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Article

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MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Leader effectiveness – the missing link in the relationship between employee voice and engagement

Michael Gyensare^{1*}, Reginald Arthur², Evelyn Twumasi² and Joan-Ark Agyapong³

Abstract: Purpose—Voice and engagement studies have drawn scholars' attention to examine how they are related. However, it appears the mechanisms that connect these two constructs are understudied. Hence, the purpose of this study is to examine leader effectiveness as the mechanism through which employee voice translates into engagement.

Design/methodology/approach—A cross-sectional data were collected from 106 employees in the 24 Rural and Communities Banks (RCBs) that qualified for the seventeenth edition of the Ghana Club 100 awards. A covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) with maximum likelihood (ML) estimation was used with a 95% confidence interval (CI) bootstrapping analysis to examine our hypotheses.

Findings—The result shows that leader effectiveness fully mediated the relationship between employee voice and engagement. This is supported by our estimated fully mediated structural model which indicates a good fit to the data $\chi^2(52) = 61.24, p = 0.18, AIC = 113.24$. The 95% CI bootstrapping analysis further lends support to the fully mediated structural model.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Although silence is golden, empowering employees to speak up and speak out rather than hold their peace is essential for the 21st century organization that want to retain their talents and enhance how they express themselves within the roles they are expected to accomplish. However, this cannot be possible without the support of effective leadership in the workplace. Specifically, this study sought to find out the mechanism through which voice – *speaking up and speaking out* – fosters employee engagement. To do this, primary data were sourced from 106 full-time employees in the rural and community banks listed in the Ghana Club 100. This study found that leader effectiveness is the means through which voice behaviour fosters employees' engagement. Hence, rural and community bank managers and HR professionals should encourage their workers to speak up and speak out since silence is very dangerous to the wellbeing of both employees and the organisation.

Practical implications—Since defensive silence is detrimental to the wellbeing of both employees and the firm, this paper suggests that RCB managers and HR professionals should exhibit effective leadership behaviours that inspires employees to channel their creative ideas and misgivings by speaking up and speaking out in order to enhance and sustain their level of engagement.

Originality/value—The findings of this paper suggest leader effectiveness as the missing link between voice and engagement relationship. Thus, contrary to previous research that theorises a direct relationship between voice and engagement, this paper provides leader effectiveness as a novel mechanism that explains *how* employees' voice behaviour is transmitted into their levels of engagement.

Subjects: Sociology of Work & Industry; Research Methods - Soc; Policy; Finance; Business, Management and Accounting

Keywords: voice behaviour; leader effectiveness; employee engagement; rural and community banks; Ghana

1. Introduction

Analysis of the literature shows that over the years, engagement has remained one of the most prevalent topics of interest in both human resource management and organisational behaviour. As such, both researchers and practitioners have endeavoured to understand the concept of engagement. For instance, Johnson (2004, p. 1) noted that “the ability to engage employees ... is going to be one of the great organizational battles of the coming 10 years.” Today, it seems this prophecy has been fulfilled since the twenty first century organisations are still grappling with how to make their employees feel a sense of attachment and invest themselves in their assigned roles. Also, research shows that employee engagement is important for the competitive advantage and success of service-oriented organisations (Botero & van Dyne, 2009; Crawford, Lepine, & Rich, 2010; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Besides, Gyensare, Kumedzro, Sanda, and Boso (2017) note that “highly engaged employees are enthusiastic, passionate and emotionally involved with their assigned roles in the organization” (p. 319).

On the other hand, employee relations literature theorises voice as a broad construct which encompasses both direct and indirect mechanisms (Kaufman, 2015). Wood and Fenton-O’Creevy (2005) define voice behaviour as employees either receiving information, being consulted, or being a part of joint decision-making within the organisation. However, Lepine and Van Dyne’s (1998) description of voice is adopted to underscore the theoretical position of this study. According to Lepine and Van Dyne (1998), voice is an extra-role behaviour where employees speak up and challenge the status quo based on a motive to improve situations at work rather than mere criticism. Accordingly, this study posits that the positive relationship between voice behaviour and employee engagement is intervened by the extent to which employees speak up to challenge the status quo than hold back on issues that threatens their very wellbeing in performing their assigned—roles. Some studies have examined the relationship between voice and engagement (e.g., Koyuncu, Burke, Fixenbaum, & Tekin, 2013; Kwon, Farndale, & Park, 2016; Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013). Among these studies, Rees et al. (2013) found both direct and indirect relationship between voice and engagement through trust in superiors and employee-line manager relationship which shows the extent of the literature on the relationship between voice and engagement.

Although some studies have been carried out on employee voice and engagement relationship (Koyuncu et al., 2013; Rees et al., 2013; Travis, Gomez, & Barak, 2011), it appears the mechanisms by which voice connects to engagement have not been fully established in the extant literature. As such, Kwon et al. (2016) drawing on the job demands-resources theory, emphasized in their multi-level framework the need for scholars to examine the *macro*, *meso* and *micro* level factors that

transmit voice practices into an engagement. Based on this premise, this paper addresses this salient call by proposing to examine *leader effectiveness* as the *micro-level* missing link between voice behaviour and employee engagement. We provide three reasons to support our study's position. First, we reason that for employee voice practices to converge as “best practices” that creates engagement (Kwon et al., 2016), there must be an “archetype” leadership behaviour in the eyes of employees [the beholders] that fosters conducive voice climate for “speaking up rather than holding their peace” on issues bothering them and the organisation. For instance, the cognitive perception of what constitutes leader effectiveness determines to what extent employees will freely speak up on matters concerning their welfare and that of the organisation. Given that cognitive perceptions influence affective states, we reason that subordinates' perception of their immediate supervisors' leader effectiveness will influence their emotional attachment to and involvement with their assign roles in the organisation which reflects the affective aspect of engagement. Second, based on the implicit leadership theory (ILT; Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013; Shondrick, Dinh, & Lord, 2010), employees' perception of leader effectiveness, defined as *the overall effectiveness of managers in performing their job responsibilities*, is a key micro-level mechanism that transmits voice into engagement. Although some scholars (e.g., Anitha, 2014; Gyensare et al., 2017) have highlighted the direct effect of voice on engagement, we opine that such effect is likely to occur when perceived leader effectiveness creates supportive climates that fosters open communication among superiors and subordinates without fear of being targeted. Our view is that when employees are happy and perceive a huge amount of support from their superiors, voice innately becomes helpful rather than harmful. Third, given the destructive role of defensive silence in the workplace (Guo et al., 2018), we believe an empirical examination of the relationship between voice and engagement would be highly desirable for both academics and practitioners. Therefore, we argue that the relationship between voice behaviour and engagement is amplified through employees' cognitive perception of what constitute effective (or prototypical) leadership which in turn inspires and motivate them for action.

Putting all together, we make three important contributions to the body of knowledge. First, we contribute to the literature that considers employee engagement as an outcome rather than a process or psychological state in human resource management literature. By so doing, we help to lessen the conceptual muddling surrounding the positionality of the engagement construct (Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2017). Second, we extend our knowledge of the implicit leadership theory (ILT) and social exchange theory (SET) by examining *leader effectiveness* as a micro-level mechanism that amplifies the positive relationship between voice and engagement. From the lens of ILT, we argue that when employees perceive the behaviour of their superiors as congruent with their prototype of what constitute effective leadership, they develop trust for such leaders. This means that employees are likely to perceive a positive voice climate that supports speaking up rather than keeping silent. Further, SET posits that if employees perceive their leaders as effective in creating a system of fairness where their contributions are valued, they reciprocate that gesture by engaging in positive behaviours such as engagement. Third, as a key area of strategic HRM and employee relations literature, voice has not received much scholarly attention in the conventional HRM and organisational behaviour literatures (Kwon et al., 2016). As such our study augment the few studies that have taken the lead in expanding our knowledge of employee voice in the mainstream HRM and OB literatures.

In the reminder of this study, we provide the theoretical background and develop the research hypotheses. We then describe the methods and analyses section of our study. We conclude with a discussion tailored to implications for theory and practice as well as limitations and suggestions for future research direction.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Leader effectiveness

Leader effectiveness is the perception that followers hold based on the appraisal of their leaders behaviours in the workplace. Such perception is contingent on how well leaders are able to match

what followers see as central to their task performance. When this occurs, employees may construe the leader to be prototypical of their performance. In fact, leaders who are seen as archetypes with regard to how they discharge their leadership duties are deemed as more effective. As a complex topic, leader effectiveness is often treated as an outcome of leadership characteristics such as prior experience (Avery, Tonidandel, Griffith, & Quinones, 2003), leader self-sacrifice (De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004), ethical leadership and empowering leadership (Hassan, Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2013), leadership self-efficacy (Seibert, Sargent, Kraimer, & Kiazad, 2017). However, to the best of our knowledge, it appears no empirical study has examined the mediating role of leader effectiveness in the employee voice and engagement relationship. Leader effectiveness plays a significant role in stimulating employees' willingness to exert themselves on the job and to cooperate towards a collective goal at the team or organisational level. Indeed, effective leadership is the capacity to affect, infect and infest followers through inspiration and not manipulation. This corroborates Hogan et al.'s (1994) assertion that "leadership involves persuading other people to set aside for a period of time their individual concerns and to pursue a common goal that is important for the responsibilities and welfare of a group" (p.493).

Some studies (e.g., De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2004; Seibert et al., 2017) have shown that the display of traits such as confidence and sacrifice by leaders are key factors in determining how effective their leadership behaviours are. Thus, given the relevance of leader effectiveness in the extant literature, we argue that leader effectiveness—the ability to engender positive perceptions of leader, elicit willingness to cooperate towards collective goals, and to involve followers in the job—is the missing link between voice and employee engagement. Furthermore, while leader effectiveness appears similar to transformational leadership and LMX, they are conceptually not the same and therefore requires to be treated separately. For instance, while Bass and Avolio (1995) defines leader effectiveness as the ability to influence followers to achieve specific goals, a more recent definition has been offered in the extant leadership literature. Madanchian, Hussein, Noordin and Taherdoost (2017, p. 1044) define leader effectiveness as "an outcome when the individual in the position of leadership are able to impact a group of people to perform their roles with positive organizational outcomes". As such, a leader's ability to influence work processes could be deemed as effective leadership behaviour. This is consistent with Dhar and Mishra (2001) assertion that leaders' ability to ensure effective group processes, cohesiveness, collaboration and divergence among followers are indicators of leader effectiveness. By extension, we can also conclude that a leader's ability to promote a voice system qualifies also as an effective leadership behaviour.

2.2. Voice behaviour and employee engagement

The burgeoning interest in employee voice in recent times can be traced to studies that emerged over a century ago. Although some scholars (e.g., Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2015; Park & Nawakitphaitoon, 2018) have attributed the origin of voice as a concept to Hirschman's (1970) earlier work, others (e.g., Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & van Fleet, 1995; Wilkinson, Townsend, Graham, & Muurlink, 2015) have traced the emergence of the concept to the early 20th Century in Mayo's (1933) Hawthorne studies. Notwithstanding these historical accounts, the definition of employee voice is popularly attributed to the seminal work by Van Dyne and LePine's (1998). According to these authors, voice is described as an extra-role behaviour where employees speak out and challenge the status quo premised on a motive to improve situations at work rather than mere criticisms.

Voice is predominantly perceived as challenge-oriented yet constructive. It is a process through which employees raise concerns, advance their interests, solve problems and offer innovative ideas (Pyman, Holland, Teicher, & Cooper, 2010; Wilkinson et al., 2015). Further, definitions of voice supporting the status quo (Burriss, 2012) have also emerged, adding to the immense differences in the conceptualization of voice behaviour in the management literature. However, the importance remains on the opportunity employees have to participate and impact the organizational processes (Glew et al., 1995; Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2015). We follow the

conceptualisation of employee voice behaviour as the opportunity employees have to be involved in constructively offering diverse opinions about their existing work arrangements and organizational processes.

Although the extant literature favours the antecedents of employee voice, McCabe and Lewin's (1992) study which linked voice behaviour with participation has awakened scholars' interest in studying how employee behavioural outcomes such as employee engagement are closely linked with employee voice (Mowbray et al., 2015). Like numerous other constructs in human resource management and organizational behaviour, employee engagement has various definitions due to its operationalisation by different scholars (Rees et al., 2013) and the distinction proffered between work engagement and employee engagement (Purcell, 2014). Drawing insight from previous studies, employee engagement is defined as a positive employee behaviour where employees demonstrate a commitment to their work and employers through "high involvement work practices" and cooperative behaviours that inures to the benefit of the firm and themselves (ACAS and Purcell, 2010). In practice, an ideal picture of employee engagement is illustrated by Rees, Alfors, Gatenby, Soane and Truss (2009 as cited in ACAS and Purcell, 2010). They indicate that engaged employees barely take sick leaves, have low turnover intentions and are generally better performers. In addition, Bakker (2012) highlight that engaged employees to exhibit low neuroticism, are cheerful, hardworking, emotionally stable, well-organized, sociable, resilient, purposeful and conscientious. Some empirical studies have found a relationship between employee engagement, commitment, citizenship behaviour and performance (Demerouti & Crapanzano, 2010; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005). Nonetheless, empirical studies linking voice and employee engagement are scarce in the extant literature (Holland, Cooper, & Sheeman, 2017; Rees et al., 2013). This study enhances our understanding by examining the role of employee voice in engagement with samples from a collectivist culture.

Furthermore, as ACAS and Purcell (2010) noted, employee engagement is more useful when it is perceived as an "outcome, something that flows from practice of good employment relations" (p. 8). Drawing insight from MacLeod report,¹ Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service[ACAS] and Purcell (2010) explained that leadership, engaging manager, employee voice and integrity are the four main drivers of employee engagement. Employee voice, as a driver of employee engagement, is further supported by Rees et al.'s (2009) findings that the opportunity employees have to make meaningful contributions to the continuous improvement and successful performance of their organization is important to their engagement.

Despite the profound arguments about voice behaviour driving employee involvement and participation, only a few empirical studies have offered some insights into the relationship between voice and engagement (Cheng, Lu, Chang, & Johnstone, 2013; Holland et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2013). For instance, using data from two service sector organizations in the United Kingdom, Rees et al. (2013) found a significant positive relationship between employee voice and engagement, although this relationship was mediated by trust in senior management and employee-line manager relationship. In a related study, Holland et al. (2017) found a positive link between employee voice, direct voice (an employee voice arrangement where there is direct communication between individuals or groups and their immediate manager as opposed to indirect voice which involves contact between management and an employee's representative; Pyman et al., 2010) and employee engagement. Holland et al. (2017) also found that this relationship was mediated by trust in senior management. Furthermore, Cheng et al. (2013) found a significant positive relationship between voice behaviour and "work" engagement and yet, this relationship was found to be indirect, mediated by leader-member exchange (LMX). However, it is important to note that Cheng et al. (2013) considered a distinct approach to "work" engagement. Purcell (2014) makes strong arguments for a distinction between employee engagement and work engagement referring to them as "doing engagement" and "being engaged" (p. 242) respectively. Therefore, it will be misleading to assume the results of Cheng et al. (2013) as representing an

empirical finding of employee engagement. Since the voice and engagement relationship has been well established in the extant literature, we do not propose any hypothesis here.

2.3. Voice behaviour and leader effectiveness

As shown earlier, the relationship between voice behaviour and employee engagement is mostly indirect (see Holland et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2013). A review by Mowbray et al. (2015) showed that certain supervisor-related behaviours such as trust, LMX and level of supervisor often influence voice behaviours due to their role in establishing, managing and implementing voice systems. Advances in the study of employee voice and its outcomes have also generated interest in examining the mechanisms through which such a relationship exist, albeit such works remains infant. Other scholars have also found that variables such as openness (Detert & Burris, 2007), and leadership constructs including ethical leadership (Walumbwa, Wang, Wang, Schaubroeck, & Avolio, 2010), authentic leadership (Hsiung, 2012) and transformational leadership (Detert and Trevino, 2010) are related with employee voice. Of these constructs, leadership-related factors appear to be well established with trust in supervisor and employee-line manager relationship receiving the most empirical attention as in the voice and engagement relationship (Holland et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2013).

The influence leadership has on employee voice behaviours have both practical and theoretical underpinnings. Practically, management are responsible for setting the voice climate in their firms by designing the architecture that either promotes or stifles employee voice (Mowbray et al., 2015). Also, managers have been identified as the targets of employee voice since they are responsible for designing the voice systems (Detert & Burris, 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2015). In the employee voice discourse, though other targets such as co-workers (Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013) have been identified, interaction with management is still considered the most important factor to the extent that the regularity of meetings between senior management and staff is considered as closely linked to trust in management (Holland, Cooper, Bryman and Teicher, 2012). Management determines the degree (extent to which employees are given the opportunity to influence decisions about their work arrangements), level (task or departmental), range (kind of issues ranging from trivial to strategic matters) and form (nature in which voice is modelled, either formally or informally) of an organizations voice system (Wilkinson et al., 2015). This underscores how the decisions of organizational leaders determine the effectiveness of voice systems.

Despite these advancement in the voice literature, seldom has the concept been linked to concrete and novel construct, such as leader effectiveness. In addition, while leader effectiveness appears to be similar to transformational leadership and LMX, they are conceptually different and thus need to be treated separately. Bass and Avolio (1995) define leader effectiveness as the ability to influence followers to achieve specific goals. However, more recently, leader effectiveness has been defined as “an outcome when the individuals in the positions of leadership are able to impact a group of people to perform their roles with positive organizational outcomes” (Madanchian et al., 2017, p. 1044). Consequently, a leader’s ability to influence organizational processes to produce positive outcomes could be described as an effective leader. According to Dhar and Mishra (2001), leaders’ ability to ensure effective group processes, group cohesiveness, group collaboration and even divergence declaration among the members of a group are indicators of leader effectiveness. This means that a leader’s ability to promote a voice system makes him or her an effective leader.

The implicit leadership theory provides some understanding of the relationship between employee voice and leader effectiveness. According to this theory, when a leader demonstrates behaviours that are congruent with the followers’ prototype of a leader, it is likely to influence the followers to like and be satisfied by such leaders since they are perceived as meeting the expectations of the followers (Brown & Lord, 2001; Engle & Lord, 1997). This means that under the implicit leadership theory, a leader’s ability to influence followers is dependent on the extent to which the leader’s behaviour matches the follower’s expectations. In relation to voice behaviours,

employees treasure a voice climate and system that unreservedly allows their involvement in their work arrangements and organizational processes. Leaders who promote such climate and ensure the establishment and implementation of effective voice systems are thus favourably evaluated by employees as effective. Like the relationship of trust in management to employee voice behaviour, when employees perceive the behaviour of their leaders as congruent with their prototypes of a leader, they develop trust for such leaders. According to Gao, Jansen and Shi (2011), leadership influences the propensity of employees to engage in voice behaviours. This means that as leaders are favourably perceived as effective through the lens of the implicit leadership theory, employees are also likely to perceive a positive voice climate and thus engage in increased voice behaviours.

Interestingly, leader effectiveness is one of the characteristics of leadership that seems to have received limited attention in management literature and more importantly in employee relations literature on voice. Of all the empirical studies examining employee voice behaviours, it appears none has so far examined how leader effectiveness and voice behaviours relates with each other. To address this gap in employee relations literature, this study draws from the implicit leadership theory and proposes that employee voice behaviour will have a positive relationship with leader effectiveness. Hence, we offer the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between employee voice and leader effectiveness.

2.4. Leader effectiveness and employee engagement

Despite growing interest in leader effectiveness and employee engagement constructs, it appears no empirical study has so far examined the direct relationship between leader effectiveness and employee engagement. For instance, Purcell (2012) recognises perceived organizational support through a system of fairness, justice and trust as important predictors of employee engagement. Leaders/managers establish systems of fairness by determining how organizational policies are applied consistently regardless of the subject, how organizational rewards are distributed and how the views of disgruntled employees are collected and addressed. Furthermore, the enactments of policies that ensure procedural, distributive and interactive justice are major responsibilities of organizational leaders. Further, the behaviour of organizational leaders create trust in management. Trust between employees and managers is so crucial for promoting engagement to the extent that, a deficit in the trust is said to be the cause of “engagement gap” (Saks, 2006, p. 600). To Purcell (2012, p. 10), perceived organizational support, a substantive predictor of engagement, is seen in some settings as the “the employer providing good pay, secure jobs and career opportunities.” Leaders who perform these functions are perceived by employees as providing a supportive environment that promotes engagement. These predictors of engagement are inherently functions of organizational leaders and thus the effectiveness of such leaders in promoting employee engagement cannot be underestimated.

Leadership that provides a clear and shared vision for organizations is captured as a distinctive driver of employee engagement (ACAS & Purcell, 2010). When employees understand how their roles contribute to the overall vision of the organization, they are influenced to be more engaged with their work and organization. This underscores how leaders influence employee engagement and create work systems that value workers contribution. A positive conceptual link can be drawn between leader effectiveness and employee engagement, the latter which is generally considered as a positive organizational outcome. Kwon et al. (2016) posit that the critical role of managers in establishing a climate that promotes workers' engagement is highlighted when leaders empower their subordinates, a participative climate that enhances involvement in decision-making.

In the absence of adequate empirical evidence, the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and its related norm of reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) offer some in-depth understanding of the relationship between leader effectiveness and employee engagement. The theory posits that employees actively engage in relationships of trust, loyalty and mutual commitment when some “rules of exchange” are observed. The underlying tenet of this theory shows that employees are

motivated to demonstrate positive behavioural outcomes when their contribution to the firm is valued by their employers (Saks, 2006). Under the relational contract between employers and employees, when managers demonstrate behaviours that add positively to the organization, it creates a system where employees perceive the work environment as supportive and in return exchange this perception with high involvement in work practices and cooperative behaviours that inures to the benefit of the firm. Social exchange theory implies that if employees perceive their leaders as effective in creating a system of fairness where their contributions are valued, they reciprocate by engaging in positive behaviours, thereby increasing the engagement of employees. From the foregoing discourse, we offer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Leader effectiveness is positively related with employee engagement.

2.5. Leader effectiveness as a mediator in the voice—engagement relationship

Recent studies linking voice behaviour and employee engagement have sparked similar interest among researchers to examine more specifically the mechanisms and processes that connect these two concepts. Since then, variables such as trust in senior managers (Holland et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2013) and LMX (Cheng et al., 2013) have been identified as the mechanisms linking voice and engagement. However, leader effectiveness which has been extensively identified as important in influencing both voice and engagement behaviours, appears to be absent from the literature linking voice behaviour with employee engagement.

A review of the voice and engagement literatures reveal leader effectiveness as the missing link in the voice and engagement relationship; although extant research on employee voice behaviours and engagement consider the critical role of managers in increasing voice and promoting employee involvement and participation in organizational processes (ACAS & Purcell, 2010; Purcell, 2012; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2015). According to Wilkinson et al. (2015), in the case of the Bundaberg Base Hospital, managers were considered as exercising a significant power that influenced voice behaviours of nurses in the Australian Hospital. Beside, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) found that managers' consultation is positively related to employees' upward voice. Thus, it was revealed that when managers invited employees to participate in decision-making, it encouraged lower level employees to voice up issues concerning their work processes and conditions. These studies add to available evidence that leadership is significant in influencing voice behaviours and provides some nuanced support for the proposition that perceived leader effectiveness is more likely to increase employee voice behaviour.

Further, Purcell (2012) in his study made strong arguments for how perceived organizational support inculcates fairness, justice and trust and thus offers greater interest in engagement among employees. Also, leaders that offer opportunities for employees to actively participate in decision-making creates more meaningful work for their workers and help them perceive their contributions as relevant to the overall success of their firms. The result, therefore, will be increase in employee engagement.

Despite the distinctive linkages established between leader effectiveness, voice behaviour and employee engagement, the relationship between these concepts has surprisingly not gained the attention of earlier researchers. However, the social exchange theory underpins this tripartite relationship by providing some understanding of the relative contribution of leader effectiveness in mediating the employee voice and engagement nexus. The social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggests that when employees perceive that an appropriate participative climate that helps them to express voice behaviours has been created by effective leaders, they reciprocate by displaying higher involvement in work activities and other co-operative behaviours that are beneficial to the firm. The bases of these exchanges stem from trust, loyalty and mutual commitments that evolve between the employers and employees over time. That is, as employees remain over a period with their employers, they develop perceptions of behaviours of those employers. Perception of a supportive climate that fosters their ability to engage in voice behaviours as established by

their leaders who they perceive as effective will increase their level of engagement in the organization.

Against this background, we hypothesize that leader effectiveness will mediate the relationship between employee voice behaviour- and employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Leader effectiveness mediates the positive relationship between voice behaviour and employee engagement.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and procedure

Participants for this study were front-line employees in the Rural and Community Banks (RCBs) listed in the seventeenth edition of the Ghana Club 100 (www.citibusinessnews.com). We situated our study within the RCBs context because employee engagement is regarded as key to the success and competitive advantage of RCBs (Macey, Schneider, Babera, & Young, 2009; Rich et al., 2010). Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that organisations with engaged employees have higher profitability, productivity and higher shareholder return (Crawford et al., 2010; Gyensare et al., 2017) which were indicators used for selecting qualified companies for the 17th edition of the Club 100 awards by the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) (www.citibusinessnews.com). Our sample included 120 front-line employees (5 workers from each of the 24 RCBs) that qualified for the 17th edition of the Ghana Club 100 awards. In wave 1 (March 2017), we contacted all 120 front-line employees with set of questionnaires to collect data on the independent (voice behaviour) and the mediator (leader effectiveness) variables. Of the 120 employees we were able to retrieve only 110 completed surveys. In wave 2 (September 2017) we re-contacted the 110 workers who completed the survey six-month earlier to collect data on their level of engagement. Therefore, we measured employees' voice behaviour and leader effectiveness earlier and their engagement in the future separated by a six-month interval. After we removed the incomplete and non-response questionnaires, we were ultimately left with 106 fully completed survey instruments yielding 85% response rate for actual data analysis. Our sample of front-line employees comprised of 72.6% men; the average age was 33.09 years (SD = 7.66); and the average tenure was 6.02 years (SD = 4.41). The marital status of workers varied including single (46.2%); married (48.1%) and separated (5.7%).

3.2. Measures

3.2.1 Employee voice

We assessed front-line employees voice behaviour with Van Dyne and LePine (1998) six-item scale ($\alpha = 0.86$). Sample items include "I get involved with issues that affect the quality of life here in this group", "I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this work group" and "I speak up and encourage others in this group to get involved in issues that affect this group". Responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1= *never* to 5= *always*.

3.2.2 Leader effectiveness

Following prior studies (e.g., Hassan et al., 2013; Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia, 2010; Yukl, Mahsud, Hassan, & Prussia, 2013), perceived leader effectiveness was measured with two items. The first item asked front-line employees to rate the overall effectiveness of their managers in carrying out their job responsibilities and it was anchored on nine-point response format (1= *the least effective manager I have known*; 9 = *the most effective manager I have known*). The second item asked subordinates to rate the overall effectiveness of their managers and it was rated on a nine-point Likert scale (1 = *ineffective*; 9= *very effective*). Consistent with Hassan et al. (2013), we used the mean item score for the multi-item scales in this study. The Cronbach's alpha for this study is 0.71.

3.2.3 Employee engagement

Employee engagement was assessed using ISA Engagement Scale (Soane et al., 2012). The ISA engagement scale is a 9-item measure. We chose the ISA scale because it operationalizes the original conceptualisation of engagement by Kahn (1990) as the extent to which employees invest themselves fully in their role by establishing meaningful connections to others and experiencing positive cognitive and emotional reactions to the task. Based on the multifaceted nature of engagement, the ISA measure comprises three subscales: intellectual, affective and social engagement. Intellectual engagement underscores the degree to which employees are cognitively involved in their work. Affective engagement focuses on how employees are emotionally involved with, and attached to, their work which is an extension of employees' affective commitment to the organisation. Social engagement on the other hand was assessed with three items and measured the extent to which employees talk to their colleagues about how to improve their work. Sample items included "I get completely absorbed in my work", "I am happy when I do a good job" and "I talk to people at work about how to improve the way I do my job" for intellectual, affective and social engagement, respectively. Responses were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*. Following previous engagement research (e.g., Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2013), we aggregated the three subscales to compute a composite engagement score. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.83.

3.2.4 Control variable

Gender, educational level, age and organizational tenure were controlled as they directly influence employee engagement (Alfes et al., 2013; Gyensare et al., 2017; Soane et al., 2012). Gender was dummy coded (0 = *female*; 1 = *male*). Marital status of the respondents was measured by three categories (1 = *single*; 2 = *married*; 3 = *separated/divorced*). Nevertheless, age and organisational tenure were treated as continuous control variables in our study.

3.3 Common method bias

Since we used only self-report measures there is the possibility for same source bias and therefore, we followed Podsakoff et al.'s (2003) procedural and statistical techniques to control for CMB. We followed three *ex-ante* remedies. First, prior to the actual data collection, employees were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality and guaranteed that their responses were going to be used for research purposes only. Second, we used different Likert scales to help discriminate the response patterns from one section of the questionnaire to the other (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Third, a rubric was provided for each section of the instrument to ensure temporal psychological separation to reduce the carry over effect. In addition to the *ex-ante* remedies, we used one *ex-poste* remedy after the data collection. Thus, we conducted a post-hoc Harman's one-factor test to detect the presence of CMB problems (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012; Spector & Brannick, 2010). First, we loaded all the items onto a common factor to see if a dominant factor will emerge with better fit indices than the hypothesized three-factor model. Second, we compared the result of the one-factor model with our hypothesized three factor model (see Table 1). Unlike the hypothesized three factor model, the Harman's one-factor test provided a poor fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 121.98$, $df = 54$; $\chi^2/df = 2.26$; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.11; standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = 0.09; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.70; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.76; GFI = 0.84 compared with our hypothesized three-factor model [$\chi^2 = 61.17$, $df = 51$; $\chi^2/df = 1.20$; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.04; standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = 0.07; non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.94; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.91]. Accordingly, we conclude that common method bias does not pose any serious threat to our data and hence we proceeded to the data analyses.

4. Ethical consideration

We observed ethical issues to protect our participants. First, we sort the informed consent of our respondents before they agreed to participate in the study. We also, explain to them that they had the exclusive right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the data collection. In addition to that, we assured our respondent of confidentiality and anonymity and made it clear to them that

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis results

Scale items	Mean	SD	SFL	t-value	SMC	AVE	CR	α
Employee voice behaviour (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998)								
I get involved with issues that affect the quality of life here in this group	4.81	1.48	0.76	Fixed	0.58	0.51	0.72	0.86
I speak up in this group with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures	4.98	1.45	0.71	4.22	0.51			
I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this work group	4.82	1.50	0.64	4.05	0.41			
I keep well informed about issues where my opinion might be useful to this work group	4.91	1.46	0.60	3.92	0.36			
I speak up and encourage others in this group to get involved in issues that affect this group	5.02	1.55	0.75	4.55	0.56			
I communicate my opinions about work issues to others in this group even if my opinion is different and others in this group disagree with me.	4.06	1.52	0.88	4.72	0.77			
Leader effectiveness (Hassan et al., 2013; Yukl et al., 2013)								
Overall effectiveness of your manager in carrying out his/her job responsibilities	3.97	1.24	0.62	Fixed	0.39	0.52	0.71	0.71
Overall effectiveness of your manager	3.98	0.97	0.79	5.14	0.63			
Employee engagement (Soane et al., 2012)								
I focus hard on my work	3.08	1.25	0.82	Fixed	0.67	0.57	0.80	0.83
I pay a lot of attention to my work	3.08	1.27	0.63	4.45	0.39			
I feel positive about my work	3.93	0.97	0.84	5.30	0.71			

Notes: Model fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 61.17$; $df = 51$; $\chi^2/df = 1.20$; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.07; NNFI = 0.94; CFI = 0.96; GFI = 0.91. All loadings are significant at the 0.05 level. RMSEA = Root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = Standardized root mean square residual; NNFI = Non-normed fit index; CFI = Comparative fit index; GFI = Goodness of fit index; SFL = Standardized factor loading; AVE = Average variance extracted; CR = Composite reliability.

the information sought was purely for academic purpose and will therefore not be disclosed elsewhere.

5. Results and analyses

Following Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Chin's (1998) two-step approach, we first conducted a measurement model validation with a confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 8.50 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 2006) and later proceeded to test our hypothesized relationship.

5.1. Measurement model assessment

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to establish the uniqueness of our latent constructs (i.e., voice behaviour, leader effectiveness and employee engagement). The fit of CFA model was evaluated on the basis of χ^2 goodness-of-fit test and six other heuristics fit indices by Hu and Bentler (1998) and Bagozzi and Yi (2012): $RMSEA \leq 0.07$, $SRMR \leq 0.07$, $NNFI \geq 0.92$, $CFI \geq 0.95$ and $GFI \geq 0.90$.

Results of CFA confirms the three-factor model fits the data better: $\chi^2 = 61.17$, $df = 51$; normed chi-square (χ^2/df) = 1.20; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.04; standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = 0.07; non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.94; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.96; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.91. Additionally, our three-factor model fits the data well than the alternative models (two-factor model [voice + leader effectiveness and engagement]: $\chi^2 = 101.22$, $df = 53$; $\chi^2/df = 1.91$; RMSEA = 0.09; SRMR = 0.08; NNFI = 0.80; CFI = 0.84; GFI = 0.86) and (one-factor model [voice + leader effectiveness + engagement]: $\chi^2 = 121.95$, $df = 54$; $\chi^2/df = 2.26$; RMSEA = 0.11; SRMR = 0.09; NNFI = 0.70; CFI = 0.76; GFI = 0.84). Finally, all loadings were significant ($t \geq 1.96$) with majority exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). These results provide evidence of convergent validity.

Furthermore, we estimated the internal consistency (α), composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). Results indicate that our latent constructs hold high internal consistency and are within the acceptable regions of 0.70, 0.60 and 0.50 for α , CR and AVE, respectively (Hair et al., 2014; Hair, Hollingsworth, Randolph, & Chong, 2017). To establish discriminant validity, we compared the AVEs with the highest shared variance (HSV) that is the square of the correlation between two latent constructs. We then observed that the variance extracted were greater than HSV between the latent constructs demonstrating evidence discriminant validity (Fornell & Lacker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017).

5.2. Descriptive statistics and correlation

Means, standard deviations and inter-construct correlations are shown in Table 2. Employee voice was significant and positively related to leader effectiveness ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) and engagement ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, a positive relationship was found between leader effectiveness and employee engagement ($r = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$).

5.3. Structural model estimation

We estimated our structural model after validating our measures with confirmatory factor analysis. As shown in Figure 1, all the hypothesized direct effects were supported by our structural model. For instance, employee voice behaviour accounted for 35% of the variance in leader effectiveness while leader effectiveness also accounted for 37% of the variance in employee engagement. Voice behaviour had a positive effect on leader effectiveness ($\gamma = 0.59$, $t = 3.18$) and leader effectiveness also had a significant positive effect on employee engagement ($\beta = 0.54$, $t = 2.90$). Thus, the results lend support to H1 and H2.

5.4. Mediation analysis

First, as shown in Table 3, we estimated three structural models: partial mediation, full mediation and antecedent models, respectively. However, to test for mediation effect, we compared the first two models. The first model allows for both direct and indirect effects (mediated through leader

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations of latent constructs

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(1) Gender	1.27	0.45	-						
(1) Age	33.09	7.66	0.03	-					
(1) Marital status	1.59	0.60	0.06	0.57***	-				
(1) Tenure	6.02	4.41	0.09	0.86***	0.47***	-			
(1) EVB	4.91	1.03	-0.03	-0.13	-0.05	-0.11	-		
(1) LE	4.00	0.76	0.04	-0.13	-0.04	-0.10	0.43***	-	
(1) EE	3.99	0.80	0.04	-0.26**	-0.16	-0.13	0.29**	0.39***	-

Notes: n = 106; EV = Employee voice; LE = Leader effectiveness; EE = Employee engagement.

Figure 1. Research framework with hypotheses.

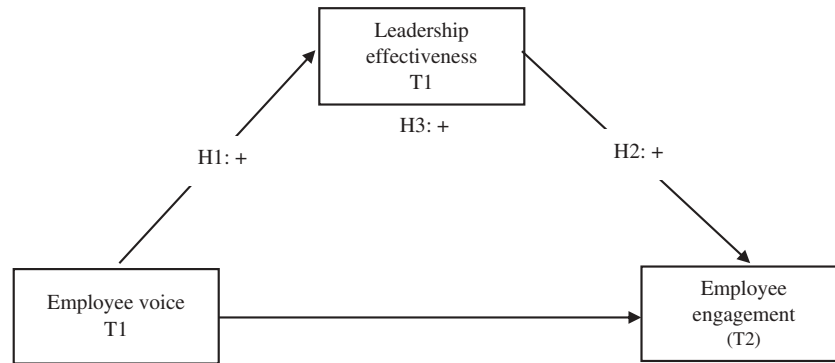


Figure 2. Results of structural equation model.

Notes. EV = employee voice; LE = leader effectiveness; EE = employee engagement. ** $p < 0.01$.
Model fit indices: $\chi^2(52) = 61.24$; RMSEA = 0.04; SRMR = 0.07; NNFI = 0.95; CFI = 0.96.

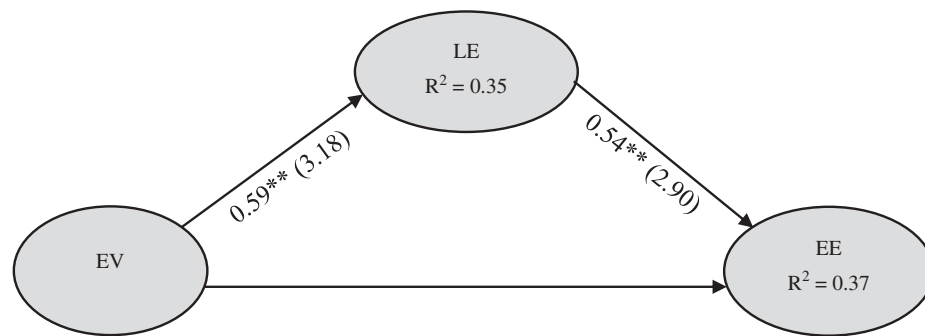


Table 3. Model comparison for mediation analysis

Fit indices	Partial mediation model	Full mediation model	Antecedent model
$\chi^2(df)$	61.17(51)	61.24(52)	70.54(52)
$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	-	0.07(1)	9.37(1)
RMSEA	0.04	0.04	0.06
SRMR	0.07	0.07	0.08
NNFI	0.94	0.95	0.90
CFI	0.96	0.96	0.92
AIC	115.17	113.24	122.54

Note. $n = 106$, RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; CFI, comparative fit index; AIC, Akaike’s information criterion.

effectiveness) of voice behaviour and employee engagement. The second model (the hypothesized model of our study) places leader effectiveness in a full mediating role between voice behaviour and engagement. Since the second model is nested within the first, a chi-square difference test was performed to determine whether leader effectiveness fully or partially mediates the effect of voice behaviour on employee engagement. This approach for testing mediation effect is consistent with previous research (e.g., Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002; Gyensare, Anku-Tsede, Sanda, & And Okpoti, 2016; Mostafa & Gould-Williams, 2014). Thus, Table 3 shows that both partial and full mediation models fit the data reasonably well. However, the χ^2 difference that compares the full mediation model with a partial mediation model suggests an insignificant difference ($\Delta\chi^2 = 0.07$, $df = 1$) (cf. Gyensare et al., 2016). As a result, we followed the recommendation by Bozdogan (1987) to compare our models based on the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). According to Bozdogan (1987), the model with the minimum AIC value is preferred. From the foregoing discussion we conclude that our hypothesized full mediation model provides the appropriate fit to our data: $\chi^2(df) = 61.24(52)$, RMSEA = 0.04, SRMR = 0.07, NNFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.96 since it recorded the minimum AIC score of 113.24.

Table 4. Bootstrapping results for the direct and indirect effect of LE on EV-EE relationship

Hyp.	Paths	Std. Estimates	SE	t-value	Bootstrapping		p-value
					LLCI	ULCI	
H1	<i>Direct effect</i>						
H2	EV → EE	0.106	0.076	1.397	-0.045	0.257	0.165
H3	EV → LE	0.309	0.067	4.599	0.176	0.442	0.000
	LE → EE	0.327	0.103	3.172	0.122	0.531	0.002
H4	<i>Indirect effect</i>						
	EV → TM → EE	0.101	0.042	2.391	0.037	0.209	0.000

In addition to the structural models, we also ran a mediation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) as shown in Table 4, to examine the mediation effect of leader effectiveness between voice behaviour and engagement. We generated 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) with 5,000 bootstrap resample (Hayes, 2013; MacKinnon, 2008; Preacher and Hayes, 2004; Preacher and Kelley, 2011) for the hypothesized indirect effect. The bootstrapping analysis result confirmed the mediating effect of leader effectiveness in the relationship between voice behaviour and engagement ($\beta = 0.101$, CI = 0.037, 0.209). Furthermore, results indicate that the direct effect of voice on engagement was not significant ($\gamma = 0.106$, $t = 1.397$, $p = 0.165$) when controlling for leader effectiveness. Accordingly, we conclude that our hypothesized full mediation is supported since the confidence interval of the indirect effect reported above does not include zero.

The results of our mediation analysis with bootstrapping technique as shown in Table 4 revealed that leader effectiveness fully mediates the relationship between voice behaviour and engagement. Hence, H3 which states that leader effectiveness fully mediates employee voice and engagement link is supported by the mediation analysis.

6. Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify and examine a *micro-level mechanism* that connects employee voice behaviour and engagement. Contrary to prior research which theorises direct relationship between voice and engagement, we found *leader effectiveness* as the missing link between voice and engagement relationship. In addition, we also observed a positive effect of employee voice on leader effectiveness and leader effectiveness on employee engagement. Our findings have both theoretical and practical implications which are further discussed.

6.1. Theoretical implications

The findings of our study have important theoretical implications for academics and engagement scholars. First, our study contributes to both the ILT and SET by explaining the key role of *leader effectiveness* in shaping voice and engagement relationship. From the standpoint of ILT, we argue that when employees perceive the behaviour of their supervisors as congruent with their view of what constitutes effective leadership, they develop trust for such leaders. This means that employees are likely to perceive a positive voice climate that supports speaking up rather than stepping back. Furthermore, consistent with the core tenet of SET, if employees perceive their leaders as effective in creating a system of fairness where their contributions are valued, they are likely to return that gesture by engaging in positive behaviours such as engagement. Second, we contribute to the engagement literature by identifying leader effectiveness as a salient antecedent of employee engagement. In addition, we add to the body of engagement literature that consider engagement as an outcome rather than a process or psychological state in human resource management (HRM) and organisational behaviour (OB) literatures (ACAS & Purcell, 2010). By so doing we help to reduce the conceptual muddling surrounding the positionality of the engagement

construct (Shuck et al., 2017). Finally, we contribute to leader effectiveness literature by examining employees' perception of their leaders' behaviour as a crucial micro-level phenomenon that connects employee voice and employee engagement. Leader effectiveness, therefore, represents a significant phenomenon that enables employees at the rural and community banks to speak up rather than hold their peace about issues concerning their wellbeing in the organisation which increases their level of engagement.

6.2. Practical implications

We offer two key recommendations to HR professionals and rural and community banks (RCBs) managers in Ghana. First, we submit that leadership that understands and accommodates divergent views and embraces sensitive concerns of employees will help reduce the debilitating consequence of voice and rather help translate the positive influence of voice behaviour into employee engagement. Therefore, as highlighted hitherto by Gyensare et al. (2016), leadership that fosters "trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for employees" (p.243) at all levels of the organisational hierarchy creates confidence in employees and facilitate the ease of voicing out important and novel ideas as well as debilitating concerns for the common good of the organisation. Second, the rural and community banks in Ghana must invest in leadership training programmes that creates a conducive atmosphere for voice mechanisms. We are of the view that since engagement has a strategic benefit to organisations in the banking sector in terms of higher profitability and shareholder returns (Crawford et al., 2010), investing in leadership training programmes that helps to transmit the positive effect of voice behaviour into engagement will be appropriate and ideal.

6.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

Our study suffers from some limitations just like other studies and therefore offers opportunities for future research. First, our sample was limited to employees at the rural and community banks operating in a developing country context. Like other collectivist cultures, Ghanaians are known to suppress their feelings due to high power distance and therefore prefers defensive silence which is at variance to a more individualist cultures where voice rather than silence is encouraged. Hence, we assume that our findings are tentative and thus calls for future research to explore the boundaries of the theory in other cultural settings to generalize our findings in a broader setting.

Second, because of the cross-sectional nature of our data, some inferences on causality cannot be established conclusively. For example, the possibility that leader effectiveness can antecede voice is not ruled out completely and therefore future research could explore this path. We also believe that allowing a one-year time-lagged between our independent and dependent variables may have been ideal in ruling out completely issues of common method variance which is associated with self-report measures. Yet, while we followed some *ex ante* and *ex poste* remedies recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), we do not claim to have ruled out completely common method bias. However, we are confident that our findings are credible with the rigorous procedural and statistical techniques followed. Finally, while we addressed a micro-level mechanism between voice and employee engagement, we encourage future researchers to consider meso- and macro-level mechanisms as suggested by Kwon et al. (2016) in their comprehensive review to help extend knowledge in this area of research.

7. Conclusions

We found that leader effectiveness explains *how* employee voice behaviour transmits into employee engagement. The study makes a significant contribution to the voice and engagement literature by revealing followers' perception of *leader effectiveness*, the overall effectiveness of managers in carrying out their job responsibilities, as the missing link between voice practices and engagement. Our findings support the perception that *leader effectiveness* plays a key role in creating conducive voice climate that inspires employees to "speak up" rather than adopt defensive silence which with all due respect is detrimental to the wellbeing of employees and the organisation. Furthermore, our findings provide support to prior research which highlights that

competitive advantage is achieved when employees communicate to superiors for improving processes, products and services (Botero & van Dyne, 2009; Crawford et al., 2010). This study provides a promising start for future research-examining micro-level mechanisms that connect voice practices to engagement at the individual level of analysis.

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Note

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