

When Employees Stop Talking and Start Fighting: The Detrimental Effects of Pseudo Voice in Organizations

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Abstract Many organizations offer their employees the opportunity to voice their opinions about work-related issues because of the positive consequences associated with offering such an opportunity. However, little attention has been given to the possibility that offering voice may have negative effects as well. We propose that negative consequences are particularly likely to occur when employees perceive the opportunity to voice opinions to be “pseudo voice”—voice opportunity given by managers who do not have the intention to actually consider employee input (i.e., managerial disregard). The effects of this kind of deception were examined by means of a survey among employees ($N = 137$) and managers ($N = 14$) of a Dutch healthcare organization. We hypothesized and found that perceived pseudo voice led to reduced voice behavior and, as a result, increased intragroup conflict. These results imply that while offering voice opportunity is mostly seen as an effective management strategy, negative effects are likely to occur when a manager is perceived to try to deceive employees by pretending to be interested in their points of view.

Keywords Deceit · Intragroup conflict · Pseudo voice · Voice behavior · Voice opportunity

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Many organizations provide their employees with the opportunity to present their views about work-related issues (Markey et al. 2001). This is often referred to as offering employees “voice opportunity” (Avery and Quinones 2002). The positive effects associated with offering voice opportunity are well documented and include increased feelings of fairness, trust, decision control, inclusion in the group, and respect (for overviews, see Lind and Tyler 1988; Miller and Monge 1986; Thibaut and Walker 1975). On the other hand, little attention has been given to the possibility that providing voice opportunity may also have *negative* effects, which probably is because negative voice effects are assumed to be quite rare (Lind and Tyler 1988). Recently, however, scholars have suggested that negative voice effects may not be as rare as previously thought (Potter 2006b; Sagie and Aycan 2003), although empirical evidence to back-up this claim is highly limited. Accordingly, for both the scientific community and practitioners (e.g., managers, decision makers) it is important to develop a better understanding of the conditions under which providing voice opportunity to employees is likely to backfire. The current research is a relevant first step in this regard.

In this paper, we argue that whether offering voice opportunity to employees has positive or negative effects depends on how employees perceive the motives of their manager to provide them with such an opportunity. More specifically, we propose that negative effects are likely to occur when a manager is perceived to try to deceive employees by pretending to be interested in their points of view. That is, the manager encourages employees to share their views about work-related issues without the intention to really consider their input. We refer to this combination of voice opportunity and managerial disregard as “pseudo voice”, implying autocracy covered with a mask of democracy (Sagie and Aycan 2003). Torka et al. (2008)

cite an operator from a textile printing factory who depicts pseudo voice as follows: “*It’s always been the same here that it’s already been agreed upon before they even ask your opinion. So, actually, it’s virtually all arranged and then you can come along and say what you think.*” (p. 151). Lind and Tyler (1988) and Potter (2006b) have referred to procedures that provide voice opportunity while the input is never really considered as “sham”.¹ Our goal is to demonstrate that perceived pseudo voice decreases voice behavior and, eventually, increases conflict within organizations, thereby demonstrating that providing voice opportunity to employees can indeed have significant negative effects.

The Ethics of Pseudo Voice

In organizational settings, pseudo voice is manifested in distinct forms. For instance, when ideas posted in suggestion boxes or the results of employee satisfaction surveys are ignored. The suggestion box is a popular management tool for offering voice opportunity but it could be quite susceptible to perceptions of pseudo voice. There is a myth that suggestion boxes are token gestures because organizations all too often ignore the suggestions delivered in these boxes (Opt 1998). Indeed, employees who suspect that their suggestions are not used, or not even considered, may easily start to believe that they are in fact offered pseudo voice. In a similar vein, employee satisfaction surveys may be seen as a form of pseudo voice when employees suspect that management only uses those results that suit them best.

Why would managers provide employees with an opportunity to voice opinions if they do not intend to actually regard their input? After all, offering voice opportunity may be costly in terms of both time and money (Milgrom and Roberts 1988). One reason why a manager could decide to offer pseudo voice is when he or she supports an autocratic leadership style whereas the organization requires a more democratic style. When offering voice opportunity is part of an organization’s ideology and requirements, managers simply have no choice but offering such an opportunity. However, in this case autocratic managers may be tempted to disregard the input of employees all the same. In a way, this manifestation of pseudo voice compares to what happened in communist countries where socialist ideology and legal requirements evoked voice opportunity but autocratic leaders disregarded it (e.g., Etzioni 1969; Heller 1971).

Although it seems that valuable time and money is wasted if employees are encouraged to voice their opinion while their input is actually not regarded, this is not necessarily true. That is to say, offering voice opportunity has proven to be an effective strategy to create feelings of fairness, decision control, inclusion in the group, and respect (Lind and Tyler 1988; Miller and Monge 1986; Thibaut and Walker 1975), which in turn fosters employees’ work motivation, job performance, group morale, trust, and policy acceptance (Chemers 2000; Lind and Tyler 1988; Miller and Monge 1986; Terwel et al. 2010). Indeed, this is why managers are often taught to consult subordinates and solicit their suggestions before making a decision. Important to note here is that managers may establish such positive outcomes by offering voice opportunity even if they do not have the intention to really consider the input, as long as employees do not perceive managers to disregard their input. Thus, offering pseudo voice is likely to positively affect the functioning of individual employees and, as a consequence, the organization as a whole when employees do not perceive that the voice opportunity offered to them is, in fact, a hoax.

In the end, it all boils down to whether or not employees *perceive* pseudo voice; they may perceive pseudo voice when it is absent by objective criteria, and vice versa (see Cohen 1989; Searle 1997). Although offering pseudo voice may have positive effects if it is not perceived as such, managers who engage in pseudo voice run the risk of being perceived as intentionally deceitful, with all its consequences. That is, they intentionally deceive employees by giving the false impression that their employees’ views and opinions matter and are seriously considered in an attempt to create illusions of fair treatment (i.e., “fabrications of justice”, Cohen 1989). In their study on perceived deceit during flights, Jehn and Scott (2008) proposed three forms of deceit: deceit of intention, deceit of belief, and deceit of emotions. One of the quotes reflecting perceived deceit of intention strongly connects to the concept of pseudo voice: “*They always say they’ll bring a pillow, and then never do. In fact, I bet they never intend to!*” (p. 334). In an organizational setting, this could be reframed as “*My manager often asks me what I think, but he never actually uses my ideas. In fact, I bet he never intends to!*”. We propose that it can be quite harmful when employees perceive that they are being intentionally deceived.

Pseudo Voice and Voice Behavior

Employees who suspect that their manager does not intend to regard their ideas, comments, and suggestions will not be very motivated to engage in voice behavior (intentionally expressing work-related ideas, information, and opinions; Van Dyne et al. 2003). If we return to the two

¹ We prefer the term “pseudo voice” over “sham” because it refers more specific to the voice situation. The word “sham” could refer to more general situations.

examples of pseudo voice that we gave earlier—the suggestion box and the employee satisfaction survey—it is reasonable to assume that employees who perceive pseudo voice decide to leave the suggestion box empty and choose not to complete the survey. Employees might experience feelings of unfairness and outrage when they suspect that the opportunity to voice opinion is a hoax (Cohen 1989). Such feelings may cause them to display destructive, rather than constructive, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) such as intentionally withholding ideas, information, and opinions. This phenomenon is also known as “employee silence” (see Morrison and Milliken 2000; Van Dyne et al. 2003).

Employee silence is potentially an important negative consequence of perceived pseudo voice. If employees withhold expressing their views on work-related issues, the organization does not benefit from their ideas and perhaps useful suggestions which, if considered, could help improve the organization’s performance. As research has thus far been relatively silent on the possibility that voice could also have negative effects (particularly likely in the case that pseudo voice is perceived), this paper focuses on perhaps the most basic yet important effect of pseudo voice, namely the effect on voice behavior. Based on the above reasoning, we hypothesize that more perceived pseudo voice leads to less voice behavior (Hypothesis 1).

Voice Behavior and Intragroup Conflict

Reduced voice behavior may harm organizations in different ways. For one, if employees do not speak up anymore, organizations cannot benefit from informational diversity which is often present within organizations (e.g., Jehn et al. 1999; Stasser 1992). Informational diversity refers to the presence of different perspectives and fields of expertise due to, for example, different types of education or work experience (e.g., Morrison and Milliken 2000). Informational diversity has the potential to positively influence group performance (Jehn et al. 1999) but “leaving the suggestion box empty” is equal to leaving the potential benefits of informational diversity untouched.

Perhaps, even more important than not taking advantage of informational diversity is the possibility that reduced voice behavior caused by perceived pseudo voice leads to increased intragroup conflict, which can be defined as the amount of tension and disagreements within a work group (Jehn 1995). Intragroup conflict has been identified as one of the main causes of organizational malfunctioning as it may lead to decreased employee performance and satisfaction (e.g., De Dreu and Weingart 2003; Jehn et al. 1999). Therefore, it is important to know whether there is an effect of reduced voice behavior (i.e., the proposed consequence of perceived pseudo voice) on intragroup conflict.

There are different psychological processes that may cause reduced voice behavior due to perceived pseudo voice to increase intragroup conflict. First, the negative feelings of deceit, unfairness, and outrage caused by the perception of pseudo voice are likely to create a negative organizational atmosphere. A negative atmosphere, which is characterized by negative attitudes (e.g., lowered interpersonal trust and commitment to the organization; Korsgaard et al. 1995) could cause counterproductive behavior (see Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001). Recent research shows that organizational illegitimacy (for instance in the form of offering pseudo voice) can initiate counterproductive work behavior. That is, in the mind of employees, organizational authorities’ lack of legitimacy deactivates the validity of formal organizational rules (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara 2010). In other words: “if the boss does not stick to the rules, I don’t stick to the rules”. Counterproductive behaviors such as sabotage, organizational and interpersonal aggression, or other forms of deviance (e.g., Spector 1978) could evoke conflict in the workgroup that causes group members to act aggressively toward each other.

Second, employees who perceive pseudo voice and consequently withhold their point of view cannot exert control over the decision-making outcomes. After all, they do not share their opinion with the decision maker. If employees feel that they cannot exert control through voice or other constructive means, they may attempt to regain control in ways that are destructive for the organization (see Morrison and Milliken 2000). However, employees might be reluctant to act out directly toward their manager (or higher management) out of fear of retaliation or of losing their jobs (e.g., Pelletier and Bligh 2008; Sims and Brinkman 2002). Instead, we expect them to direct their frustration at their coworkers rather than management and to try to control their group members, for instance by bossing them around, by showing nonco-operative behavior, or by starting a fight. This behavior represents a form of anger displacement—one of the defense mechanisms coined by Freud—explaining the shift of aggressive impulses to less threatening targets in order to avoid dealing directly with what is threatening (e.g., Balkwell 1990). Based on the above, we hypothesize that reduced voice behavior due to perceived pseudo voice increases intragroup conflict (Hypothesis 2).

Hypotheses and Model

We propose that employees intentionally withhold their opinions, ideas, or information when they perceive that their manager encourages them to share their views about work-related issues without his or hers intention to really regard their input (pseudo voice). We further propose that

intragroup conflict increases when employees withhold their opinion as a result of perceived pseudo voice. In short, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1 Perceived pseudo voice (the interaction of voice opportunity and managerial disregard) leads to reduced voice behavior.

Hypothesis 2 Reduced voice behavior due to perceived pseudo voice leads to increased intragroup conflict.

Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the proposed relationships.

Method

Procedure and Sample Characteristics

We tested our hypotheses in an organizational field study among employees from a Dutch multi-sited healthcare institution (“Company Care”). Top management invited 325 employees to complete a survey under the condition that responses were not retraceable to individual employees. The response rate was 42% ($N = 137$), which is comparable to the average response rate for organizational field studies (see Baruch and Holtom 2008; Cook et al. 2000). Employees with access to the internet completed a web-based version of the survey ($N = 76$), others completed a paper and pencil version ($N = 61$). The sample consisted of 121 females and 16 males between 16 and 60 years old ($M = 41.10$, $SD = 11.02$). On average, they worked for 11.35 years ($SD = 10.22$) at Company Care. Of the employees, 77% had completed vocational or higher education. The survey asked employees to rate voice opportunity, managerial disregard, voice behavior, and intragroup conflict (see the “Measures” section below).

To avoid common-method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003), we also invited 19 managers to complete a web-based survey about voice opportunity, managerial disregard, and intragroup conflict in the organization. The response rate of the managers was 74% ($N = 14$). The sample of managers consisted of six females and eight males between 37 and 60 years old ($M = 46.93$, $SD = 6.47$). On average, they worked for 14.34 years ($SD = 9.88$) at Company Care and

93% of them had completed vocational or higher education.

Measures

Voice Opportunity

Voice opportunity was assessed with three items based on the scale developed by Lam et al. (2002), $\alpha = 0.87$. An example of an item was “I get the opportunity to influence decisions affecting me” (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*).

Managerial Disregard

Managerial disregard was assessed with five items (reverse coded), $\alpha = 0.94$. Examples of items were “My manager regards our input for his/her decisions”, and “My manager uses the input for the benefit of the group” (1 = *totally disagree*; 7 = *totally agree*). Because we constructed a new scale to assess managerial disregard, we performed a pilot test prior to the study with 37 employees of a consultancy firm. The pilot test consisted of two extra items derived from the “behavioral integrity” scale (Simons et al. 2007): “There is a match between my manager’s words and actions” and “When my manager promises something, I can be certain that it will happen”. Factor analyses revealed that these two items loaded on a separate dimension and indeed measured behavioral integrity rather than managerial disregard, which is why we did not include them in the final assessment.

Voice Behavior

Voice behavior was assessed with seven items based on Van Dyne and LePine (1998), $\alpha = 0.93$. Examples of items included “Do you speak up with ideas?” and “Do you make recommendations concerning issues that affect your team?” (1 = *never*; 7 = *always*).

Intragroup Conflict

Intragroup conflict was assessed with six items based on work by Jehn (1995),² $\alpha = 0.87$. Examples of items include “How many disagreements about work-related issues are there in your work team?” and “How much friction is there about personal, non work-related issues in your team?” (1 = *very little*; 7 = *very much*).

² Jehn (1995) distinguishes two types of conflict: task conflict and relationship conflict. In our study, these two types of conflict were strongly correlated ($r = 0.66$) and represented one factor in principal component analysis, which is why we do not make this distinction here.

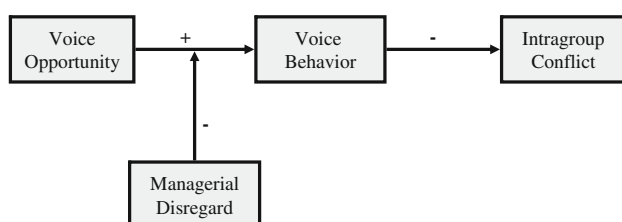


Fig. 1 Hypothesized model

Manager Ratings

As Avery and Quinones (2002) noted, objective levels of voice opportunity may differ from perceived voice opportunity (and this holds true for managerial disregard and intragroup conflict as well). Therefore, we asked managers' identical questions about voice opportunity, managerial disregard, and intragroup conflict, and checked whether their ratings were comparable to the employee ratings.

Results

We compared employee and manager ratings of voice opportunity, managerial disregard, and intragroup conflict because similarity would increase our confidence about the reliability of the employee ratings. Ratings of managers and employees appeared quite consistent. First, manager ratings of voice opportunity ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 0.72$) were similar to the employee ratings ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.01$), $F(1, 149) = 0.15$, $P = 0.699$. Second, results concerning managerial disregard showed that managers rated managerial disregard a bit higher ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.55$) than the employees did ($M = 2.08$, $SD = 0.76$), $F(1, 148) = 4.15$, $P = 0.043$. Apparently, employees did not perceive as much pseudo voice as there was objectively. Finally, managers ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.71$) and employees ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.89$) reported equal levels of intragroup conflict, $F(1, 149) = 0.04$, $P = 0.848$.

Our hypotheses and the resulting model (Fig. 1) imply a conditional indirect effect, also known as moderated mediation. We tested the proposed model by means of hierarchical regression analysis (Muller et al. 2005; Aiken and West 1991) and bootstrapping (Preacher et al. 2007). All regressions controlled for the effects of education and organizational tenure, since employees reported significantly more voice behavior when they were better educated ($r = 0.26$, $P < 0.01$) and worked longer for Company Care ($r = 0.18$, $P < 0.05$), see Table 1.

First, we tested whether perceived pseudo voice led to reduced voice behavior. We ran regression analysis with pseudo voice (i.e. the interaction term between voice opportunity and managerial disregard) as the independent variable and voice behavior as the dependent variable, controlling for the main effects of voice opportunity and managerial disregard. As shown in Table 2, column 1, we found a significant negative effect of perceived pseudo voice on voice behavior ($B = -0.21$, $P = 0.015$), confirming Hypothesis 1.

Second, we tested whether less voice behavior led to more intragroup conflict within the organization. We ran regression analysis with voice behavior as the independent variable and intragroup conflict as the dependent variable, controlling for the effect of voice opportunity. As shown in Table 2, column 2, we observed a significant effect of voice behavior on intragroup conflict ($B = -0.29$, $P < 0.001$), confirming Hypothesis 2.

Mediation

As schematically represented in Fig. 1, we proposed that voice behavior mediates the direct effect of voice opportunity on intragroup conflict. We performed hierarchical regression analysis to test the relationship between voice opportunity and intragroup conflict. The results showed a significant negative effect of voice opportunity on intragroup conflict ($B = -0.27$, $P = 0.001$), see Table 2, column 3. This negative effect implicates that reduced voice opportunity leads to increased intragroup conflict. To establish mediation, an effect of voice opportunity on voice behavior (i.e., the proposed mediator) is required. This effect appeared to be significant as well ($B = 0.30$, $P = 0.001$), as shown in Table 2, column 1. Mediation also requires an effect of voice behavior on intragroup conflict (corrected for the effect of voice opportunity). As shown previously, the second column in Table 2 shows a significant negative effect ($B = -0.29$, $P < 0.001$). The final requirement for mediation is that the effect of independent variable (i.e., voice opportunity) on the dependent variable

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
Education level (1 = low/7 = high)	4.99	1.13						
Organizational tenure (in years)	11.43	10.22	-0.144					
Voice opportunity	5.10	1.01	0.253**	0.046	(0.87)			
Managerial disregard	2.08	0.76	0.038	0.072	-0.423**	(0.94)		
Voice behavior	4.76	1.01	0.256**	0.176*	0.357**	-0.187*	(0.93)	
Intragroup conflict	2.48	0.89	-0.063	0.075	-0.357**	0.272**	-0.378**	(0.89)

Note: The numbers in parentheses on the diagonal are α coefficients
 $N = 136$, * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$

Table 2 Hierarchical regressions of voice opportunity, managerial disregard, and pseudo voice on voice behavior and intragroup conflict

Variables	Column 1 DV = Voice behavior	Column 2 DV = Intragroup conflict (including the effect of voice behavior)	Column 3 DV = Intragroup conflict (excluding the effect of voice behavior)
Education level	0.20**	0.08	0.02
Organizational tenure	0.02**	0.01	0.01
Voice opportunity	0.30**	-0.20*	-0.27**
Managerial disregard	-0.26*	0.12	0.16
Pseudo voice (VO × MD)	-0.21*		
Voice behavior		-0.29**	
R ²	0.24	0.24	0.15
R ² change	0.04*	0.07**	0.14**

Unstandardized coefficients (*B*) are reported

N = 136, * *P* < 0.05, ** *P* < 0.01

(i.e., intragroup conflict) disappears or is significantly reduced when taking the effect of voice behavior into account. As predicted, the effect of voice opportunity on intragroup conflict was significantly reduced after controlling for the effect of voice behavior (Sobel $z = -2.76$, $P = 0.014$), although the direct effect remained statistically significant ($B = -0.20$, $P = 0.014$), see Table 2, column 2. These results indicate partial mediation.

Moderated Mediation

Besides performing hierarchical regression analysis, we performed bootstrapping using the method of Preacher et al. (2007). Bootstrapping provides a method for probing the significance of conditional indirect effects at different values of the moderator variable. We examined the conditional indirect effect of voice opportunity on intragroup conflict (through voice behavior) at three values of managerial disregard: the mean (2.08), one standard deviation above the mean (2.83), and one standard deviation below the mean (1.32). Normal-theory tests indicated a significant conditional indirect effect at the mean ($P = 0.019$) and at one standard deviation below the mean ($P = 0.013$). We also computed conditional indirect effects at various arbitrary values of managerial disregard to identify the regions of significance; the values of managerial disregard for which the conditional indirect effect is just statistically significant at $P = 0.05$. Results demonstrated that the

conditional indirect effect was significant for any value of managerial disregard smaller than or equal to 2.47. Thus, consistent with our reasoning, the results obtained by bootstrapping showed that the indirect effect of voice opportunity on intragroup conflict through voice behavior was conditional upon levels of managerial disregard.

In sum, our findings support the model proposed in Fig. 1. Employees who received the opportunity to voice their opinion and who perceived their manager to regard their input showed more voice behavior and encountered less intragroup conflict than employees who received the opportunity to voice their opinion but perceived their manager to *disregard* their input (the interaction we refer to as pseudo voice).

Discussion

For managers, decision making about work-related issues is an important and recurrent task. Managers are often confronted with the choice to make a decision in an autocratic way (i.e., unilateral decision making) or democratic way (after consultation of their employees). They are often taught to solicit their employees' suggestions before making decisions because democratic leadership is associated with positive outcomes such as enhanced employee work motivation, job performance, and group morale (e.g., Chemers 2000; Lind and Tyler 1988; Miller and Monge 1986). Although positive effects of voice opportunity are quite robust and well documented, thus far little scientific attention has been paid to the possibility that offering voice opportunity to employees also can have negative effects.

The current research demonstrates that offering voice opportunity has negative effects when employees perceive to be offered pseudo voice—an illusion of influence that occurs because the manager does not have the intention to really regard the input. While scholars have theorized about the concept of pseudo voice (Sagie and Aycan 2003; Torka et al. 2008) and have illustrated its existence in an organizational context by means of qualitative data (Potter 2006a), our study shows empirically that employees who perceive pseudo voice are more likely to withdraw from voicing their input and, as a result, encounter more intragroup conflict. These insights are important to both theory and practice.

Our work makes an important contribution to voice literature by showing the relationship between perceived pseudo voice and voice behavior (i.e., intentionally expressing work-related ideas, information, and opinions; Van Dyne et al. 2003). Several factors were already known to influence voice behavior (e.g., Lam et al. 2002; LePine and Van Dyne 1998) but it was not yet known that perceived pseudo voice decreases voice behavior.

Furthermore, the current research contributes to conflict literature by showing that voice behavior is a predictor of intragroup conflict within organizations. Conflict researchers have proposed many predictors of conflict including group value consensus, group atmosphere, and group diversity (e.g. Jehn and Mannix 2001; Jehn et al. 1999); however, to date, voice behavior has not been examined as a possible determinant of intragroup conflict. We hypothesized and found that employees who were given the opportunity to voice their opinion and also perceived their manager to regard their input tended to engage in more voice behavior and to encounter less intragroup conflict than those employees who received the opportunity to voice their opinion but at the same time suspected their manager to *disregard* their input (i.e., pseudo voice).

The current findings concerning managerial disregard are in line with research by Bryson et al. (2006) on the effects of managerial responsiveness. They observed a relationship between employee perceptions of managerial responsiveness and managerial perceptions of productivity, implying that more responsive management improves productivity. This reasoning connects to our finding that responsive management (i.e., management that regards employee input after soliciting for it) increases voice behavior and reduces feelings of intragroup conflict, as compared to managers who disregard employee input after soliciting for it. Accordingly, we can only agree with Bryson et al.'s advice that policy interventions should be focused at how to motivate managers to become more responsive to their employees.

Practitioners (e.g., managers, decision makers) could benefit from the current research, as it provides a better understanding of the conditions under which offering voice opportunity to employees is likely to backfire. Allowing employees the opportunity to voice their opinion is likely to backfire when the decision maker is actually perceived as trying to deceive employees by pretending to be interested in their points of view. Importantly, negative effects of pseudo voice largely depend on perceptions of insincerity, as it all boils down to whether or not employees *perceive* pseudo voice. Employees may perceive pseudo voice when it is absent and vice versa (see Cohen 1989; Searle 1997). For this reason (and to be more confident about the validity of the self-reported data), we also surveyed the employees' managers, which allowed us to assess whether employees and managers perceived pseudo voice differently. We found that managers reported to disregard their employees' input even a bit more often than employees suspected. Apparently, employees did not perceive as much pseudo voice as there was objectively. In other words, employees were more frequently deceived than they thought. This implies that this study had provided a conservative estimate of the effects of pseudo voice.

From another perspective, this difference in perception also indicates that there is at least some room for managers to deceive their employees by unobtrusively using pseudo voice. If a manager succeeds in offering employees an illusion of influence without being noticed, the organization benefits from the positive effects of voice opportunity, and offering pseudo voice would be a successful strategy. Recent literature provides examples of managers that might deceive their employees by unobtrusively using pseudo voice. These managers represent different dimensions of the "dark triad" of personality: destructive narcissism, corporate psychopathology, and Machiavellianism (see Amernic and Craig 2010). We think that these managers are all likely to pretend to be interested in their employees' views on work-related issues without regarding the input (e.g., Amernic and Craig 2010; Boddy et al. 2010; Nelson and Gilbertson 1991).

Destructive narcissistic managers—in contrast to constructive narcissistic managers—can be described as exhibitionistic managers with inflated self-views who are fixated on power and prestige (see Amernic and Craig 2010). They may pretend to be interested in their employees' views because they have a strong need to be surrounded by followers (Amernic and Craig 2010). At the same time, destructive narcissists are likely to disregard their employees' views—especially when these views are not in line with their own—because they think they know best about what to do, are intolerant of criticism, and are unwilling to compromise (e.g., Amernic and Craig 2010; Duchon and Drake 2009). As such, destructive narcissistic managers are likely to use pseudo voice.

Corporate psychopathic managers can be described as managers who have no conscience and no ability to feel any empathy or commitment for those who report on them (e.g., Boddy et al. 2010). However, these managers are often seen as successful (see Boddy et al. 2010). Corporate psychopathic managers may create the illusion of democracy because they want to keep up the appearance of the successful, popular manager, and a democratic leadership style fits that. However, for corporate psychopaths "there is nothing they won't do, and no one they won't exploit, to get what they want" (Morse 2004, p. 20), and they probably have no problems with deceiving their employees because of their inability to feel any empathy or commitment to them. Thus, corporate psychopaths may be able to give their employees the opportunity to voice their opinion but disregard their input at the same time.

Finally, Machiavellian managers can be described as managers who are manipulative and who want to win at all costs (e.g., Nelson and Gilbertson 1991; Tang and Chen 2008). Machiavellians may encourage employees to voice their opinion as they tend to say things that others want to hear and often use impression management tactics to create

a favorable image (e.g., Nelson and Gilbertson 1991). However, they are in fact mainly concerned with their personal agendas rather than the common good (e.g., Cyriac and Dharmaraj 1994; Fraedrich et al. 1989; Nelson and Gilbertson 1991; Rayburn and Rayburn 1996; Tang and Chen 2008). Thus, Machiavellian managers are capable of offering voice opportunity without the intention to regard their employees' opinions. In sum, destructive narcissists, corporate psychopaths, and Machiavellians may typically be the type of managers to use pseudo voice as a strategy to impose their own views while giving the impression of providing voice opportunity. Future research could aim to discover whether this is true or not.

However, even if managers are willing to engage in such unethical behavior—use pseudo voice as a strategy to impose their own views—and succeed in eliciting the positive effects of voice opportunity, this success will probably be only short lived. That is, if managers keep on offering pseudo voice, it is likely that their employees will soon notice that their input is not regarded, and the accompanying negative feelings will undo the positive effects of voice opportunity. As a result, employees are more likely to suspect pseudo voice in future situations; they recall that their input was disregarded in the past and will expect this to happen each time they are offered voice. Thus, offering pseudo voice may be an effective management strategy in once-only decision making but is unlikely to remain effective in recurrent decision making. Worse still, it could easily backfire and have negative consequences such as reduced voice behavior and increased conflict.

Employees may also suspect pseudo voice when there is none—people perceive lies when none have actually occurred (Elaad 2003). Indeed, in their study on perceived deceit during flights Jehn and Scott (2008) found that even though the aircrew was telling the truth, many passengers suspected to be lied to. Employees may perceive pseudo voice particularly when managers do not provide proper feedback how employee input has been used. Without such feedback, employees do not learn that their input was used. Therefore, managers should only give voice opportunity when they are able to convince their employees that they have the intention to regard their input and are also able to show how they used this input. In other words: do not install a suggestion box if you have no intention to regard the suggestions.

However, we like to stress the fact that providing voice opportunity has positive effects when the input is regarded (and this is perceived as such). Providing voice opportunity creates positive feelings among employees and is likely to positively affect the functioning of individual employees and thus the organization as a whole (e.g., Lind and Tyler 1988; Miller and Monge 1986; Thibaut and Walker 1975).

Therefore, we do not want to advise against democracy, we only advise against autocracy covered with a mask of democracy.

Our research is among the first empirical studies to examine the possibility that there may be negative effects associated with offering voice opportunity, which is why we have chosen to focus on perhaps the most basic effect of perceived pseudo voice, namely its effect on voice behavior. We made some assumptions about the psychological processes underlying the effects observed with regard to voice behavior and intragroup conflict. For instance, we suggested that feelings of deceit, unfairness, and outrage cause employees who perceive pseudo voice to show less voice behavior. Furthermore, we reasoned that the accompanying negative organizational atmosphere and felt lack of control would instigate intragroup conflict. Further research is needed to examine whether these psychological processes indeed account for the effects observed.

Although we surveyed employees with different tasks and from different backgrounds, our sample was limited to one organization: a health care organization in a democratic country. We do not expect that the current findings only apply to this specific organization or that pseudo voice is an issue that is only relevant to the healthcare branch. However, it would be interesting to see how people in countries with communist and/or dictatorial regimes react to pseudo voice. As stated earlier, communist countries differ from democratic countries in that their socialist ideology and legal requirements could evoke voice opportunity, but autocratic leaders may disregard it (e.g., Etzioni 1969; Heller 1971). Democratic countries like the Netherlands, where the current research was conducted, are well-known for their voice culture. The Netherlands even have a name for it, the “poldermodel”.³ Since voice is such an important part of daily organizational practice in democratic countries, it could be that people in democratic countries are more susceptible to pseudo voice, or perceive pseudo voice more easily than in communist countries. Future research could be aimed at researching the influence of political culture on perceptions of pseudo voice.

Conclusion

The positive effects associated with giving employees the opportunity to express their views and voice their opinions to management are well documented, but little attention

³ A popular explanation of the “poldermodel” is based on the situation that a large part of the Netherlands consists of “polders”; low-lying land that has been reclaimed from a body of water. Ever since the Middle Ages, leaders from competing cities in the same polder were forced to share their ideas to maintain the land, and avoid being flooded.

has been given to the potential negative effects of offering voice opportunity. The current research shows that offering voice opportunity to employees may indeed have negative effects, in particular in the case that employees suspect their manager to pretend to be interested in their input without the intention to actually regard it. This type of managerial insincerity is a form of deceit which we refer to as offering “pseudo voice”. Perceived pseudo voice leads to reduced voice behavior and increased intragroup conflict, as compared to the situation in which managers ask people to voice their opinions and do consider what people have to say. In other words, when employees perceive pseudo voice, they stop talking and start fighting.

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