities (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

It can also be concluded that employee voice provides voluntary, coordinated, consultative, and participatory opinions as a motivation for making constructive changes, constant improvement, and amendment through sharing knowledge and experiences that might lead to resolving managerial and organizational problems. This study also contributes to the existing literature by extending theoretical assumptions to establish that management characteristics (e.g., support, communication, and recognition,) significantly affect the development of employee voice behavior. It can, in turn, boost innovation in organizations. This study may also enrich the literature by explaining how voice behavior can help organizations achieve employee voice outcomes through knowledge-sharing behavior and competitive advantage.

Despite valuable contributions, employee voice literature would not be exempt from shortcomings. For instance, most studies on employee voice have highlighted organizational managers' power in prioritizing the concept of silence over voice through the institutional framework and developing agenda (Wilkinson et al., 2018). In this paper, however, different perspectives such as OB, HRM, and IR have been examined to provide an integrated perception of organizational voice within various disciplines, including human resources management, industrial relations, and organizational behavior. This study also provides some managerial implications that will help managers evolve employee voice in an organization. In the end, it is suggested to investigate the concept of voice in other disciplines such as economics, psychology, and political sciences in order to compare the respective results with the findings of the present study.

Practical Implications

This systematic review study contributes to the existing literature about organizational voice. Several studies have emphasized the role of organizational voice and its relationship with different management fields (e.g., OB, HRM, and IR). However, there is only a little theoretical knowledge about such a relationship in this dynamic field of study. This study aimed to fill this gap and enrich the related literature though acknowledging practical evidence on the association between these three management areas.

Findings of this study indicate that managers can build mutual trust by preparing the ground for employees to voice their ideas and suggestions as well as refraining from dogmatic decision-making. This can enhance their participation and sense of belonging, which can lead to employees' innovative behavior. Moreover, it is suggested that managers communicate information with their fellow employees to foster voice behavior. It is also recommended to establish interactive channels so that it can provoke discussions about specific occupations.

Finally, findings also demonstrate that managers are required to promote knowledge-sharing behavior and novelty among employees to enhance the implementation of employee voice. Consequently, organizational leaders should remain impartial to their fellow employees, build trust, and employ their authority so that they can benefit these employees.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the researchers attempted to conduct the perfect study based on their capabilities, this study might have limitations. For instance, it was suggested that the present study had developed an integrated and multidisciplinary definition for employee voice. However, since

the authors did not include any articles regarding psychology, anthropology, and sociology, it is not academic to consider the proposed definitions truly integrated. Moreover, this study has only investigated articles that are essentially published in English. On the other hand, it is believed that there are different approaches to the interpretation of employee voice based on various background factors, e.g., values and cultures. Even though the present study determined the importance of employee voice in the field of management, it is still unclear how to estimate employee voice and its contributions. At last, there are only a few studies regarding the impact of governance structures, while the present article detected an increasing inclination towards the significance of the mechanism.

In response to such limitations, the authors intend to suggest some issues to be investigated in the future. The future researchers might include a variety of factors within different disciplines to perform an inclusive analysis. Future studies can also improve the generalizability of our findings by reviewing the articles published in other languages. Moreover, we recommend the scholars perform similar studies on employee voice according to different economic, cultural, political, and social contexts to achieve proportionate twofold objectives. In the end, the authors might conduct a longitudinal study on a larger number of articles to indicate the multidimensional and complex nature of the studies on employee voice.

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