Amplifying Unheard Voices

Towards Inclusive Innovation and Development

Floris van der Marel
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An increasingly diverse engineering workforce supports innovation and creativity. However, whether diversity translates to improved organisational performance depends on whether employees are able to voice issues and ideas. Voice is conceptualised as employees’ ability to speak up and be heard. While much research has been done by industrial relations, human resource management, and organisational behaviour scholars, their different ontological assumptions have made it difficult to integrate the learnings. As such, much is still unknown about how socio-organisational factors influence employee voice, particularly in a more diverse workforce. Building on existing literature, I argue that motivation at work and assessment of voice opportunities are key indicators of employees’ resolution to voice or not. Both work motivation and voice opportunity assessment are influenced by collaborative sensemaking and former voicing attempts. In this dissertation, I dive deeper into the nuances and intricacies that influence diverse employees’ experiences in creative contexts. Based on semi-structured interviews with 130 designers, engineers, and hospital employees targeting job motivation and voice opportunity assessments, I identify patterns across different contexts that might apply to other contexts worldwide. One study applies an action research approach, teaching design to the hospital employees to shed light on changed perceptions and frames as a result of a participatory design intervention. Each study highlights the highly social context of creativity and innovation, influenced by continuous interactions with people around them. Indeed, my results suggest that both motivation and voice opportunity assessment were influenced by stubborn beliefs present in collaborative sensemaking, disproportionately impacting historically unheard voices. Additionally, spirals of silence might hinder attempts to amplify unheard voices due to ingrained silence as a result of previous failed attempts by employees similar to them. In conclusion, I argue that more attention should be paid to the role of collaborative sensemaking in employee voice in order to leverage diverse voices toward inclusive innovation and development.
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List of Publications

This doctoral dissertation consists of a summary and discussion of the following publications which are referred to in the text by their numerals.


Author’s Contribution

**Publication 1:** Meaningful moments at work: frames evoked by in-house and consultancy designers

Van der Marel is the shared first author with authors listed in alphabetical order. Björklund and the Aalto research team were responsible for the study design and data collection. Van der Marel and Björklund equally contributed to the conceptualisation of the theoretical framework and the execution of the data analysis. Van der Marel prepared the first draft of the results section and the full article together with Björklund.

**Publication 2:** Moments that matter: Early-career experiences of diverse engineers on different career pathways

Van der Marel is the first author of this publication. Björklund, Sheppard, and the Stanford research team were responsible for the study design and data collection. Van der Marel developed the theoretical framework with support from Björklund. Van der Marel had a leading role in the data analysis with support from Björklund and Sheppard. Van der Marel prepared the first draft of the manuscript and led revisions with input from Björklund and Sheppard.

**Publication 3:** Mind the gap: Comparing desk and frontline employees’ voice tendencies in participatory design

Van der Marel was solely responsible for this manuscript and the surrounding study from start to finish. Van der Marel conceptualised the study, collected the data, developed the theoretical framework, conducted the data analysis, and prepared the manuscript. Aalto research team members’ and reviewers’ comments led to refined arguments and strengthened analysis.

**Publication 4:** How participatory design influences issue framing: a hospital case study

Van der Marel was solely responsible for this manuscript and the surrounding study from start to finish. Van der Marel conceptualised the study, collected the data, developed the theoretical framework, conducted the data analysis, and prepared the manuscript. Aalto research team members’ and reviewers’ comments led to refined arguments and strengthened analysis.
1. Introduction

The engineering workforce is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of demographics. While this is good news from an inclusion or ethics perspective, it also makes business sense. For example, gender diversity increases innovation (Østergaard et al., 2011) and racial diversity development (Díaz-García et al., 2013). Indeed, a more diverse workforce increases organisational creativity, diligence, and productivity (Phillips et al., 2014). The positive effects of diverse and inclusive organisations can be seen across organisational rank, from recent graduates who carry new knowledge and ideas enhancing an organisation’s innovation capacity (Wang & Zatzick, 2019) to leadership that is diverse in gender and race contributing to financial gains (Phillips et al., 2014; Richard, 2000). Indeed, when people with different backgrounds and experiences come together, they generate more original and impactful ideas than groups with similar perspectives (Phillips et al., 2014; Stahl et al., 2010).

However, work environments’ socially situated nature is gendered (Kuschel et al., 2020; Russell & Weigold, 2020) and racialised (Dietz et al., 2019; A. E. Smith et al., 2021). Despite numerous attempts in organisations to draw from a more diverse set of knowledge and experiences to create solutions for today’s wicked problems, we still live in a world systemically silencing certain groups of people, undervaluing other ways of understanding, expressing, attributing value, and assessing meaning. Conventional structures continue to prevail pervasively due to an imbalanced exercise of power by those who get to partake through their positionality and its many implications. Diversity can initially be uncomfortable, resulting in reduced trust and togetherness, translating to rockier interactions and perceived or intended disrespect (Phillips et al., 2014). Underrepresented groups might quickly be categorised as ‘dissimilar’ to the majority, i.e. as part of the outgroup, in a process called social categorisation (Faems & Subramanian, 2013). Since outgrouping can hinder information exchange within teams (Schubert & Tavassoli, 2020) and weaken relationships with supervisors and colleagues (Ibarra, 1993; Sabat et al., 2021; L. Zhang et al., 2020), diverse employees are less likely to be equally responded to and might be less aware, experience less self-efficacy, and feel less motivated. Indeed, social dynamics influence whether people are heard and succeed in professional environments (Hess et al., 2016). This perseveres because many work environments suffer from persisting biases in hiring practices, both intentionally and subconsciously (Quillian et al., 2017), and many norms and policies prescribing ‘correct’ ways of working or expressing are also historically
biased. Indeed, existing norms and practices are tailored more to empowering and caring for White men, who have dominated hardware and software development worldwide. Flourishing creativity requires leveraging diversity, for which an organisational culture must be innovative and supportive for all talent (Andriopoulos, 2001).

Employee voice is critical in shaping an open and innovative culture, essential for organisational success (Amabile, 1998). While definitions change across disciplines and over time, employee voice describes how employees speak up to impact the organisational context (Huang et al., 2023). Employee voice requires, among other things, awareness of issues, having ideas, status, self-efficacy, and perceived organisational fit, and is dependent on various forms of positive leadership, such as helping behaviour and responsiveness (Morrison, 2023). Increased employee voice positively impacts overall creativity (Zhu et al., 2018), engagement, efficiency, and effectiveness (Mohammad et al., 2023), as well as retention (Jiang et al., 2023). Job satisfaction is both a voice requirement (Morrison, 2023) and outcome (Jiang et al., 2023). Indeed, voice increases an organisation’s adaptive capacity, allowing it to respond effectively to challenges and opportunities (Jiang et al., 2023; Tornau & Frese, 2013). Employee voice serves as an early warning system, revealing critical issues like resource shortages and operational malfunctions (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). For example, workers further removed from management can see issues early on yet are often hampered in influencing decision-making (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). Early detection empowers organisations to address problems before they escalate and seize opportunities as they arise, saving valuable resources and minimising disruption. As such, employee voice leads to reduced errors, increased innovation, and improved performance (Akkermans & Hirschi, 2022; Bashshur & Oc, 2015; Bienefeld & Grote, 2014; Nemhard & Edmondson, 2006; Oc et al., 2015).

Furthermore, understanding employee motivations and aspirations leads to a more engaged and productive workforce. Prioritising employee needs and desires supports work environments where employees feel heard, valued, and empowered to contribute their best talents (Klaas et al., 2012; Klaas & Ward, 2015; X. Lin et al., 2020; Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Employee voice can also uncover intentions to quit, allowing for proactive intervention and retention strategies to prevent burnout (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Additionally, aligning work with individual aspirations fosters well-being and reduces stress (Holland et al., 2017; Kahn, 1990; Loudoun et al., 2020; Spaeth, 2022). Conversely, imposed silence can lead to frustration, resentment, and exhaustion (Knoll et al., 2019). Employee voice is thus essential for all stakeholders’ health, resilience, and well-being (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Kahn, 1990; Moloney et al., 2018; Spaeth, 2022). Indeed, employee voice supports individual success (Major et al., 2006; S. K. Parker et al., 2006) and the organisation at large (Bindl & Parker, 2016; Segarra-Ciprès et al., 2019).

The impact of having or lacking voice is even more prominent in organisations that require creativity and innovative mindsets. This includes inherently creative industries, such as design and engineering, yet it also applies to
organisations undergoing transformational change. Organisational culture evolves through employee dialogue, facilitating the co-construction of shared meaning and a unified understanding of organisational values and objectives through collaborative sensemaking processes (Hatch, 1993). Employees feel valued and empowered through open dialogue and participation, leading to increased ownership and commitment to organisational goals. Considering employee involvement and initiative are predictors of employee empowerment, successful leadership, and organisational success (Fay & Sonnentag, 2010; Griffin et al., 2007; Knoll et al., 2019), it is problematic that many employees choose silence over voice (Haskins & Freeman, 2015). This notion is particularly important in the increasingly diverse workforce and changing work landscape. Diverse perspectives drive creativity and problem-solving, improving outcomes (Wilkinson et al., 2023). By encouraging employee voice, organisations tap into a wealth of untapped potential, enhancing their ability to adapt and thrive in a constantly changing environment. As such, supporting employee voice is not just a matter of inclusion or ethics; an organisation’s readiness for change depends on employees’ commitment and understanding (Frahm & Brown, 2007; Parsells, 2017).

Historically, managers and unions have paid insufficient attention to ‘other’ or ‘new’ voices, such as those belonging to marginalised groups or those arising from non-traditional channels, a neglect mirrored in the voice literature (Wilkinson et al., 2021, 2023). Certain views continue to dominate pervasively due to the exercise of power by those who can speak (and be heard, respected, and mindfully responded to) through their positionality by intersections of, among others, gender and race. Deviating perspectives are often not tolerated because of power structures, resulting in the negligence and denial of other perspectives in shaping and evolving company cultures and offerings. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of existing voice mechanisms in capturing the full range of employee experiences and perspectives and our understanding of the voice construct. Recognising that diverse voices are currently the most important to study (Wilkinson et al., 2023), there is a need to understand how to construct meaningful engagements with often unheard employees and ensure they effectively evoke new perspectives (Clark et al., 2019).

Indeed, considering that leveraging employees’ knowledge and ideas is essential for organisational success (Kok et al., 2016; Song et al., 2022), we know surprisingly little about the nuance and intricacies of how the antecedents work in practice, in particular with diverse employees (Chamberlin et al., 2017). My dissertation will study organisational contexts where various stakeholders with different perspectives and interests reflect on their well-being at work and their ability to shape their work environment, both in their day-to-day work and through facilitated interventions. This way, I aim to contribute to unpacking and addressing the underlying issues which stand in the way of employees’ tendency to voice, comparing multiple contexts. To effectively support genuinely inclusive innovation and development by amplifying unheard voices, we need a deeper understanding of the social dynamics around it. Therefore, this dissertation
aims to contribute to innovation and employee voice literature by identifying how socio-organisational factors inform employee motivation at work and voice opportunity assessment.
2. State of the Art

2.1 Supporting inclusive innovation and development through participatory design

Inclusive innovation and development concerns itself with involving historically excluded or marginalised groups of people (Heeks et al., 2014). The purpose here is to increase participation through greater awareness, better accessibility, and equitable conversations. In the organisational context, participatory design promotes listening, understanding, and codeveloping, addressing immediate needs and imagining long-term potential futures, leading to more rational, sustainable, and just innovations and organisational transformations (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016), benefitting operational efficiency and interpersonal dynamics (Piper et al., 2012). As such, it has gained substantial traction to support larger transformations towards open and more inclusive, innovative work environments (R.C. Smith and Iversen, 2018). Historically, both inclusive innovation as well as participatory design research have predominantly focused on the influence of methods and dynamics during initiatives to support democratisation (Schillo & Robinson, 2017; R.C. Smith & Iversen, 2018). Participatory design is evolving towards emphasising participation configuration, including participants and supporting dynamics from the onset to shape the initiative's direction (R.C. Smith & Iversen, 2018). Although participation dynamics are influenced by previous experiences at work, little attention has been paid to how imbalances on the work floor might influence the desire and ability to participate in design and innovation initiatives.

If employees perceive that innovation is valued and rewarded, they are likelier to take risks and try new things (Cai et al., 2022). Indeed, employees assess whether participating is worthwhile and will produce positive results (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). However, whether employees see participation as positive is also informed by internal beliefs and external context resulting from previous work experiences (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Indeed, individuals whose perspectives have historically been undervalued (e.g., due to gender, race, role, background, or otherwise) might be less likely to develop proactive tendencies, increasing the risk of not joining or not feeling safe to share ideas in inclusive innovation and development initiatives. Simultaneously, those who are encouraged and (over)valued are more likely to. Without considering the social and historical context, we risk not hearing marginalised voices in otherwise inclusive initiatives, perpetuating hegemonic ways of doing (Gooch et al., 2018).

Employee voice is a growing research field concerned with understanding why and when employees speak their minds, contribute ideas, or stay quiet,
exploring the consequences for individuals and organisations (Morrison, 2023). Employee voice, or the ability of individuals to influence organisational affairs, has been a topic of research and debate for decades (Huang et al., 2023). Its history is intricately woven with shifting power dynamics, evolving disciplinary perspectives, and the ever-changing work landscape. To better situate my contributions, this section aims to unpack the multifaceted nature of employee voice, exploring its development, key concepts, and current challenges. In particular, I will first discuss why and how perspectives of organisational behaviour, human resource management, and industrial relations (or employment relations) scholars differ and overlap to situate our current understanding and remaining knowledge gaps.

2.2 Comparing industrial relations, human resource management, and organisational behaviour conceptualisations of voice

Perhaps one of the first known notions of voice came from Albert Hirschman, an economist, sociologist, and political scientist, whose work primarily focused on exit, voice, and loyalty in the context of consumer behaviour and political theory (Hirschman, 1970). He proposed three main options for individuals facing dissatisfaction: ‘exit’ (leaving the product or service), ‘voice’ (attempting to address concerns), and ‘loyalty’ (continued commitment or allegiance despite dissatisfaction). Hirschman’s concept of ‘voice’ became influential in understanding employee behaviour within organisations, emphasising the importance of employees expressing their concerns, ideas, and feedback to address problems and contribute to organisational improvement. While he didn't coin the term ‘employee voice’ (since his work targeted consumer behaviour), his work laid a foundational understanding of the concept within the broader framework of organisational behaviour and decision-making (Pfrombeck et al., 2022).

Historically, employee voice was primarily associated with unionised workplaces, where workers collectively bargained for their rights and interests. In line with Hirschman’s (1970) conceptualisation, voice was primarily seen as a response to dissatisfaction and a tool for expressing grievances (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Mowbray et al., 2015). Industrial relations scholars conceptualised voice in this context as a means for worker self-determination and a counterbalance to managerial power (Kaufman, 2014), a way to improve their own work environment and interests as well as increase effectiveness (Wilkinson et al., 2020). As such, they took a rather macro-level perspective, examining policies and institutional mechanisms to support voice (Wilkinson et al., 2020). The decline of unionism in the Anglo-American world around 1970-1980 (Freeman et al., 2007) coincided with the rise of human resource management as a strategic approach to managing employees to promote proactivity and high performance (Mowbray et al., 2015), and responding to increasing labour laws (Hosseini & Sabokro, 2022). Conceptualisations of employee voice began acknowledging its broader potential, encompassing proactive suggestions for improvement and the work landscape (Pfrombeck et
al., 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2020). As such, this separated the concept of voice into two distinct forms (Mowbray et al., 2015).

First, unionised voice emphasised employee involvement in shaping organisational decisions through collective bargaining and representation. Second, voice within human resource management practices focused on issue sharing, providing employees with avenues to express concerns and suggestions, often through anonymous feedback mechanisms or performance reviews. Using performance-driven metrics, human resource management researchers explored how organisations could structure and encourage voice (complaints and participation in decision-making) through formal systems (Knoll & Redman, 2016; Morrison, 2011). Adopting the motive from industrial relations scholars, human resource management conceptualised voice as self-serving (Freeman et al., 2007; Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Mowbray et al., 2015). This meso-level perspective provided insight into establishing and utilising organisational voice systems (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Organisational behaviour scholars, in turn, took a micro-level perspective and focused on individual motivations and behaviours related to voice, emphasising its role in employee engagement and proactive behaviour (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Wilkinson et al., 2018, 2020). The dominant definition in organisational behaviour is “informal and discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems, or opinions about work-related issues, with the intent to bring about improvement or change” (Morrison, 2023, p. 80). Indeed, they conceptualised voice as inherently prosocial (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016, 2022; Kaufman, 2015; Nechanska et al., 2020). Organisational behaviour studies are more quantitative in nature, predominantly using the Van Dyne and LePine (1998) scale to reveal the presence of voice.

Each disciplinary perspective has received criticism from the other. Due to its focus on formal structures, the industrial relations perspective has been accused of paying insufficient attention to informal interactions and relational aspects. Organisational behaviour and human research management studies, in turn, while focusing on which behaviours and mechanisms are present, have been criticised for lacking increasing understanding of the impact of voice behaviours - in other words, whether it actually democratises the workplace, a key aspect of industrial relations studies (Nechanska et al., 2020). Because organisational behaviour and human resource management assume interests of the individual and the organisation are aligned (Ashford & Barton, 2007; Farndale et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2013; Rees et al., 2013; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008), their metrics of voice have been predominantly performance-driven (Ashford & Barton, 2007; Burris et al., 2009; Detert et al., 2013; Fast et al., 2014; Fu et al., 2017; Grant, 2013; Knoll & Redman, 2016; Liu et al., 2013; Morrison, 2011; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008), neglecting how voices are shaped by structural power imbalances (Nechanska et al., 2020). Additionally, organisational behaviour studies have ignored formal mechanisms and collective action by overemphasising individual motivators and inhibitors. Because organisational behaviour conceptualised voice as prosocial as opposed to self-serving, their measurements did not capture factors like voicing for a raise, promotion, better
assignment, fair treatment, or securing proper working conditions (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Furthermore, due to its quantitative nature, Mowbray et al. (2015) commented that organisational behaviour lacks the nuance that human resource management studies bring. While critiques have been exchanged between the different literature streams, they have all enhanced our understanding of employee voice within specific constraints (see Table 1 for an overview).

Table 1. Summary of the different literature streams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Industrial/employment relations</th>
<th>Human resource management</th>
<th>Organisational behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motive</td>
<td>self-serving</td>
<td>self-serving</td>
<td>prosocial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention</td>
<td>self-determination, workplace democracy</td>
<td>sharing complaints, participating in decision-making</td>
<td>sharing ideas or concerns, improving organisational or unit functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms</td>
<td>macro-level: policies, institutional, formal structures</td>
<td>meso-level: systems establishment and utilisation</td>
<td>micro-level: individual motivators, emotions, beliefs, leader receptivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant study type</td>
<td>both qualitative and quantitative</td>
<td>qualitative, performance-driven metrics</td>
<td>quantitative (often using the Van Dyne and LePine (1998) scale), performance-driven metrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>employees need to overcome power imbalances</td>
<td>employees and organisation are aligned</td>
<td>employees and organisation are aligned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaps</td>
<td>informal interactions, relational aspects</td>
<td>whether impact democratises, structural power imbalances</td>
<td>self-serving voice, formal mechanisms, collective action, whether impact democratises, structural power imbalances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In conclusion, organisational behaviour literature on individual behaviour has predominantly used quantitative measures, highlighting the role of leadership and psychological safety. In contrast, human resource management and industrial relations literature have used more qualitative measures but have focused on organisational and systemic factors, respectively, that shape employee voice, potentially overlooking the individual motivations, behaviours, and psychological drivers behind employees speaking up and the ways they express themselves. As such, our understanding of whether and how employees choose to voice is still limited, particularly considering the increasingly diverse workforce.

### 2.3 Reflection on established and emerging models of voice

Despite the decades-long interest, models of the complex voice construct started appearing only recently. Due to the varying ontologies of the different literature streams and the changing landscape of work, these models are still being expanded and iterated upon, highlighting various facets of the construct and calling upon future scholars to test and develop them further.

The first framework discussing the complex interplay of influential factors was created by Morrison (2011) (Figure 1).
By reviewing different conceptualisations and related constructs from Hirschman (1970) to the most recent studies at the time, Morrison (2011) describes what is known about employee motives, antecedents, and outcomes. Based on theoretical and empirical studies, Morrison (2014, p. 375), an organisational behaviour scholar, defines voice as “discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organisational or unit functioning”, building on the work of other organisational behaviour theorists (Burris et al., 2009; Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2003; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Considering voice as a type of proactive behaviour, Morrison laments that voice had not sufficiently drawn from proactive work behaviour theory. In this model, Morrison integrates voice and silence literature by considering silence as the failure to voice. While acknowledging the presence and richness of the voice construct in industrial labour relations, human resource management, and organisational justice literature, Morrison deliberately omits these studies from this review due to the mismatch in conceptualisations of voice, i.e., their focus on mechanisms instead of discretionary behaviours, their causes and their consequences. Morrison’s integrated model focuses on the influence of individual and contextual factors influencing the assessment of whether voicing is worthwhile and the effect this has on the individual and organisation or group. The model emphasises a multi-faceted influence on employee voice, where factors like satisfaction, commitment, workgroup identification, obligation for change, and perceived fairness, among others, are intricately linked (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Liang et al., 2012; Morrison, 2011; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008).
Iterating on this model, Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse (2015) argue from an employment relations perspective that the different literature streams might be more aligned than Morrison (2011, 2014) suggested. They adopt Maynes and Podsakoff’s (2014, p. 88) broader definition of voice, which describes it as “an individual’s voluntary and open communication directed toward individuals within the organisation that focuses on influencing the context of the work environment”. They identify common ground by reviewing the literature from a multidisciplinary perspective resulting in an integrated model (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Mowbray et al.’s (2015, p. 394) “Conceptual model: employee voice and the management–employee interaction” (redrawn by author)

Mowbray et al. (2015) expand the model to include voice for both personal and organisational benefits, highlight the role of leadership, and separate mechanism, target, and channel. Notably, they include collective efforts and formal channels, which organisational behaviour scholars hadn’t done. Indeed, Morrison (2023) agrees that organisational behaviour scholars might have underexplored how informal behaviour is influenced by formal and collective mechanisms. This conceptual model highlights the role of leadership and management-employee relationships in the assessment of voice and the impact of voice on subsequent attempts. However, in line with Morrison’s (2011) critiques of human resource management conceptualisations of voice, the model might overemphasise the role of management and pay insufficient attention to other influencing factors and outcomes, which are more at the forefront of Morrison’s (2011) model.

In recent years, more models have been developed in response to an increase in diversity and inclusion (or diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives (Ellingrud et al., 2023). Two of these more recent models focus specifically on how power imbalances interfere with employee voice (Nechanska et al., 2020; Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Nechanska, Hughes, and Dundon (2020) argue in a special issue of Human Resource Management Review aimed at integrating
different research disciplines that employee silence had remained underexplored in both organisational behaviour and industrial relations literature. By integrating literature from these two streams and complementing it with labour process literature, they contribute to the human resource management literature by highlighting the impact of “structural power imbalances” (Nechanska et al., 2020, p. 2) (Figure 3).

Indeed, Nechanska et al. (2020) focus primarily on voice as a self-serving concept where employee and management interests might not align, or be perceived as misaligned. They introduce the importance of ‘structured antagonism’, suggesting the necessity for a formalised and organised process to navigate conflict and collaboration inherent to employee voice. Coming from a labour process perspective, they explore the contributions from different literature streams, which all, in one way or another, inform the social relations between the voice and the target. As such, they stress the social situatedness and power imbalances at the micro-level of face-to-face interactions, the meso-level, the organisational context, and the macro-level sociopolitical forces from the outside world. Additionally, the model emphasises the complex interplay of socio-organisational factors impacting interest formations and assessment of
voice opportunities resulting in either voice or (un)intentional silence. It gives specific attention to silence, not just as the opposite of voice but as its own construct, albeit closely connected to voice. They argue that particularly in increasingly diverse contexts, where diverse interests and structural power imbalances are present, more understanding is needed of not only what leads to different types of voice but also what leads to different types of silence. The framework discusses silence as a distinct option beyond the opposite of silence, providing three possible resolutions: meaningful voice, intentional silence, and unintentional silence. Meaningful voice includes both individual and collective efforts in a variety of channels. However, Nechanska et al.’s (2020) contributions lie more on the side of silence, explicating that employees can choose to ‘get-back’, ‘get-on’, or ‘get-by’. Indeed, employees might try to get-back at their employer due to a culture unsupportive of voice, choosing to withhold information, resulting in reduced productivity and cooperation. Or, they might be getting-on by compromising without speaking up about their own desires but also not actively supporting the organisation’s objectives. Lastly, they could get-by due to fear of being penalised for bringing up issues. In summary, this model draws our attention to the complex socio-organisational factors influencing the assessment of voice opportunities and a wider variety of options for diverse actors to act on these.

Like Nechanska et al. (2020), Pfrombeck, Levin, Rucker, and Galinsky (2022) highlight the impact of rank and power to understand employee voice and silence better. Pfrombeck et al. (2022, p. 4) define voice as a means to improve the work situation of the voicer, other stakeholders, and/or the organisation through “voluntary, internal, upward communication”. By highlighting the role of hierarchy, they include the rank of both the voicer and the target (Figure 4), an important aspect for diverse employees who might experience lower status as a result of intersections of demographics.
Pfrombeck et al. (2022) expand the dimension of the reaction of the target, where the target reacts to the voice by appraising and attributing the voice and voicer, influenced by the chosen communication content, style, and context. Notably, the framework highlights the hierarchical influence on the decision calculus and the effect of a voice attempt on the rank of both voicer and target, informing future voicing attempts.

Lastly, Kim, Lam, Oh, and Sohn (2023) explore the dyadic relationship between voicer and voice target integrating on the one hand voicer-centric literature and on the other hand manager-centric literature. Using social exchange theory, they emphasise the cyclical nature of voice, similar to Pfrombeck et al. (2022), where voicer and manager build rapport over time, increasing both voice and voice receptivity between the two parties (Figure 5).
This model highlights the effect of the managerial response on felt voice. They highlight four pathways by reviewing existing studies. Two pathways reveal increased voice due to managerial endorsement, either through increased voiceer mood and engagement (Wu et al., 2021) or increased status (Janssen & Gao, 2015). The other two pathways discuss managerial non-endorsement, either resulting in decreased voice and idea generation due to reduced self-efficacy (Ng et al., 2022) or increased voice due to a sensitive explanation (King et al., 2019).

While the wording differs across the models, four factors are present in each model, although presented differently (see Table 2 for a summary). First, an employee needs to be motivated. Usually, this is presented as having a motive, a reason, whether prosocial (Morrison, 2011) or include self-serving or a combination of both (Mowbray et al., 2015; Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Nechanska et al. (2020) and Kim et al. (2023) present this as interest formations and felt voice. They combine motivation with an assessment of voice opportunities, which was separate in the other models. This assessment includes individual and contextual factors influencing safety and efficacy (Morrison, 2011), the relationship between management and employee (Mowbray et al., 2015), or both, highlighting the relative ranks of both parties (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). The third factor describes a resolution to stay silent or voice and how. Most models focus on voice only, describing choices such as message content, tactics, target, mechanisms, channel, style, and context (Kim et al., 2023; Morrison, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2015; Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Nechanska et al. (2020) include both intentional and unintentional silence. Lastly, each model describes some form of effect. Some focus more on outcomes, describing either the conflicting interests between management and employees informing these (Nechanska et al., 2020) or the positive and negative impact on organisational, group, and individual factors (Morrison, 2011). The other three models focus on the relational aspect more, either how this impacts management-employee relation (Mowbray et al., 2015) and subsequent voice attempts (Kim et al., 2023), or also including the appraisal and attribution of the voiceer and the content informing the reaction (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Taken together, the
models highlight different socio-organisational factors influencing both motivation and assessment of voice opportunities resulting in a resolution that has an effect on the voicer and future voicing attempts.

Table 2. Summary of the different models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Morrison (2011)</strong></td>
<td>Motive to help organisation</td>
<td>Individual and contextual factors</td>
<td>Voice message, tactics, and target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>influencing safety and efficacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mowbray et al. (2015)</strong></td>
<td>Dissatisfaction, pro-social, or justice for personal or organisation</td>
<td>Leadership, management-employee relation</td>
<td>Voice mechanisms, targets, channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nechanska et al. (2020)</strong></td>
<td>Included in assessment</td>
<td>Individual and contextual factors</td>
<td>Intentional silence, meaningful voice, and unintentional silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>influencing interest formations + relations and power imbalances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pfrombeck et al. (2022)</strong></td>
<td>Self-interested and prosocial, informed by voicer and voice target’s rank</td>
<td>Impact and risk, informed by voicer and voice target’s rank</td>
<td>Communication content, style, and context, informed by voicer and voice target’s rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kim et al. (2023)</strong></td>
<td>Included in assessment</td>
<td>Felt voice, considering voice as a positive initiating action</td>
<td>Expressed voice, speaking up with suggestions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4 Socio-organisational factors influencing employee voice

As emphasised across the models, the interplay of factors supporting and hindering voice is multi-dimensional. Mechanisms, managerial behaviours, efficacy, and psychological safety all play a role, yet what is required to include a diverse workforce to support innovation and development remains underexplored (Bell et al., 2011; Meyers & Vallas, 2016; Nechanska et al., 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2018, 2023). Individuals’ backgrounds and social interactions in the workplace’s macro-, meso-, and micro-contexts influence voice (Spaeth, 2022). As such, there is a need to study how observable and more obscure power dynamics influence employees’ tendency to voice (Nechanska et al., 2020).

2.4.1 Motivation at work as a prerequisite for voice

Taken together, whether employees engage in voice behaviour depends on whether they have ‘reason to’, ‘can do’, and are ‘energised to’ do so. Traditionally, employee voice literature has focused more on the ‘reason to’ voice (motive) (Peng et al., 2021). For example, in Morrison’s framework (2011), the starting point is the motive to help the organisation or work unit. Mowbray et al. (2015, p. 394) expand on this by defining voice as “motivated by dissatisfaction, justice or pro-social tendencies” and connecting it directly to the
content, describing work issues that are either personal or organisation-oriented. Indeed, ‘reason to’ voice is considered either self-serving or prosocial (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Self-serving motives, found primarily in industrial relations literature, include job satisfaction, control, fairness, status, and power (Anderson et al., 2015; Klaas et al., 2012; X. Lin et al., 2020; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Prosocial motives, in turn, originate in organisational behaviour literature and reflect benefitting others (McClean et al., 2022) or wanting to improve the organisation or work unit effectiveness or collective benefits (Grant & Ashford, 2008; McClean et al., 2022; Morrison, 2011). While the motive is often associated with the underlying reason for voice, whether the motive is out of self-interest or prosocial could be more a matter of framing than content (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Indeed, a self-serving motive can be packaged as prosocial, and voicing with the most prosocial intentions might still result in individual benefits for the voicer. As such, the framing might depend on the voicer’s assessment of what they believe the voice target might be more susceptible to.

However, considering the social situatedness of voice behaviour, the ‘energised to’ side deserves more attention (Peng et al., 2021). While dissatisfaction with a certain situation or a perceived opportunity for improvement might provide the reason for voicing an issue, key prerequisites for voice are job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Morrison, 2011, 2014; Tucker & Turner, 2015). Especially with employees whose voices are unheard, it is reasonable to assume they have a ‘reason to’, considering the work environment was shaped based on other employees’ needs. Increasing our understanding of the ‘energised to’ voice (motivation) might shed more light on why diverse people have higher or lower tendencies to voice (Cangiano et al., 2019; Lebel & Kamran-Morley, 2021; Peng et al., 2021; Sonnentag & Starzyk, 2015). Indeed, a sense of alienation, or depersonalisation, reduces the likeliness to engage in extra-role behaviour, such as voice (Bakker et al., 2004; Burris et al., 2008; Knoll et al., 2019; Knoll & Redman, 2016). Furthermore, silence can also stem from job detachment (Burris et al., 2008; Detert & Burris, 2007) and low self-control, cynicism, and high job dissatisfaction (Donner et al., 2018). While organisational behaviour studies have highlighted individual factors such as the positive influence of conscientiousness and extraversion on voice (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Morrison, 2011), the role of job satisfaction or motivation in diverse social contexts is still emerging. Indeed, most studies focus on managing engagement with processes to improve performance, undervaluing individual experiences and employee well-being (Spaeth, 2022).

While organisational behaviour shows job satisfaction is a prerequisite to voice, industrial relations scholars have revealed it as a voice outcome. Indeed, within industrial relations, scholars have conceptualised voice as a way to improve their own work environment and interests (Wilkinson et al., 2020) toward employee self-determination (Kaufman, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2014). For example, successful voice increases a sense of meaningfulness (Holland et al., 2013, 2017) and likeliness to get promoted (Brykman & Raver, 2021; Huang et al., 2018). This, consequently, increases these employees’ odds of increasing
status, power, and becoming leaders (McClean et al., 2018; Weiss & Morrison, 2019). Negative voice reception, in turn, leads to a lower reputation and sense of self-worth, reducing voicing, thus losing opportunities to grow in the organisation (Kim et al., 2023; Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Underrepresented groups thus might be less able to develop proactive tendencies and are at risk of being mischaracterised as silent by choice, having no interest (Bindl & Parker, 2016), while those who have historically been present increasingly get their voice heard. This circular connection has traditionally been underexplored because organisational behaviour studies have favoured managers’ interests over those of employees (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016), conceptualising voice as a mechanism to support organisational growth. Morrison (2011), however, did discuss voice outcomes for the organisation, group, and individual. Indeed, the effect of voice is not just organisational outcomes but also has individual and relational implications. Recent models are showing the feedback loop on the voicer and the social implications more clearly (Kim et al., 2023; Mowbray et al., 2015; Pfrombeck et al., 2022).

2.4.2 Assessment of voice opportunities reflects social power

Employee motivation alone is insufficient to predict voice. Indeed, employees’ ‘can do’ ability is based on assessing costs, benefits, and success likeliness (Ashford et al., 1998; Detert & Burris, 2007; Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, 2011). Considering that diverse actors might have less access to information, their ‘can do’ assessment might be influenced by perceptions of the accessibility and worthwhileness of engaging in voice. Morrison (2011) describes a combination of ‘perceived costs versus safety of voice’ and ‘perceived efficacy versus futility of voice’ influenced by contextual and individual factors. In other words, employees evaluate their efficacy, whether they expect to be heard (Detert & Treviño, 2010; Milliken et al., 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2003), and the safety of speaking up, whether they believe the risks of being punished are low (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Morrison, 2011; Nechanska et al., 2020). Indeed, studies have focused on how internal beliefs and external context influence employees’ tendency to voice (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Ford, 1996) by evaluating the desirability and feasibility (Klehe et al., 2021; S. J. Shin et al., 2017; Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Here, the complex interplay of organisational structure, culture, supervisor openness and relationship, attitudes, personality, and demographics, among other factors, come into play. Mowbray et al. (2015) highlight the role of ‘leadership factors and the LMX relationship’. Pfrombeck et al. (2022) combine Morrison’s (2011) and Mowbray’s (2015) models, describing a decision calculus based on impact and risk, influenced by the ranks of the voicer and the target (a higher rank of the voicer decreases risk, whereas a higher rank of the voice target increases risk; a higher rank of either increases the potential impact). Nechanska et al. (2020) similarly describe this phase as navigating relational power imbalances and the various dynamics influencing this. Although their framework emphasises power and structured antagonism, they describe these factors in relation to interactions between contexts, actors, processes, and outcomes. Supporting and
hindering factors have been identified by scholars from all streams, ranging from individual factors, such as perceived self-efficacy, to organisational factors, such as the level of technocracy and human resource management practices (Mohammad et al., 2023).

Industrial relations scholars have focused predominantly on mechanisms (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Formal mechanisms can support upward communication, as do physical proximity and hierarchical structures (Morrison, 2011). Other factors supporting voice are organisations keeping promises (Ng et al., 2014) and high organisational support (Loi et al., 2014). The extent to which an organisation values innovation or favours bureaucracy and risk aversion directly influences proactivity behaviours such as voice (Cai et al., 2022). Similarly, a lack of formal channels or imposed silence can result in fear or a sense of voice futility, reducing well-being and health (Knoll et al., 2019). Although scholars have argued that formal mechanisms such as employee involvement and participation opportunities support informal voice (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013), due to the lack of frameworks and models incorporating both, we still know little of the interplay between both (Mowbray et al., 2015). Individual factors have mostly been studied by organisational behaviour scholars. Predominantly, these described individual differences in emotions, attitudes, perceptions, and agentic beliefs, such as self-efficacy (Mowbray et al., 2015). Factors like strong self-belief, feeling safe to speak up, trusting relationships, clear identity, healthy emotions, and balanced power dynamics all encourage people to raise their voices, and several of these also feature in human resource management literature (Nechanska et al., 2020). Indeed, trust, openness, and leader-member relations are featured prominently in human resource management and organisational behaviour studies (Mowbray et al., 2015).

2.4.3 Collaborative sensemaking

Contextual and social factors also influence a sense of safety, meaningfulness, and motivation (Morrison, 2011; Nechanska et al., 2020; Pinder & Harlos, 2001) and, subsequently, voice (Heaphy et al., 2022; Spaeth, 2022). In recent years, more attention has been given to the social situatedness of the employee experience and motivation. For example, An and Bramble (2018) argue that a weak bargaining position due to gender, education, family situation, employment, and social connections results in silence. Concretely, Cooper et al. (2021) found that women experienced the most voice when organising social events, rarely at discussions around staffing, pay, investments, and strategic planning. Pfrombeck et al. (2022) also highlight the social situatedness of the first stage, depicting the voicer and their motivation being influenced by the ranks of both the voicer and the target. Indeed, motivation is also shaped by opportunity perceptions (Loudoun et al., 2020; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2003), thus dependent on social relations at work. While progress has been made, research connecting voice and motivation is still lacking (Spaeth, 2022).
Indeed, voice is also influenced by collaborative sensemaking in peer-to-peer relationships (Hatch, 1993; Loudoun et al., 2020), which has received less attention (Spaeth, 2022). Especially when top-down communication is insufficient, employees often get information about what is desirable or feasible from peers influencing their perception of cues (J. Allen et al., 2007; Y. Shin et al., 2017). Considering the weaker connections of diverse employees to supervisors, they might turn to peers more often. Additionally, when employees need bargaining power through collective voice (Casey & Delaney, 2022), healthy peer-to-peer voice and social networks are required (Loudoun et al., 2020; Spaeth, 2022). Indeed, voice is made sense of in a social space where emotions and ideas are vocalised (Heaphy et al., 2022; Loudoun et al., 2020), where emotional support, connection, and belonging influence the outcomes (Heaphy et al., 2022; Spaeth, 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2021). Voice is thus shaped not only by personal backgrounds but also through interactions (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Spaeth, 2022), informed by critical sensemaking of social patterns and behaviour (Robinson & Shuck, 2019; Whiting et al., 2012). Additionally, shared workgroup beliefs impact employees’ safety to voice, especially when they experience a higher sense of belonging (Morrison, 2011). Silence, in turn, has been attributed to protecting credibility or social capital (Morrison, 2011), as well as to not upset peers (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Indeed, negative voice outcomes can result in reduced image or sanctions (Milliken et al., 2003; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). While personality traits have received a lot of attention in predicting voice, we still know little about the intricacies and nuance of how peer relations and interactions influence voice (Bindl & Parker, 2016; J. B. Farrell & Strauss, 2013; Jiang, Wang, et al., 2022; Jiang, Wu, et al., 2022; Singh & Rangnekar, 2020). Thus, how peer-to-peer collaborative sensemaking influences the assessment of voice opportunities deserves more attention (Kalfa & Budd, 2020; Spaeth, 2022).

Studies targeting the social context and influence of peer relations and interactions have thus far focused too much on the standard employee (Wilkinson et al., 2023). Indeed, employee voice has been theorised largely as if employees consist of homogeneous groups (Adebayo et al., 2021; Bell et al., 2011; Khan et al., 2020). However, context and power are present in social interactions (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009), influencing the “social construction of meaning” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 192). While it was previously assumed that organisations had cultures promoting either voice or silence (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), later studies revealed differences across organisational pockets even when top management provided the same cues (Morrison, 2011). Indeed, position and power determine access to speaking and silence (Detert & Treviño, 2010; Fast et al., 2014; Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Nechanska et al., 2020). Additionally, leader-member exchange theory suggests that being part of the ‘in-group’ supports voice as a result of receiving more opportunities to speak up and engage (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Liu et al., 2013; Van Dyne et al., 2008), as opposed to the ‘out-group’ who have lower-quality relationships (Fairhurst, 1993; Krone, 1991, 1992; Mowbray et al., 2015). Indeed, accessibility of voice mechanisms can be
supported or hindered by social norms, which may not be equal across a diverse workforce (Nechanska et al., 2020). For example, women tend to experience lower self-efficacy on the work floor and lower levels of supportive leadership, reducing their voice (Eibl et al., 2020). As such, while formal voice mechanisms (e.g., open door policy, staff meetings, team briefings, intranet) support voice and increase employee retention (Mohammad et al., 2023; Spencer, 1986), they do not always provide equal voice opportunities to all employees (Bell et al., 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2023). Considering the assessment of voice mechanisms depends on social context and ‘power’, they only elicit diverse voices if all employees can get their views across and influence decisions (M. Allen & Tüselmann, 2009; Mowbray et al., 2015). Considering these differences, more studies are needed to understand the nuances and intricacies of providing equal opportunities in diverse workforces (Bell et al., 2011; Meyers & Vallas, 2016; Morrison, 2023; Nechanska et al., 2020; Wilkinson et al., 2018, 2023).

2.4.4 Resolution to voice (or not) as a result of motivation at work and assessment of voice opportunities

Influenced by job motivation and voice opportunity assessment, employees can resolve to either exit, voice or stay silent (Hirschman, 1970). Disconcertingly, while research has predominantly been targeting the influence of mechanisms, the voice target’s receptivity depends on who the voicer is (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). For example, women tend to frame issues more prosocially (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Bowles et al., 2007; Bowles & Babcock, 2013), which should be more positively received than voice framed as a critique (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). However, women also are more likely to be hindered from voice by hierarchical structures, opportunity hoarding, stereotyping, and belittling by men co-workers (Cooper et al., 2021). Pfrombeck et al. (2022) argue that this is due to the voice target’s assessment of the implicit rank of the voicer in relation to the voice target. This implicit rank is influenced by status (respect, admiration) and power (access, control over resources) (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Ascribed status (e.g., gender and ethnicity), associated status (e.g., tenure), and achieved status (e.g., expertise) influence voice (Kim et al., 2023; Li et al., 2019; Martin & Harrison, 2022; McClean et al., 2018; Z. Zhang et al., 2020).

Due to the increased risk, diverse employees are more likely to remain silent (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Silence has been studied increasingly in the past two decades (Morrison, 2023). Silence causes stress, dissatisfaction, disengagement, underperformance, and faster turnover (Morrison, 2014; Nechanska et al., 2020). Employees planning to leave are less inclined to express their concerns (Cooper et al., 2021), making reticence to speak up a possible predictor of employee attrition. For instance, an employee who is unhappy with their work conditions may be less likely to complain to their manager if they are planning to resign anyway. Silence can be separated into either loyalty, reflecting trust in the organisation that the issue would be resolved automatically, or neglect, choosing not to act as a result of the assessment (D. Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Morrison, 2011; Rusbult et al., 1988;
Withey & Cooper, 1989). Although early studies revealed the positive impact of unionised voice mechanisms on retention (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Spencer, 1986), these studies targeted retention across all employees as a homogeneous workforce, not considering the socially situated nature of voice (Cooper-Thomas & Morrison, 2018; Spaeth, 2022). Within engineering, because most studies looking at the socially situated nature have targeted engineers who stayed, we know little of the initial reasons for leaving (Ferguson et al., 2017; Trevelyan, 2010). One notable exception is Frehill’s (2009) study on engineering retention, which concluded that women leave more often due to negative work climates and men leave more often for advancement or other issues (e.g., salary). Indeed, career outcomes result from negative and positive socialisation experiences such as experiencing harassment, being welcomed, and being seen as competent, which are influenced by the representation of intersections of gender and race (Beddoes, 2021, 2022). Additionally, if organisations break promises early on, employees’ tendency to leave increases (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). Overall, more studies are needed to understand the nuance of what causes employees to stay silent in certain contexts to better understand the social dynamics and power imbalances (Nechanska et al., 2020).

Indeed, employee silence often does not indicate a lack of motive but other factors impeding a willingness or ability to act (Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, 2011; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Additionally, employees’ voice behaviour is contextual, meaning they can display both voice and silence behaviour at different times for different causes (Morrison, 2011). Silence is a result of a complex interaction of various factors (Marler et al., 2023), such as hierarchy (Pfrombeck et al., 2022), organisational pressure and norms (Prouska & Psychogios, 2018), structure and managerial practices such as imposed decisions (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Nechanska et al., 2020), cultural values as well as organisational climate and culture (Nechanska et al., 2020; Prouska & Psychogios, 2018; Xu et al., 2023). Any of these factors can result in a perceived unsupportive culture or structure for voice causing employees to resolve to remain silent (Morrison, 2011). For example, Spaeth (2022) found power imbalances, lack of transparency, limited access to media, emotional and physical distance, and blunt ignorance as antecedents for silence in a nursing environment. Notably, perceived cues depend on emotional experiences such as social relations with peers or superiors through received support (Sherf et al., 2021). As such, voice literature might benefit from unpacking socio-organisational factors causing resolutions for silence and exit to build on what is known about antecedents and consequences of voice itself, which has been the dominant focus area in the literature.

One way to unpack such factors is by looking at framing. Framing refers to how information is presented and interpreted. Framing has received much attention in voice literature, predominantly to understand better what type of framing is more likely to receive positive versus negative responses. For example, presenting issues as entirely out of your hands makes it less likely they are received positively (Edmondson, 2003b). Additionally, the target’s
perception of voice is more positive if the issue is framed constructively versus as a taboo, challenging the status quo, or undermining the target’s judgement (Morrison, 2011). Indeed, Pfrombeck et al. (2022) argue that voice receptivity is increased when issues are framed as promotive (Burris, 2012; Huang et al., 2018; Whiting et al., 2012; Z. Zhang et al., 2020), as an opportunity for the target (Lam et al., 2019), and with a clear rationale of the feasibility (Brykman & Raver, 2021). Voice framed as opportunities also leads to better performance evaluations (Brykman & Raver, 2021; Burris, 2012; Howell et al., 2015; Su et al., 2017), whereas voice framed as threat leads to lower performance ratings (Burris, 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Additionally, framing has gained traction in change communication from the sender’s side (Frahm & Brown, 2007). However, framing can also be used to understand employees’ motivation or assessment of a situation. This type of framing occurs outside management control, between employees on the work floor, as they match management’s messaging with their own experiences (Gallivan, 2001). Indeed, issues can be framed and tackled in many ways (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). How employees frame issues influences the target’s receptivity, exciting them or triggering resistance (Edmondson, 2003b, 2018), and consequently, the risk and impact of voicing (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Hierarchical position, occupational communities, and prior socialisation on the job develop a variety of biases of experience and awareness, which result in different frames (Gallivan, 2001). When employees receive different or conflicting messages about change from different sources or when their own experiences and assumptions contradict the official framing, contradicting frames can arise (Gallivan, 2001). This can lead to uncertainty, confusion, and resistance (Frahm & Brown, 2007; Gallivan, 2001). Notably, employees tend to experience these interpretations or perceptions as the truth rather than a personal frame (Edmondson, 2003b). As such, invoked thinking frames can reveal challenges and opportunities for employees in identifying and acting on voice opportunities.

2.5 Aims and research frame

Despite the decades-long interest in employee voice and the exponentially increasing number of studies (Morrison, 2023), questions seem to emerge more than answers. Indeed, while integrating the different voice constructs supports a more holistic understanding in the long run, in the short term, this brings many findings that were obtained using measuring tools underpinned by different ontological assumptions back into question. Historically, the focus on organisational goals and assumptions of homogeneous workforces has distracted from understanding the relevance of societal and workplace inequalities (Nechanska et al., 2020). Little attention has been paid to the intricacies of the social dimension influencing whether employees are motivated to or find themselves able to use their voice and be able to participate equally in innovation and development activities. Indeed, the need to understand voice amongst diverse employees is rapidly increasing and should be at the forefront of the employee voice research agenda (Wilkinson et al., 2023). In particular,
understanding what results in employee silence or even departure requires additional focus if we want to reap the benefits of innovation in a more diverse workforce (Mohammad et al., 2023; Nechanska et al., 2020).

In this dissertation, I intend to increase our understanding of what might influence employees’ motivation and assessment to voice, paying particular attention to the complex interaction between the social and contextual factors around the voicer (see Figure 6 for the proposed framework of assessing these).

Figure 6. Proposed framework to explore nuance and intricacies of unheard voices

Adopting an explorative research frame, I contribute to a more nuanced and contextualised view of what might result in voice or silence, formulating propositions that can be leveraged as starting points for future researchers interested in deepening our understanding of amplifying diverse voices towards inclusive innovation and development. As such, the research question I intend to answer is:

How do socio-organisational dynamics influence voice prerequisites of motivation at work and assessment of voice opportunities, and how do these link to resolving to voice?

Instead of relying on a single-case study approach, this research employs a multi-site design to investigate the phenomenon across diverse contexts. This allows for identifying differences and recurring patterns in the data, enhancing the generalisability of the findings, as is done in many voice studies (Mohammad et al., 2023). Publications 1 and 2 target creatives in different technology-driven environments, and publications 3 and 4 target the same group of employees in an organisation undergoing a transformational change (Table 3).
Table 3. Summary of the aspects of employee voice explored in the publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of employee voice</th>
<th>Publication</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prerequisite 1. Motivation (job satisfaction)</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prerequisite 2. Assessment (consequence expectation)</td>
<td>somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution (employee action)</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Research Approach

3.1 Ontological stance

My desire to understand employee voice comes from a unique combination of academic training, professional experience, and personal commitment to open and innovative work cultures. This statement aims to share my positionality, demonstrating how my background in design and engineering has equipped me to study this aspect of organisational life effectively. As a degree holder in design and engineering, I can successfully navigate the often disconnected worlds of creativity and technical rigour. This supports me in understanding the complex dynamics at play within organisations, particularly regarding how employee voices navigate possibilities to get their voice heard. My academic focus has delved into the sociological implications of design, specifically questioning who gets to participate in design decisions and how these decisions impact individuals and communities. This critical lens equips me to analyse employee voice as an operational tool and a social construct shaped by power dynamics, organisational structures, and cultural norms. Importantly, I have immersed myself in one of the study contexts where a transformational change was happening by facilitating a participatory design initiative. This experience gave me invaluable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities associated with employee voice in this environment specifically.

This study embraces a constructivist lens, recognising the world as a collection of socially constructed realities shaped by factors like gender and race. A constructivist perspective understands the work environment as socially constructed, shaped by interactions and relationships, constructed norms, and structures (Loudoun et al., 2020). It recognises the subjective nature of human experiences and emphasises that individuals have unique perspectives shaped by their cultural, social, and historical contexts. I alternate between an interpretive and transformative paradigm, seeking to understand human nature as I describe it. An interpretive approach, often used in social sciences and humanities, is a research methodology that focuses on understanding and interpreting the meanings people attribute to their experiences, actions, and the world around them. This approach is rooted in the idea that reality is socially constructed, and individuals actively create and give meaning to their experiences. However, my aim is not simply to observe, but to empower change through action research, dismantling myths and empowering individuals to reshape their worlds (Chilisa, 2011). Guided by phenomenology and critical theory, I delve into the lived experiences shared by my participants, honouring
their perceptions as truths (Cresswell, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Simultaneously, in my data analysis, I attempt to reveal structural power imbalances by prioritising the value of furthering social justice and human rights. Indeed, departing from a positivist point of view which would aim for objectivity and universal laws, I recognise the diversity of human experiences and perspectives. Truth is thus not found in objectivity but context-dependent and socially informed. I adopt qualitative tools to capture this, combining interviews and participatory research. Here, I reveal the interplay between employee voice and socio-organisational factors that shape individual realities.

3.2 Data collection

For publications 1 and 2, I take an etic (outsiders’) perspective, allowing for identifying more generalisable patterns that might apply to other contexts worldwide (Morris et al., 1999). I describe the experiences of designers and engineers, both creatives in a technology-driven environment. Through semi-structured interviews, their meaningful moments were captured and, in the case of the engineers, connected to career plans. For publications 3 and 4, I take a more emic (insiders’) perspective, diving deeper into how dynamics are understood internally in a particular context (Morris et al., 1999). While not an insider originally, I immersed myself in the study context and applied action, research, and training principles to support my ability to interpret the insights. This part of the study took place at a healthcare facility, where I conducted participatory design workshops and semistructured interviews in turn. In particular, action research principles are used to critically evaluate and inform both process and product with participants individually after each design workshop (Bannon et al., 2018). Participatory design workshops and confidential face-to-face interviews reflecting on the social dynamics in those workshops occur in turn. Additionally, creative capacity building sessions are integrated into the project to train participants as change agents. During these sessions, participants reflect collectively on the creative process and explore opportunities for enhancing inclusive innovation. This immediately achieves better action and research results, and creates conditions for more design initiatives to be developed after the project has ended (Björgvinsson et al., 2012; Hernberg & Mazé, 2018). Action (participatory design workshops), research (one-on-one reflective interviews), and training (creative capacity building sessions) are balanced to enhance each other’s effectiveness: the reflections inform the training, the creative capacity building prepares participants for the design workshops, and the design workshops provide experiences to reflect on. These types of empirical studies are particularly useful in revealing the nuanced realities of employee voice in the workplace (Mohammad et al., 2023). For all studies, I applied inductive reasoning, in line with interpretive research principles, building theories and generalisations based on observations and interpretations made in the study, rather than starting with pre-established hypotheses (see Table 5 for an overview).
Table 4. Summary of the data collection approaches of the publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collection approach</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of study</td>
<td>cross-sectional</td>
<td>cross-sectional</td>
<td>single case action research</td>
<td>single case longitudinal action research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>motivation at work</td>
<td>motivation at work connected to voice resolutions</td>
<td>experiences at work connected to voice assessment</td>
<td>voice issue framing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>34 in-house and 35 consultancy designers</td>
<td>33 engineers across gender and race</td>
<td>17 frontline and 11 desk workers in a hospital</td>
<td>28 hospital employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection type</td>
<td>semi-structured retrospective interviews</td>
<td>semi-structured retrospective interviews</td>
<td>semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>semi-structured interviews and workshop pitches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.1 Study context and participants

The participants in the first two studies were creatives in technology-driven environments. One way to understand the social dynamics of motivation of unheard voices in the creative sector is by investigating what designers’ top and bottom moments are at work. Indeed, due to design shifting towards broader and strategic roles, designers must collaborate effectively with a vastly more diverse group of stakeholders (Pierri, 2017). Legitimising and stabilising the role of design on a strategic level can be challenging, particularly in large organisations (Mutanen, 2008; Rauth et al., 2010). Designers take active roles in advancing design in organisations, yet often have limited structural power to enact behaviours, routines, and processes that cut across organisations (Björklund et al., 2020; Micheli et al., 2018). However, most extant literature has been conducted with design students, individual design professionals or, at most, fairly homogeneous teams (N. Cross, 2004; D'souza, 2016; Defazio, 2008). Surprisingly, we know little about how designers construe their experiences (Daly et al., 2012). As described in the first publication (p. 757), two case companies were selected as research sites, each encompassing diversity in design specialisations, projects and locations yet operating predominantly in technology-driven contexts: a globally-operating technology company with over 100,000 employees and a design consultancy with studios in several countries, serving many large technology company customers. A total of 37 in-house designers (3 were excluded during the data analysis) and 35 design consultants chose to take part in the study, with most interviewees having worked for their organisation for at least a year and having several years of professional design experience. The sample included 40 men and 29 women, mostly in their late twenties to late thirties. They were based in nine different countries, with most interviewees being either European or North American. The design consultants were based at six different design studios of the consultancy, and the in-house designers were based in more than 10 different parts of the company.

The 33 participants in the second study were all recent bachelor’s degree graduates in engineering, employed full-time (as described in publication 2, p. 3-4). Early-career engineers are a particularly interesting group to study because although engineering graduates often start their careers in engineering, many consider a wider variety of jobs (Sheppard et al., 2015). Notably, educational success does not predict whether engineers stay (Lowell et al.,
2009). Rather, social and infrastructural barriers inform early-career experiences (Hess et al., 2016; Lutz & Paretti, 2021; Petersen & Buch, 2016) that are gendered and racialised (Beddoes, 2021, 2022; Brunhaver et al., 2013; Buckley et al., 2022; Ross et al., 2021). All participants had graduated more than one but less than two years before the interview and held engineering positions at consultancies, private companies, or public organisations in various sectors in the United States. We divided the participants into four groups: (1) engineers who self-identified as White and man (n = 14), representing the majority of U.S. engineers (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2021), (2) engineers who identified as White and woman (n = 11), (3) engineers who identified as Asian or Asian American, Hispanic or Latino or multi-racial and man (n = 4), and (4) engineers who identified as Asian or Asian American, Hispanic or Latina or multi-racial and women (n = 4). While the proportion of interviewees of colour is smaller than that of White interviewees, this approach supports understanding some intersectional experiences, focusing on the various potential effects of White and man privilege.

The third and fourth publications are based on data obtained from 28 hospital employees in a regional hospital in Australia undergoing a transformational change. Buy-in and employee participation are key indicators for successful transformation in hospitals (Montani et al., 2015), yet many social and hierarchical influences are at play in healthcare environments (Singh & Rangnekar, 2020). Additionally, increased workload or reduced role clarity contributes to hospital workers’ resistance to change (Knight et al., 2020). To be successful, healthcare organisations thus need to develop and implement change management strategies that consider all employees’ needs and concerns (Parsells, 2017). However, little is known about how to promote equal participation in high-reliability environments such as hospitals (Bindl & Parker, 2016). As such, the chosen case could be expected to yield diverse perceptions for voice opportunities.

At the time of the study, the hospital had changed leadership one and a half years ago and had implemented a new strategic plan a year ago. The intention behind the strategic plan was to nurture a more open and innovative working culture in which all employees could voice ideas equally. All hospital employees were invited to participate in a change initiative to develop ways to collaboratively create a safer work environment. This initiative would involve participating in seven full-day workshops, one month apart, with reflective 30-minute interviews after each workshop and one 60-minute interview before the first workshop.

This gives insight into how voice might be supported through participatory design initiatives since voice success depends on framing and successful voice attempts supporting future voice. Indeed, participatory design initiatives incorporating workshops and training have emerged as a valuable approach to addressing immediate issues while facilitating larger organisational transformations (R. C. Smith & Iversen, 2018). These larger transformations hinge on amplifying employee voice, and fostering an environment where employees take a proactive stance, speak up, and take action regarding needs.
and opportunities on the work floor (Morrison, 2023). While various studies have connected participatory design initiatives to success for the individual and the organisation, how these influence issue framing specifically (meaning how employees perceive, articulate, and approach challenges) remains notably underexplored. This is surprising, considering that how issues are framed sheds light on how participants navigate and make sense of organisational complexities and uncertainties outside the more curated environment of the participatory design initiative, offering insights into how we might better support creative and adaptable mindsets and employee voice.

Of the 28 participants who responded to the call, seven were men, 21 were women, and 10 out of 28 held management positions. All participants were White, except the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, who was Aboriginal himself. At the time of the initiative, seventeen employees were frontline workers (e.g., nurses, social workers, orderlies, or paramedics), and eleven desk workers (e.g., HR managers, occupational health and safety officers, or board members).

3.2.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the designers and engineers, asking open-ended questions on previous experiences at the company and expectations going forward. As described in both publications (p. 757 in publication 1, p. 4-5 in publication 2), the studies are based on responses to two specific interview questions: the descriptions of their three top and three bottom moments so far at the companies. Using reflections on top and bottom moments follows the research approach of participant-selected critical incidents (Cope & Watts, 2000). Rather than asking for reflections on meaningful moments in general, asking for the extremes of ‘top’ and ‘bottom moments’ has the advantage that when engaging in retrospective reflections, participants are more likely to recall self-selected, meaningful events in detail and accurately (Chell, 2004). In this study, the reflections are not taken to reflect any objective best and worst moments, rather the purpose is to examine memorable events that provide “first hand evidence of the relationship between context and outcome” (Chell, 2004, p. 47) – the outcome being meaningful professional experiences in this case. No definitions were offered for ‘top’ or ‘bottom’ moments to not impose any considerations on what the designers themselves found meaningful. The specific wording of the prompt varied from interview to interview to keep the tone conversational to encourage designers and engineers to share their thoughts freely. Participants were not required to select three moments of each type, again the main purpose being prompting to reflect on experiences. Interviews with participants of publication 2 also included a question about their intentions going forward (whether to stay in their current role or not).

Publications 3 and 4 leveraged insights from data from the first interview round with the hospital employees. Interviews are an effective method to study complex phenomena, such as situated organisational participation experiences in transformational change (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). Indeed, how interviewees frame the experiences can reveal underlying reasons and
envisioned consequences that inform how they perceive their ability or desire to participate proactively in the transformational change. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants to share their views freely and giving sufficient space to ask for underlying motivations. Publication 3 focuses on the part of the interviews that discussed the working culture. Participants were asked whether they felt management was invested in change, whether they identified as a change-maker, and recent examples of change they had participated in or that had impacted their work. For each example, follow-up questions regarding enablers, hindrances, and involvement of others were asked if appropriate. Publication 4 focused on the responses to what they felt was needed to create a more open and innovative working culture in the hospital and why.

### 3.2.3 Workshops

Publication 4 also leveraged data obtained during the participatory design initiative (as described in publication 4, p. 39). The initiative consisted of four full days with all participants together, each one month apart, with reflective 30-minute interviews after each day. As is common in participatory design, both design workshops and design training were offered. Design workshops involve people in decision-making, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes while nurturing employee creativity, which contributes to organisational profit and success (Piper et al., 2012). Design training focuses on providing employees with design capabilities and cultivating employee connectedness, job satisfaction, and retention (Edmondson & Besieux, 2021). See Table 6 for a summary of the content of each design workshop or training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction to design training</strong></td>
<td>Project introduction, exercises communication and collaboration, exercises and theory design thinking, discussion case studies design thinking in healthcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathise and define design workshop</strong></td>
<td>User description, user journey, pain point identification, formulating design challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideate and prototype design workshop</strong></td>
<td>Splitting design challenge, generating ideas, combining ideas, developing concepts, storyboarding, desktop walkthrough prototype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creating change design training</strong></td>
<td>Reflection on process and methods, deciding what to change, pitching change ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 'creating change' training, participants were asked to reconsider what was needed to create a more open and innovative working culture and briefly pitch their ideas to the group. These brief pitches were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, facilitating the workshops gave me a more in-depth understanding of the participants and their experiences. This supported the data analysis for both publications 3 and 4.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Considering the semi-structured and open-ended nature of the interviews, a rigorous approach for the data analysis was required to achieve trustworthiness
and credibility. A sequential, theory-driven analysis followed by data-driven analysis was considered most appropriate for publications 1, 2, and 3 for several reasons. Firstly, by grounding the analysis in established theoretical frameworks, researchers are less likely to be overwhelmed by the messiness of qualitative data, supporting moving beyond mere descriptions and testing grounded predictions about the phenomenon under study (Bryman, 2017). Secondly, by employing a theoretical framework as an interpretive lens, researchers can move beyond surface-level descriptions and uncover the underlying dynamics and mechanisms shaping the social phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). Lastly, grounding the analysis in established frameworks allows for the generalisation of findings beyond the specific data set, increasing the impact and significance of the research (Bryman, 2017).

For small datasets like in publication 4, however, the benefits of a first theory-driven, then data-driven approach can be outweighed by limitations (G. A. Bowen, 2008). Indeed, imposing a theoretical framework on a small dataset can result in overfitting (Bryman, 2017), hindering the exploration of novel relationships and patterns, which can inform new avenues for investigation (Charmaz, 2006). Therefore, publication 4 applied a purely data-driven analysis.

Table 6. Summary of the data analysis approaches of the publications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis approach</th>
<th>Publication 1</th>
<th>Publication 2</th>
<th>Publication 3</th>
<th>Publication 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Supports and hindrances of job satisfaction</td>
<td>Supports and hindrances of job satisfaction, linked to career plans</td>
<td>Participation experiences increasing or decreasing tendency to voice</td>
<td>Framing of expressed issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Excerpts</td>
<td>160 top and 131 bottom moments</td>
<td>94 top and 58 bottom moments</td>
<td>201 hindrances and 106 supports</td>
<td>19 ideas before and 22 after the design workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Analysis</td>
<td>First theory-driven, then data-driven</td>
<td>First theory-driven, then data-driven</td>
<td>First theory-driven, then data-driven</td>
<td>Data-driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Comparison across two study groups</td>
<td>Comparison across four study groups</td>
<td>Comparison across two study groups</td>
<td>Longitudinal comparison</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.3.1 Excerpt identification

For publications 1 and 2, the authors went through the interview transcripts to identify the responses to the specific question on the interviewees’ three top and bottom moments on the job so far and coded them as such. This resulted in 160 coded top and 131 bottom moments from the 69 designers in study 1 and 94 top and 58 bottom moments from the 33 engineers in study 2. In publication 2, this was complemented by the interviewees’ responses to their intentions going forward, differentiating intentions to stay at the organisation or leave and whether they were aiming for a different position or the same. For publication 3, the entire interview transcripts were scanned to identify any statement
reflecting an experience of being able or unable to participate and tagged as such, which resulted in 201 hindrances and 106 supports shared by the 28 hospital employees. Publication 4 used the same dataset as publication 3, but only the response to the question 'What is needed to create a more open and innovative working culture in the hospital' was tagged. The data obtained in the workshops was also leveraged in publication 4; here, the entire pitch was tagged. In all studies, the coded excerpts were summarised in one-sentence statements in preparation for the two rounds of analysis.

3.3.2 Theory-driven analysis

In a second round of coding, the thematic content of these excerpts on a semantic level (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was mapped to the chosen frameworks for publications 1, 2, and 3. Publication 4 did not have a theory-driven analysis.

Self-determination theory was used in publications 1 and 2, which can help to understand intrinsic motivation at work (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is driven by the desire to engage in an activity for its own sake. Self-determination theory suggests that when employees feel that their basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated (Knoll et al., 2019; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Van Dick et al., 2006). Self-determination theory focuses on social and contextual conditions and experiences that influence innate needs, which, by fueling intrinsic self-motivation, energise, direct, and motivate (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As such, it can reveal factors contributing to job detachment or engagement. Satisfying innate needs has been found to apply in cultures worldwide and support well-being, job satisfaction, and profitability in the workplace (Deci et al., 2017). Particularly in situations where it is unclear which behaviours are required or respected, as in increasingly diverse workplaces such as engineering, studying intrinsic motivation is relevant (Devloo et al., 2015). Indeed, self-determination theory can reveal intrinsic motivation, engagement, and commitment (fulfilled needs) and motives to act (unfulfilled needs). Publication 1 added another layer of coding, combining self-determination theory with the orders of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006), providing an outside-in perspective, examining how people critique and justify their experiences to others (Jensen, 2018).

Similar to publication 1, publication 3 leveraged two theoretical constructs, combining the perspective of employees' tendency to speak up with whether employees have reason to trust management to create change. The tendency to speak was conceptualised through the 'decision calculus' to voice, reflecting a sense of efficacy and safety (Morrison, 2014), and by connecting the experiences to the 'ladder of participation', indicating which level of engagement the experience took place: the promise to inform, consult, involve, or collaborate (Arnstein, 1969).

The mapping into the frameworks was done by evaluating how participants framed meaningful moments or participation experiences. The used frameworks are not the only way to map these experiences, nor do we claim the participants were necessarily cognizant of the frames they invoked for their
experiences. Rather, the frameworks offered ways of making sense of their experiences.

3.3.3 Data-driven analysis

All publications used data-driven coding to identify categories based on semantic-level thematic similarity (Braun & Clarke, 2006); publications 1, 2, and 3 after the theory-driven coding, and publication 4 as the only way of coding. These self-descriptive categories were key results of the studies, following the critical incident technique (Butterfield et al., 2004). They characterise the content and framing of meaningful moments (publications 1 and 2), participation experiences (publication 3), and issues (publication 4). The data-driven coding was done iteratively, allowing codes to emerge organically from the data, minimising researcher bias and ensuring the analysis reflects the full richness and complexity of participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006). For publications 3 and 4, where the author was immersed in the study context, the iterative sensemaking process leveraged an in-depth understanding of the context and participants while reflecting critically on the themes that emerged from the data (Sundler et al., 2019).

3.3.4 Presentation

Each study presented the identified categories by drawing a comparison. Publication 1 compared designers in two organisational contexts, publication 2 early-career engineers across gender and race, publication 3 frontline and desk workers in a hospital, and publication 4 focused on different framings before and after design workshops. Comparisons are particularly valuable to shed light on socio-organisational factors because variations across study groups provide a nuanced understanding of their influence (Bryman, 2017). Indeed, it enables generalising some experiences while also revealing underlying patterns or power dynamics across contexts or individuals (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

In publications 1, 2, and 3, the frequency of categories and subcategories across the study groups was highlighted, providing systematicity and transparency to these comparisons (Chi, 1997). Different from publication 1 and 2, where the distribution and frequency of moments are discussed, publication 3 explores the number of employees who voiced a participation experience in each category rather than the number of expressed experiences because the same employee often shared related experiences that belonged to the same category. Focusing on employee numbers reduces interpretation bias and provides a straightforward overview of how many employees fall into each category, allowing for quick comparisons and identifying trends across the two study groups.
This dissertation presents four original studies published or submitted to peer-reviewed journals, exploring the nuance of the social situatedness of employee voice. Examining different facets of the employee voice construct (Figure 7), the studies offer a comprehensive view, revealing social intricacies at the initial and final stages. This contributes to a richer understanding of the dynamics of employee voice and how to support it across diverse contexts. Publication 1 focuses on employee motivation, and publication 2 deepens our understanding of how motivation connects to employees’ resolution to voice, stay, or leave. Publication 3, in turn, focuses on assessing voice efficacy and safety, touching on the connection to resolution. Publication 4, lastly, does not target any of the facets specifically, but focuses on issue framing, which connects to all facets.

Figure 7. The publications in relation to the employee voice construct
4.1 Publication 1. Meaningful moments at work: frames evoked by in-house and consultancy designer

In publication 1, we analyse 69 designers’ self-selected critical incidents in two organisational contexts, exploring how internal drives and external justifications shape their experiences. To make sense of their experiences, we leverage two established frameworks: self-determination theory's three innate needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Boltanski and Thévenot's six orders of worth (2006) (Figure 8).

![Figure 8. Our framework combining three innate needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and six different orders of justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).](image)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 37 designers working at a large technology company and 35 designers at a design consultancy, operating predominantly in technology-driven contexts. They were asked to describe their top three and bottom three moments at the companies. Selecting three moments of each type was not enforced, resulting in 160 top moments and 131 bottom moments. Most moments were connected to innate needs of competence and relatedness, usually positively, and autonomy was least frequent, usually invoked to justify a bottom moment. Despite having a competence framing for many moments, they rarely described the work itself but were almost always tied to the reception of others. For example, designers were motivated by professional development and individual successes, such as being offered positions, promotions, or assignments, experiencing new perspectives through learning and teaching, and seeing their impact, such as increased understanding of design through workshops and discussions. Dissatisfaction, in turn, emerged from regulations hindering advancing design and other long processes and discussions. Framed more as relatedness, designers expressed valuing receiving recognition in the form of appreciation or trust from managers and clients, as well as having open and responsive superiors. On a peer level, designers valued social gatherings, feeling equal, seeing honesty, constructive collaborations, and appreciating each other. Undermining a sense of relatedness, in turn, was often attributed to interpersonal issues such as disrespectful managers, discouraging feedback, or a lack of reassuring feedback, as well as experiencing insufficient support, psychological safety, transparent communication, trust, or involvement. Additionally, the designers felt hindered by being misunderstood by peers or...
Results

experiencing social tension, as well as when they were left out or alone or when colleagues were leaving. Overall, designers rarely mentioned design practice as a top or bottom moment and instead found meaning in their work’s social and organisational context.

Some key differences emerged across the two organisations. In-house designers more often framed their moments as market and industrial competence (e.g., growing as a professional, getting a position, promotion), which aligns with innovative working cultures. Design consultants, in turn, emphasised civic and domestic relatedness more (e.g., social gatherings, people leaving), connected to a supportive culture. For employee voice to flourish, both an innovative (divergent and learning) and supportive (empowering and caring) culture is necessary (Andriopoulos, 2001). Notably, while voicing creative ideas requires high autonomy (Andriopoulos, 2001), its scarce connection to positive moments in the current study suggests it may be a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful design work - whereas the social dimension of work influences job satisfaction, and subsequently employee voice, more.

Main findings

- While autonomy is essential for creativity, a sense of competence more often hinges on social interactions with peers and supervisors than on the work itself, suggesting meaningful collaboration is needed ‘to energise’ voice;
- Being misunderstood when voicing ideas resulting in unsatisfactory responses undermines motivation at work;
- Each workplace has its unique culture and power dynamics, necessitating understanding motivations and tailored approaches to promote voice and address challenges.

4.2 Publication 2. Moments that Matter: Early-Career Experiences of Diverse Engineers on Different Career Pathways

To deepen our understanding of how employee motivation connects to resolutions to voice, silence, or exit (Hirschman, 1970), publication 2 dives into the intricacies of motivators and dissatisfactions connected to career intentions of early-career engineers. Publication 2 dives into the socially situated nature of early-career engineering experiences to shed light on how these inform intrinsic motivation and willingness to stay or leave the organisation, comparing engineers across gender and race. As such, it contributes to emerging studies highlighting the power and privilege newcomers face when entering the workforce (Beddoes, 2021, 2022, 2023). Without going into the assessment of, e.g., efficacy and safety of voice specifically, this study explores factors influencing motivation and envisioned possibilities in or outside the organisation in more detail.

Like in publication 1, the early career engineers (14 White men, 11 White women, 4 Asian or Asian American Hispanic or Latino or multi-racial men, and 4 Asian or Asian American, Hispanic or Latina or multi-racial women) were
asked but not forced to share three top and bottom moments on the job so far. This resulted in 94 reported top moments and 58 bottom moments. Additionally, participants in this study were asked about their intentions going forward, differentiating whether they intended to stay at the same organisation or not and whether they were aiming for a different position or the same. Although many moments reflected competence, i.e., effectiveness, it was clear that social interactions predominantly influenced motivation. Indeed, social conditions often impacted not only relatedness but also competence and autonomy. Distinct patterns were found across the various study groups when they discussed social validation. For example, White men shared abundant moments reflecting positive recognition, bonding, being the go-to guy, receiving praise from peers, and early promotions from superiors. Men of colour, in turn, shared more informal events supporting their relatedness, such as a welcoming training or a camping trip. White women’s top moments rarely reflected social interactions, with only a few describing peer support or appreciation as top moments. Women of colour’s top moments never mentioned social interactions with peers, only validation from superiors. Additionally, all men were less likely to have negative social experiences, except for a few mentions of communication issues, compared to all women, who often recalled lacking a sense of belonging, being subjected to inappropriate behaviour or feeling embarrassed after making a mistake. Indeed, social categorisation (Faems & Subramanian, 2013) may contribute to these early-career experiences. In this social process, actors at the workplace draw distinctions between ‘us’, with whom the categoriser identifies as similar, and dissimilar ‘others’ (Faems & Subramanian, 2013). Being relatively visibly expressed characteristics, gender and race are prevalent bases for ‘ingrouping’ and ‘outgrouping’ people (Jehn et al., 1999). In this context, White and man are bases for ‘ingrouping’. Outgrouping can lead to less information sharing (Schubert & Tavassoli, 2020) and poorer connections to supervisors and peers (Ibarra, 1993; L. Zhang et al., 2020). Our findings of differential recognition within organisations support existing notions of likely being out-grouped people facing more obstacles to contribute, as their social identity and novel perspectives connect less with dominant cultures (Hofstra et al., 2020).

It is worrying in particular that while engineers of each intersection of gender and race were planning to stay and advance in the organisation, only White men assessed that internal opportunities were worth their while. Women and people of colour who felt motivated by moments increasing their sense of competence sought external credentials to advance, hoping to get promoted to do more technical work or provide more value for the organisation. Indeed, White men were also most likely to share top moments of receiving early promotions, which is positively associated with voice (S. H. Lin & Johnson, 2015). Thus, accessibility or visibility of opportunities seemed to be influenced by different experiences on the job due to intersections of gender and race.

Lastly, engineers shared clear reasons for intending to leave. Indeed, although moments were never directly connected to the decision to stay or leave, the sum of experiences influenced their decisions. For example, White men’s
experiences of receiving praise and bonuses from managers, combined with their good reputation and connectedness with peers and leadership, saw internal advancement opportunities to become managers and increase their impact and responsibility. Women, in turn, desired to advance to get away from the most negative social experiences (although through different pathways than White men). Indeed, negative social interactions contributed to these decisions; however, predominantly, they mentioned a lack of control over the scope of work in their current positions. Leaving engineers often felt good about their work, but not the resistance limiting their effectiveness or control. Those looking for a similar position in another type of organisation all hoped that the change would provide more opportunities to meaningfully contribute in their line of work, for example, by working in a smaller organisation. While reasons for looking for a different type of position in another organisation were more varied, these also focused on seeking opportunities to work on more meaningful issues or have more ownership in one’s work. Usually, these engineers felt good about their work, not about the resistance they received. Here, again, differences were seen across gender and race. Overall, White engineers were more likely to stay than engineers of colour. White men, whether staying or leaving, were motivated by superior praise and demotivated by time-related issues as a result of team dynamics. For some staying engineers, receiving recognition and collective enthusiasm outweighed vivid recollections of interpersonal conflict. Leaving engineers in the other three study groups shared more bottom moments related to social interactions, e.g. White women unintentionally offending somebody, men of colour lamented siloed communication, and women of colour shared various collaboration issues. Indeed, men more often leave for opportunities or career advancement issues, while women more often escape a negative work climate (Frehill, 2009; Sheppard et al., 2015). White women left to be able to focus more on the technical work, whereas men and women of colour were dissatisfied with the work impact and challenge. Overall, accumulated issues, which underrepresented groups experience more due to ‘outgrouping’, resulted in tipping points to, at some point, leave (Naukkarinen & Bairoh, 2022; Woodrow & Guest, 2020).

Main findings

- Recognition and validation from colleagues (or lack thereof) influence engineers’ sense of effectiveness, impacting individual motivation to voice ideas;
- Being part of the outgroup impacts a sense of belonging and motivation to voice negatively and reduces awareness or perceived usefulness of supportive mechanisms such as internal growth opportunities, decreasing the likeliness voice opportunity assessments are positive;
- Catching silence early on might prevent diverse employees leaving early on to involve them in shaping work environments that are sufficiently supportive, impactful, and challenging.
4.3 Publication 3. Mind the gap: Comparing desk and frontline employees’ voice tendencies in participatory design

Publication 3 studies perceptions of socio-organisational factors indicating openness to voice, in particular, influencing assessment. This publication is based on interviews with hospital employees at the healthcare facility undergoing a transformational change, shedding light on how employees in different positions frame participation experiences influencing their tendency to voice.

I interviewed seventeen frontline workers and eleven desk workers, inquiring about change they initiated and change impacting them. If participants shared change initiatives, follow-up questions targeting enablers and hindrances were asked. This resulted in 201 statements reflecting a hindrance and 106 statements reflecting supports. Consistent with existing research, I found common barriers primarily in employee willingness (e.g., resistance, insufficient establishment of psychological safety) and management support (e.g., effective communication to keep people in the loop, hierarchical distance). However, a more nuanced picture emerged when comparing desk workers with frontline workers, highlighting the role of management reach and stubborn beliefs.

Regarding management reach, the hospital’s new leadership had implemented a strategic plan providing more opportunities for all employees to voice issues and ideas. However, interviews revealed a disparity in the perception and utilisation of these opportunities among staff. While some celebrated the changes, many frontline workers seemed unaware or unable to engage, attributing it partly to the communication medium chosen by leadership. Desk workers benefited from an open-door policy and accessible information in blogs and newsletters, whereas frontline workers, occupied with their duties, lacked the same access. This information gap may diminish frontline workers' understanding of their roles, impacting their perceived efficacy to voice and resist leadership initiatives, reducing motivation. The fear of speaking up among frontline workers and desk workers’ apprehension to impose resulted in negative assessments to voice for both study groups.

In addition to awareness of changes and opportunities, many interviewees, particularly frontline workers, referenced experiences from before the change in leadership as hindering participation. Indeed, negative outcomes in previous experiences that might have led to stress or penalties, among others, as mentioned by several interviewees, might have contributed to employees developing less participatory tendencies, in particular by being less ‘energised to’ engage (Björklund et al., 2023). This can be explained through thinking frames (Edmondson, 2003a). Indeed, despite the presence, frontline employees did not perceive the invitations to join conversations similar to desk workers. It also provides another perspective on why people might be resistant to change.

Main findings

- Different pockets in an organisation might assess the same situation differently, both as a result of their ability or opportunity to utilise the
available mechanisms, but also due to conversations being held in these pockets turning assumptions into ‘truths’;

- Previous unsuccessful voicing attempts shape employee motivation and likeliness they would assess future attempts as meaningful despite changes in the mechanisms and culture supporting voice.
- Misunderstanding the reasons behind employee silence can exacerbate existing challenges. Without understanding why people are silent, mechanisms to promote voice might just promote already represented voices, instead of those unheard.

4.4 Publication 4. How participatory design influences issue framing: a hospital case study

Publication 4, like publication 3, results from the longitudinal study conducted at a healthcare facility in Australia. Where publication 3 targeted hospital employees’ assessment of their ability to voice, publication 4 dives deeper into how they framed issues. The longitudinal study allowed me to compare how employees framed issues before and after the design workshops took place to deduce the impact of these design workshops on issue framing.

In the same interview as publication 3, I asked participants what was needed to create a more open and innovative working culture in the hospital and why. Due to the flow of the interview, not all 27 participants were asked this question, resulting in 19 ideas being shared before the participatory design initiative. After this introductory interview, participants joined the workshops ‘introduction to design training’, ‘empathise and define design workshop’, ‘ideate and prototype design workshop’, and ‘creating change design training’. The first three workshops targeted the design challenge of reducing occupational violence (in particular, from patients or their close ones to nurses). In the ‘creating change’ training, participants were asked to reconsider what was needed to create a more open and innovative working culture and briefly pitch their ideas to the group. Due to incomplete attendance at the final workshop, 22 ideas were shared this time.

Ideas for a more open and innovative working culture expressed before and after the design initiative predominantly reflected a need for more time to reflect, think, and improve. However, clear differences were found between the framing before and after the initiative. Firstly, the framing of initial ideas reflected predominantly a need for more resources, such as staff, time, or physical resources. In contrast, the ideas after the initiative were more often framed as a need for a shift in ways of working, such as better internal collaboration or improving communication with patients by sharing or asking for more information. Indeed, before the workshops, issues were mostly framed as out of their own hands, which reduces the likeliness they are positively received (Edmondson, 2003b). After participating in the design initiative, employees framed issues more prosocially, focusing on the collective benefit of addressing the problem. This suggests a shift towards focusing on their voice’s positive impact on the organisation and colleagues. Additionally, they framed
issues with greater concreteness, indicating a clearer understanding of the organisational complexity and potential solutions. This increased awareness can facilitate more informed voice contributions and better collaboration with other stakeholders, potentially leading to more targeted and effective voice actions. This shift in framing indicates increased employee change receptivity as well (Frahm & Brown, 2007).

Main findings

- Hospital employees initially framed issues in a way that positioned themselves as lacking the ability to influence them. This reflects a perception of limited control and agency, potentially discouraging voice behaviour.
- Participation in design initiatives can shift employee framing towards self-efficacy, prosocial motivation, and concreteness, leading to more effective voice behaviour.
- While autonomy is a core prerequisite for creativity, experiencing or lack of autonomy can be explained through various underlying factors, some of which could be reframed.

4.5 Summary

The four studies highlight nuance and intricacies influencing motivation at work, assessment of voice opportunities, and resolutions to voice or not. As expected, clear differences were found across different groups, whether comparing designers in different organisational contexts, early-career engineers across intersections of gender and race, or hospital employees in desk- or frontline positions. As such, each study context revealed the importance of socio-organisational factors influencing voice motivation and assessment.

Publications 1, 2, and 3 each highlighted in one way or another how similar work environments were experienced differently, impacting motivation and perceptions of opportunities. To truly leverage the creative potential of all employees, meaningful collaborations are needed to energise employee voice (publication 1). Indeed, social interactions with peers and supervisors not only enhance employees’ sense of relatedness and belonging but also support a sense of competence through peer-to-peer support and superior validation (publications 1 and 2). Additionally, participants recalled unsuccessful voicing attempts undermining their motivation (publications 1 and 3). Despite changes in leadership styles and available mechanisms introduced to support voice more, hospital employees still assessed voice opportunities as risky and futile (publication 3). Former voicing attempts by individuals or peers might thus be more crucial in shaping employee perceptions and influencing their willingness to voice concerns resulting in vicious spirals of silence for some and virtuous spirals of voice for others, increasing established power imbalances.

While autonomy is essential for creative work, how issues are framed might influence whether autonomy is experienced (publication 4). Indeed, when
experiencing an issue, employees might be inclined to frame it as beyond their control, resulting in perceived limited control and agency, potentially discouraging voice behaviour (publication 4). Participating in design initiatives revealed an increased ability to frame issues towards self-efficacy, prosocial motivation, and concreteness, supporting motivation, assessment, and effective voice behaviour (publication 4). Framing also influences employees’ motivation and assessment through peer-to-peer conversation, explaining in part how certain pockets of an organisation hold similar stubborn beliefs regarding the costs and futility of voice (publication 3). However, differences in awareness or perceived usefulness don’t necessarily stem solely from alternative framing; accessibility and chance of success of voice-supporting mechanisms are also influenced by intersections of gender and race (publication 2) and what their roles permit (publication 3). Misunderstanding the reasons behind employee silence can exacerbate existing challenges. Without understanding why people are silent, mechanisms to promote voice might just promote already represented voices, instead of those unheard.
5. Discussion and Implications

Diversifying the workforce is going slower than could be expected from the increasingly diverse groups of students and job applicants. Indeed, the White-men dominated workplace dynamics hinder newcomers from participating equally in innovation and development activities. This carries social, psychological, and economic costs, as diversity has been connected to increased creativity, diligence, and productivity (Phillips et al. 2014). As such, it is unsurprising that interest in transforming organisational cultures towards more open and innovative environments has been gaining traction in order to drive inclusive innovation and development. However, transformation success depends on employees’ engagement, taking action and speaking up (Morrison, 2023). Thus, we must understand what supports and hinders employee voice.

Despite decades of research, employee voice literature is still emerging due to the diverse literature streams conceptualising voice in different ways and the (assumed) homogeneous workforces initially studied. While studies have revealed personal and organisational antecedents, voice mechanisms, applied styles and tactics, as well as outcomes for the voicer, organisation, and voice target, we still know relatively little about the socio-organisational factors influencing diverse employee experiences. This dissertation highlights how socio-organisational factors influence job motivation and assessment of opportunities leading to resolutions to voice, stay silent, or leave. This section discusses the theoretical contributions in the form of propositions drawing from the explorative studies and outlines practical implications for managers.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Employees voicing issues is not an isolated event. Due to the highly social context of engineering and development work contexts, where creativity and innovation are valued, prerequisites to voice are influenced by continuous interactions with people around them. Additionally, responses to employees who voice issues have an effect on future voicing. Indeed, there is a loop in the voice construct, connecting the outcomes back to the prerequisites. This can result in virtuous spirals of voice for some, while others experience vicious spirals of silence. While more factors influence employees’ desire and ability to voice (e.g., personality, organisational structure, leadership styles), the explorative, empirical studies of this dissertation highlight the importance of collaborative sensemaking on the prerequisites of motivation at work and
assessment of voice opportunities, as well as the lasting effects of previous attempts when amplifying unheard voices.

### 5.1.1 Proposition 1. Collaborative sensemaking disproportionally dampens unheard voices

In publications 2 and 3, some groups did not consider mechanisms to increase their voice or assess them as meaningful, while others did. This could be attributed to a lack of affirmation, reducing their motivation to voice (publication 1). Publication 2 reveals that an accumulation of these experiences can result in silence or leaving the organisation altogether to have more autonomy and impact in innovation and development activities. Notably, this was true for employees who had not been on the job very long, implying the beliefs informing these assessments were transferred from their social environment through collaborative sensemaking (Hatch, 1993). Indeed, Morrison (2011) argued that engaging in voice is influenced by personal experiences and voice attempts by peers. Publication 3, in particular, reveals that some teams or units held stubborn beliefs based on the stories of others. Indeed, this could be explained using thinking frames, turning experiences into local ‘truths’ as they are being told and retold within one community. Thinking frames are developed over time, in education and work (Russo & Schoemaker, 2002), and applied to new contexts often as the truth rather than a personal frame (Edmondson, 2003a). Especially employees further removed from management and with less central positions, thus not as exposed to various thinking frames, might suffer from this. Various studies have shown that status, power, and hierarchical positions support speaking up due to more opportunities and more central positions (Pfrombeck et al., 2022). Publication 2, in turn, revealed that these differences could be exacerbated due to in- and outgrouping, explaining different awareness or perceived usefulness of these mechanisms, resulting in less access to information and opportunities. This also became apparent in publication 4, where employees framed issues initially as lacking the ability to influence them. Based on these insights, I add nuance to our understanding of collaborative sensemaking for unheard voices.

This leads me to propose the following:

**Proposition 1.** Unheard voices are undermined disproportionally through collaborative sensemaking influencing job motivation and voice opportunity assessment:

1a. Besides a sense of belonging, social interactions also influence a sense of competence through coworker support and validation;  

1b. Peers’ framing of perceived efficacy and safety informs individuals’ assessment of voice opportunities, resulting in different resolutions;  

1c. Framing and reframing capabilities support shifting motivation and opportunity assessment resulting in more resolutions to voice.
The need for more understanding of the social situatedness of voice has long been acknowledged (Morrison, 2011). Indeed, studying individual factors without acknowledging influences from the group might fail to grasp the whole picture and lack the nuance or complexity of the situation (Morrison, 2011; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). In the context of engineering, young engineers develop identities that are both ‘engineer’ and their ‘gender and race’ (Ross et al., 2021), resulting in tensions for underrepresented intersections of gender and race where the ‘self’ is less or potentially insufficiently represented in their own and their peers’ ‘identity’, thus hampering growth and development of said ‘identity’ by interacting with the social context (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011). This depersonalisation can reduce interactions, opting for silence and decreasing the likeliness to voice (Kirrane et al., 2017; Knoll et al., 2019). As such, despite attempts to establish mechanisms improving inclusion in innovation and development initiatives, some groups might still feel unable to participate.

However, employee studies have focused more on either personality or contextual factors instead of the complex social and hierarchical interactions influencing abilities and perceived opportunities (Cai et al., 2022; El Baroudi et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2023; Klehe et al., 2021). Studies that do focus on these, in turn, tend to focus on employee-supervisor relationships solely, leaving the social and contextual factors and their interplay still largely unknown (Björklund et al., 2023; Cai et al., 2022; Ontrup & Kluge, 2022; Spaeth, 2022). Notably, some studies have focused on relational or contextual antecedents specifically (Morrison, 2023), e.g. voice is motivated by coworkers’ respect (increasing coworkers’ respect) (Ng et al., 2021), supervisors’ and coworkers’ support (increasing a sense of obligation) (Curcuruto et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2015), and supervisors’ and coworkers’ voice engagements (supporting psychological safety) (Ng et al., 2021; Subhakaran & Dyaram, 2018). However, despite revealing meaningful correlations, these quantitative studies provide a limited understanding of the intricacies of the socio-organisational factors influencing voice. The publications in this dissertation reveal more understanding of differences among employees in similar positions. While the propositions are based on exploratory data, they offer promising avenues for further research.

5.1.2 Proposition 2. Unsuccessful voice attempts have long-term, spiralling effects

Publications 1 and 2 highlighted core issues resulting from being misunderstood when attempting to voice, undermining motivation and perceiving a lack of opportunity to shape the work environment into a desirable one, in particular, newcomer engineers who could increase diversity opting to leave. In line with emerging models (Kim et al., 2023; Pfrombeck et al., 2022), we thus highlight the importance of acknowledging the loop present in employee voice. Indeed, feeling silenced or unheard results in employees remaining silent, causing stress, dissatisfaction, disengagement, underperformance, and faster turnover.
(Nechanska et al., 2020). Disengaged employees are less likely to use informal voice mechanisms and resort to formal channels only (Mowbray et al., 2015). As such, this may result in ‘spirals of silence’, a term originally coined by Noelle-Neumann (1974), describing how individuals tend to conform to perceived majority opinions and remain silent when they believe their own views are unpopular. This, Noelle-Neumann (1974) argued, explains how dominant narratives automatically strengthen while marginalised weaken in the context of public opinion. This theory was applied to the context of employee voice by Bowen and Blackmon (2003), who demonstrated how queer people are less likely to voice issues because they fear outgrouping due to their sexuality. This suggests that silence in one area of an employee’s life can lead to silence in others, with employee silence reflecting socio-cultural power imbalances. This leads to the second proposition:

Proposition 2. Amplifying unheard voices might be less effective when employees are experiencing ‘spirals of silence’ where intentional silence is ingrained due to historical failed voicing attempts by themselves or employees similar to them:

2a. Being misunderstood, which is more likely for unheard voices, undermines motivation and the likeliness of voicing again;

2b. Without sufficiently understanding why employees are silent, implementing voice mechanisms might adversely amplify only already represented voices, further decreasing motivation and voice opportunity assessment of more unheard voices;

2c. A culture of silence impacts employees’ framing of perceived assessment of future voice opportunities, reducing their effectiveness.

Indeed, spirals of silence could be particularly problematic in organisations attempting to open up voice mechanisms to all their employees to invite more diverse perspectives. Social and contextual factors influence employees’ knowledge, capabilities, motivation, and expectations regarding participation in shaping their work environment (Bindl & Parker, 2016). This cycle can become vicious when silence prevails, leading to a decreased understanding of the work environment, resistance to leadership, and difficulty implementing change initiatives (Gagné et al., 2010; Montani et al., 2015). Simultaneously, employees more assimilated to the status quo might voice more due to higher motivation and expectancy, resulting in their perspective being overrepresented in shaping the work environment. Consequently, these employees might, intentionally or unintentionally, reinforce the dominant view, shaping shared understanding further in their direction (Spaeth, 2022). Positive voice experiences increase satisfaction and motivation while decreasing stress for the ones who can voice (Greenberger & Strasser, 1986; L. E. Parker, 1993). Thus, while ‘spirals of voice’ can emerge in some pockets of an organisation, ‘spirals of silence’ can simultaneously occur in others (Wilkinson et al. 2023). Besides this being a missed chance to make progress on democratising the workplace (Wilkinson et al., 2023), voice resulting from social dominance also reduces team
performance (Pfrombeck et al., 2022; Sherf et al., 2021). Pfrombeck et al. (2022) emphasise the need to break the vicious spiral of silence and emphasise the internal contagion of silence, particularly among marginalised groups. This necessitates a shift towards a more diverse and inclusive understanding of voice, as advocated by Nechańska et al. (2020) and Wilkinson et al. (2023).

5.2 Practical implications

The current dissertation highlights the social situatedness of amplifying unheard voices to promote innovation and development. Increasing the presence of formal and informal mechanisms might not be sufficient to overcome employees choosing silence due to collaborative sensemaking and stubborn beliefs. The social dynamics surrounding employee voice present valuable considerations for professionals and educators in innovation and development.

First, the results highlight that job satisfaction, which informs motivation to stay and voice issues and ideas, is influenced by social dynamics. Even in engineering, where effectiveness and novelty are valued highly, these are often experienced in relation to collaboration and validation. Getting employees to stay at the organisation and engaged in their work is thus a matter of creating work environments where employees experience a sufficient sense of belonging and respect.

Secondly, establishing voice mechanisms, whether formal or informal, to promote issue sharing does not mean employees experience equal access to them. While these accessibility issues can be partially overcome by considering who has time and where information is made available, cues influencing accessibility also come from peers. This requires a deeper understanding of how communication works in the organisation. Understanding the types of social networks present in the organisation, might help support managers thus to promote voice (R. Cross et al., 2005). The results show that management promises and cues are made sense of in peer-to-peer conversations. In some pockets, stubborn beliefs might exist that undermine employees’ sense of safety, efficacy, or trust in the mechanisms that are made available. Especially in pockets of people who have historically gone unheard, these beliefs might exist as a result of experiences in the past, despite managerial changes in the present. Knowing which beliefs exist and how they are made sense of is thus an important part of supporting voice.

One potential avenue to further support voice might be to focus on framing abilities. By training employees in shifting frames, they can frame issues in ways that empower them and make it easier for others to join in. It can change the perception of issues from out of one’s hands to within one’s power to change. As such, it can increase motivation, opportunity assessment, and successful voice attempts, countering vicious cycles of silence. This might support each of the five innovation capabilities identified by Liedtka et al. (2022): opportunity seeking, relationship, scientific reasoning, presencing the future, and reflection skills. Notably, not everything comes down to framing, and I do not intend to
downplay the real existence of power imbalances and exclusion on the work floor. However, this is an important implication for managers interested in creating work environments where more diverse perspectives are leveraged for more successful innovation. Additionally, educators in the field of innovation and engineering can incorporate this more into the curriculum. Indeed, framing is a valuable skill both for problem-solving, inherent to the engineering field, and for navigating the social dynamics of the workplace.

5.3 Limitations of the dissertation

This dissertation studied various socio-organisational factors influencing facets of employee voice. While each study revealed valuable insights, the compiled thesis and derived implications are not without limitations.

Firstly, I adopted a multiple-case study approach, studying experiences of designers in two different organisational contexts based in nine different countries in publication 1, early-career engineers in various organisations in the United States in publication 2, and hospital workers in a regional healthcare facility in Australia in publications 3 and 4. Examining facets of employee voice across various contexts (industries, organisational contexts, and nations) enriched the understanding of its multifaceted nature and how these manifest differently under diverse conditions. Similarly, having participants from diverse backgrounds and roles provided a more comprehensive picture of possible employee voice dynamics. However, comparing findings across the different contexts and compiling them might not take the unique characteristics of each setting into account. Indeed, while patterns across the different contexts might provide more proof for the generalisability, differences can be explained in various ways. Simultaneously, different study groups were compared in publications 1, 2, and 3 (the comparison in publication 4 didn’t target study groups but evaluated the impact of an intervention for all participants). Publication 1 compared in-house with consultancy designers, publication 2 cross-sections of early-career engineers’ gender and race, and publication 3 frontline and desk workers. Publications 2 and 3 targeted anticipated power imbalances - building on studies that have shown that White and male privilege exist in the engineering context and that frontline employees are often less able to influence decision-making, while publication 1 set out to describe differences across the study groups without an equality agenda. Again, these diverse comparisons revealed more nuance and intricacies of how employee voice varies based on certain factors (organisational culture, gender, race, or role), providing more insights to better understand the complex socio-organisational factors that can influence voice. However, although I have done my best to present the data most honestly and transparently, the more generalised propositions might not apply to each of these similarly.

Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions in each publication. Intentionally, no hypotheses were formulated beforehand to potentially uncover unforeseen aspects of employee voice based on unique experiences and perspectives participants decided to share in their
own words. Especially for less understood phenomena, this is often a preferred method (Charmaz 2006). However, this also made the data analysis more challenging and open to the researcher’s bias. This was partially mitigated by choosing clear, established frameworks to make sense of the data in publications 1, 2, and 3. Additionally, in publications 1 and 2, two researchers reviewed each coded excerpt and discussed differences until an agreement was reached. Naturally, the journal reviewers also supported more rigour in this process. However, considering the social nature of the phenomenon, the results are never without bias. Bias also may have been present in the interviewees. Publications 1, 2, and 3 applied retrospective interviews, which are susceptible to recall bias. Indeed, participants’ memories may be inaccurate or distorted over time. This was partially mitigated by applying the critical incident technique in publications 1 and 2, increasing participants' likeliness to recall self-selected, meaningful events in detail and accurately (Chell, 2004). Publication 3, in turn, although previous experiences were shared, the interview focused more on the perceived current state of affairs. Additionally, as a social constructivist, I am mostly interested in how employees perceive reality, even if misremembered, as this is also the frame they would use when assessing whether to voice or not. However, observations could have strengthened the data collection to triangulate the data, capturing unconscious behaviours, taken-for-granted practices, or other socio-organisational factors that shape employee voice in real-time situations.

Lastly, a clear limitation for all studies was the small sample size (69 designers in publication 1, 33 early-career engineers in publication 2, and 28 hospital workers in publications 3 and 4). While in-depth qualitative studies often rely on smaller samples to be able to dive deep and provide a more nuanced understanding of experiences, it also limits generalisability. The rich contextual details provided in the interviews were crucial for interpreting and presenting the data, yet should be treated cautiously. Since each data set was split into smaller study groups to draw comparisons, the frequency and causality are largely speculative. They should thus not be used as evidence but as starting points for future research. In addition to the small sample size, different facets of voice were studied in each publication, and not all were initially explicitly connected to employee voice. Indeed, designers were asked about top and bottom moments at work, which was connected to motivation in the published article and to employee voice in this compilation. Early-career engineers shared meaningful moments and career intentions. The moments were interpreted as supports or hindrances for motivation at work, supporting voice, and career intentions reflected a desire to stay or leave, not whether they were planning to voice. Publication 3 inquired about experiences of change, whether self-initiated, involved, or imposed, which were deconstructed to reveal cues reflecting a sense of efficacy and safety to voice. Lastly, publication 4 focused on issue framing in an interview and workshop setting, which might not reflect how they would voice these ideas in an organisational setting. Implicit expressions of voice-related factors may have provided a greater understanding of its complex nature and dynamics and how it interfaces with power imbalances and
organisational constraints. However, inquiring more explicitly about voice might have led to important insights missed in this study.

5.4 Future research

Inherent to an explorative study, the implications lead to more nuanced questions and possible explorations rather than validated concrete answers. Here I list a few potential avenues inspired by this study that are worth exploring.

Future research can for example delve deeper into how diverse employees navigate peer-to-peer sensemaking processes. This could involve qualitative studies examining how factors like race, gender, or cultural background influence how individuals interpret and share information within their peer groups particularly related to voice motivation and assessment of efficacy and safety. Such research could shed light on how diverse employees navigate power dynamics and potential marginalisation within these sensemaking processes. Moving beyond the expected demographic divisions, future research could also categorise study groups based on who voices and who stays silent (and who leaves). This could reveal forms of marginalisation and power imbalances not captured by known factors (e.g., gender, race, age, role, tenure), or highlight experiences of different intersections of these impacting voice (Wilkinson et al., 2023).

Additionally, the voice construct itself could be studied more deeply to understand influences and causalities. Perhaps inquiring about ‘moments of voice’, when employees have voiced ideas or chosen not to, to then dive deeper into their experienced motivations, perceived efficacy and safety, and navigated social dynamics can provide rich descriptions of how these elements connect to each other, to better understand the temporal dynamics (Morrison, 2023). Additionally, the effects of their successful or unsuccessful voicing attempts could be inquired about in terms of how it impacted the organisation, their relation with the voice target, their motivation, self-efficacy, sense of safety, social dynamics with peers, etc. Perhaps a preferred target group here could be early-career employees to link the findings to retention and career development. Longitudinal studies tracking early-career individuals could explore how their voice experiences shape their career aspirations and satisfaction, ultimately informing the design of meaningful career pathways that include all talent (Jiang et al., 2023).

Framing has been discussed in each publication and matches employee voice literature well. Therefore, the influence of framing abilities on employee experiences deserves further investigation. Studies could explore how individuals’ abilities in framing ideas and concerns affect their voice motivation, sense of efficacy, and safety and whether this leads to more successful voice attempts and innovative abilities. Of particular interest could be whether framing can support countering spirals of silence, influence stubborn beliefs, and turn them into spirals of voice (Nechanska et al., 2020).
From a methodological point of view, future studies can consider triangulation with observations. Incorporating observations alongside interviews enables capturing unconscious behaviours, taken-for-granted practices, and other socio-organisational factors that shape employee voice in real-time. Additionally, longitudinal studies, such as multiple interview rounds or daily diaries, can provide a deeper understanding of how employee experiences evolve over time and interrelate with changes in voice behaviours and organisational contexts.

5.5 Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have argued that inclusive innovation and development can occur only if employees are motivated to stay and can voice issues and ideas. Inclusive innovation literature to date has focused predominantly on who to involve, the types of activities, envisioned outcomes, and facilitation of both the development and implementation of innovations (Schillo & Robinson, 2017). Additionally, extant voice research has focused on mechanisms, leadership, and individual tendencies to voice. However, my studies have highlighted the important role of the social context and its history. Considering the historical overrepresentation and dominance of White men in engineering and development, formal mechanisms are more tailored and informal social avenues more accessible to them. Thus, more understanding of socio-organisational factors is needed when amplifying unheard voices to drive inclusive innovation and development.

Despite increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, attracting and effectively amplifying unheard voices is not easy, attracting attention from practitioners and academics alike. The studies in this dissertation each point to the importance, nuance, and intricacies of socio-organisational factors supporting and hindering employee voice. The first proposition highlights the role of collaborative sensemaking concerning job motivation and assessment of available opportunities regarding safety and efficacy. Indeed, sensemaking of workplace situations and opportunities occurs in conversations between peers. The second proposition argues that managers' response to voice directly affects the motivation and opportunity assessment. As such, pockets of people, whether grouped due to being in the same unit or similar demographics, might frame the work situation and available opportunities differently from other pockets. Indeed, besides motivation and assessment, the effect of successful or unsuccessful voice attempts is likely to influence collaborative sensemaking (Figure 9).
Over time, these frames can be experienced as the truth, resulting in stubborn beliefs. This, in turn, can lead to vicious spirals of silence for historically unheard groups, despite organisational attempts to invite these voices through formal mechanisms. This can lead to these mechanisms going undernoticed and underutilised, or worse, in them being utilised more by already represented voices, increasing power imbalances.

While literature is still emerging in this area, the publications of this dissertation offer promising starting points that can be leveraged to explore how to break the vicious dynamics that cause spirals of silence. Both publications 1 and 2 highlighted how positive experiences can outweigh negative experiences. For example, in-house designers focused on efficiency and advancement (or lack thereof) and design consultants on the level of support and learning from colleagues. Additionally, women engineers with the most negative social experiences – when coupled with intense positive experiences of competence on the job – did not intend to leave their organisation or the field but instead saw possibilities to change their circumstances through advancement. In turn, frontline workers at the hospital (publication 3) celebrated an increase in autonomy and learning opportunities. While a transformational change and integrating more diverse employees might take time, the diverse needs across the working contexts highlight the need to investigate what motivates potentially marginalised employees. Increasing the support might keep them engaged, increasing their voice (Spaeth, 2022). Lastly, publication 4 highlights the power of framing to change both the willingness and perceived feasibility of tackling issues. Indeed, fluency in approaching issues from multiple angles might empower people to voice again in different ways, engaging different targets. The additional benefit of framing capabilities is that voice targets are more likely to respond positively to issues that employees have put more
thought behind (Pfrombeck et al., 2022), thus increasing the success rate, positively influencing the change the voicer and their peers might voice again. Exploring the power of framing to turn vicious spirals of silence into virtuous spirals of voice could be an interesting avenue to explore further.

While I do not intend to downplay the importance of establishing formal channels to support employee voice, as well as promoting leadership styles that invite employee voice, I propose to simultaneously target the social understanding of voice on the work floor to create some heat from that side to avoid the 'same old voices' getting amplified through formal techniques and leadership invitations. To amplify unheard voices and achieve inclusive innovation and development, more attention should thus be paid to the role of collaborative sensemaking in employee voice.
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Discussion and Implications

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While employee voice fuels innovation and development, their expression depends on workplace motivation and perceived opportunities, both shaped by collaborative sensemaking. Based on interviews with 130 designers, engineers, and hospital workers, this thesis investigates how groups with historically unheard voices tend to be less motivated and perceive fewer chances to contribute. With diversity rising, close examination of collaborative sensemaking practices becomes crucial to amplify these voices and achieve truly inclusive innovation and development.

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