# 1 Employee voice: charting new terrain
*Adrian Wilkinson, Tony Dundon, Jimmy Donaghey and Richard B. Freeman*

## INTRODUCTION

Voice is a term that has been widely used in the practitioner and academic literature on human resource management (HRM) and industrial relations in recent years. Freeman and Medoff (1984) associated voice with union representation and in particular with the role of unions in articulating concerns on behalf of the collective. As union density has fallen in recent years, analysis of voice in workplaces has often focused on how workers communicate with managers and are able to express their concerns about their work situation without a union, and on the ways in which employees have a say over work tasks and organizational decision-making. But researchers from different disciplinary perspectives often use voice in different ways. Some refer to involvement, others to participation, while yet others refer to empowerment or engagement as if they are interchangeable. As Kaufman (Chapter 2) makes clear, few appreciate the historical pedigree of employee voice, for instance, where Karl Marx and Adam Smith expressed interest in the ways and means through which labour expressed its voice. The deeper antecedents to voice have often been forgotten or eclipsed in a rush towards newer managerial fads, such as engagement or other equally abstract notions of labour offering discretionary effort.

This book presents analysis from various academic streams and disciplines that illuminate our understanding of employee voice from these different perspectives. The following chapters show that research on employee voice has gone beyond union voice and non-union voice to build a wider and deeper knowledge base. As the introduction to the book, this chapter provides a guide to the debates about the different dimensions of employee voice and to the research findings in different areas. We review the meanings and purposes surrounding the definitions of voice; consider the role of key actors in the workplace; and evaluate the different forms and processes of voice in different spheres, contexts and organizational settings. We hope that the book will help the reader understand the debates associated with employee voice and appreciate the contribution of the different approaches to our understanding of what goes on in the workplaces that are at the heart of modern economies.

## DEFINING AND INTERPRETING EMPLOYEE VOICE

Because research and analysis have grown around the voice concept in a variety of disciplines, 'employee voice' has become an elastic term meaning different things to different policy, academic and practitioner actors (Poole, 1986; Sashkin, 1976; Strauss, 2006; Wilkinson et al., 2010; Budd et al., 2010). In the many disciplines that cover voice, such

Adrian Wilkinson, Tony Dundon, Jimmy Donaghey, and Richard B. Freeman - 9780857939272
Downloaded from PubFactory at 08/22/2022 01:14:48PM
via free access

as human resource management, political science, economics, organizational behaviour (OB), psychology or law, perspectives toward the concept differ. Scholars in one area often know little of the research, connotations or ideological baggage surrounding voice in other areas (Wilkinson and Fay, 2011). For instance, Morrison's (2011: 373) review of voice highlights three common threads running through the voice literature that favour an exclusive OB perspective on the subject:

> One important commonality is the idea of voice being an act of verbal expression, where a message is conveyed from a sender to a recipient. Second, voice is defined as discretionary behavior. Individuals choose whether or not to engage in this behavior at any particular moment in time, a choice that is affected by a variety of factors. A third commonality is the notion of voice being constructive in its intent. The objective is to bring about improvement and positive change, not simply to vent or complain.

These common factors are central to voice considered from a managerial or OB-centric approach which focuses on issues relating to individual verbal communication that is constructive to management. Management introduces voice mechanisms to an organization on management's terms, setting the parameters of what is and is not permissible voice according to employer interests (Donaghey et al., 2011). Morrison explicitly rules out voice as a mechanism 'simply to vent or complain' and, therefore, excludes any conceptualization of employee involvement and participation based on interests other than those of the employer. Thus in excluding complaints, the OB perspective tends to leave out what many other perspectives view as a key component of voice. Yet economic perspectives can also be flawed. Economists often assume voice is about rational actors (employees, employers) making logical decisions in pursuit of a shared performance improvement goal (or economic rent exchange). Neo-classical economists have historically (and mistakenly) treated unions as a constraint disrupting a smooth and natural labour market (Minford, 1985). Of course such a perspective ignores the dynamics of power operating between the buyers and sellers of labour services, not to mention the role that legitimate collective voice structures play in redressing labour market inequalities, particularly trade unions but also including works councils and other institutions (Addison, 2005; Marchington, 2008). Legal scholars, too, often reduce worker voice debates to problems of statutory mandates or infringements on presupposed property rights enshrined in contract law. Importantly, workplace relations tend to dovetail simultaneously into economic, social and psychological paradigms, rendering the notion of a fixed legal contract little more than a figment in the minds of those concerned only with legal juridification (Kahn-Fraund, 1977; Dundon and Gollan, 2007).

In addressing some of these single perspective limitations, the framework in Table 1.1 offers an inclusive structure to capture and assess multiple meanings of employee voice across disciplines. First, voice is an articulation of individual dissatisfaction or concern that aims to address a specific problem or issue with management. Voice may find expression in this way through a grievance procedure or speak-up programme. Second, and often at the same time as individual dissatisfaction, voice takes the form of collective organization, where it provides a countervailing source of power to management. Unionization and collective bargaining are exemplars of pluralist conceptualizations of collective worker voice (Turnbull, 2003). Table 1.1 also recognizes the role of voice as a contribution to management decision-making. Here the purpose is to gain employee

input to improve work organization and efficiency more generally, perhaps through quality circles or team work, or by eliciting workforce engagement (Wilkinson et al., 2013). This perspective pervades much of the high performance work system (HPWS) literature, often premised on the view that what is good for the organization is good for the employee (Addison, 2005). In a similar vein, voice can be seen as an instrument for mutual gain, with productive collaboration between capital and labour increasing the long-term viability of an organization and economic well-being of employees (Kochan and Osterman, 1994). Examples of this notion are the US mutual gains idea, European systems of social dialogue and co-determination, and voluntary enterprise-level partnership agreements. A problem facing many organizations is that of reconciling traditional methods of providing a voice for employees, such as collective bargaining and grievance procedures, with more consensual methods such as joint consultation, team working or problem-solving groups. The way employers deal with this issue reflects the purpose it sees in employee voice, which the extant literature has not explored in sufficient depth.

To attach a sufficiently wide but cogent meaning to the employee voice concept which covers the multiple situations in Table 1.1, we define employee voice as the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say and potentially influence organizational affairs relating to issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners. This definition combines a variety of voice mechanisms that analysts often group in separate boxes (for example, involvement or bargaining; union and non-union). It allows for employer implemented non-union employee representative (NER) systems as a collective form of voice, be it chosen to marginalize a union presence or to provide an alternative to union influence (Dundon, 2002; Kaufman and Taras, 2010) as well as union

*Table 1.1   Multiple meanings of employee voice*

| Voice as: | Purpose and articulation of voice | Mechanisms and practices for voice | Range of outcomes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Articulation of individual dissatisfaction | To rectify a problem with management or prevent deterioration in relations | Complaint to line manager Grievance procedure | Exit–loyalty |
| Expression of collective organization | To provide a countervailing source of power to management | Union recognition Collective bargaining Industrial action | Partnership– Derecognition |
| Contribution to management decision-making | To seek improvements in work organization, quality and productivity | Upward problem-solving groups Quality circles Suggestion schemes Attitude surveys Self-managed teams | Identity and commitment– Disillusionment and apathy Improved performance |
| Demonstration of mutuality and cooperative relations | To achieve long-term viability for organization and its employees | Partnership agreements. Joint consultative committees Works councils | Significant influence over management decisions– Marginalization and sweetheart deals |

*Source:*   Dundon et al. (2004: 1152).

forms of voice. In economies where trade union membership and bargaining coverage is low and falling, as well as in economies such as that of China where the government established unions as transmission belts for national economic policies, employers generally expect unions to be more in tune with business objectives and use their say to support corporate or national goals. Some independent trade unions engage in dialogue at an enterprise level even in the most management-led interpretations of partnership in the hope that this will benefit their members (Rittau and Dundon, 2010; Johnstone et al., 2010). In general, employee voice is about how employees are able to have a say over work activities and decisions within the organizations in which they work, regardless of the institutional channel through which it operates – whether through speak-up programmes, quality circles, team work, or collective negotiation (Marchington, 2008; Freeman et al., 2007).

Utilizing the above definition helps unpack the meaning of employee voice. Strauss (2006) argues that voice is a weaker concept than other related terms – such as participation – because voice does not denote influence or power-sharing and may thus be no more than 'spitting in the wind'. But Strauss highlights a key element of voice as a defining concept. This is the act of trying to exert influence over management actions, even if desired worker outcomes are not achieved or realized. In a similar vein Harlos (2001) points out that some managements have 'deaf-ear syndrome', where worker exercise of voice becomes a process of little real impact as management pays little attention to resolving issues or changing action.

In recent years, diminishing union density in advanced economies has shifted the form of voice in most organizations and countries from collective and unionized channels of representation to direct and individualized mechanisms, some of which exist alongside unions as a dual method while others are exclusively non-union. The union-only form of voice has all but disappeared in countries where unions once dominated the space of representing worker concerns. In the 2000s, for example, only 5 per cent of British workplaces relied on union-only participation (Willman et al., 2009: 102) Similar trends are evident across much of the rest of Europe, America and Australia (Lewin, 2010; Gomez et al., 2010). In a world in which voice mechanisms go beyond the traditional union mechanism, there is need for more fine-grained and at times more qualitative analysis of how the different mechanisms actually function.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

### Theoretical Approaches to Voice

The voice literature finds its roots in several theoretical and methodological paradigms. Part I (Perspectives and Theories of Voice) demonstrates the insight that we gain from complementary and competing approaches towards voice. Importantly, the idea of employees having a say and contributing to work decisions is not in itself new or novel. The recognition that workers tend to know better than managers how best to do a job or how to engage in customer relations existed long before the factory system and the Industrial Revolution. The history and trajectory of worker involvement in industry (voice) is comprehensively examined by Kaufman in Chapter 2, showing that early conceptualizations are central to contemporary developments in the employee voice space.

Allen (Chapter 3) points out that early human resource management (HRM) developments about voice tend to start with the work of Albert O. Hirschman. Hirschman's (1970) classic study of consumers in nationalized African Railways conceptualized 'voice' in the context of the ways in which organizations respond to decline in consumer demand for their products. His definition of voice was 'any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs' (1970: 30). The point about voice is that its provision may secure general improvements. The absence of good exit options may force the discontented to take action within the organization, hence making voice more powerful (Dundon et al., 2004: Wilkinson et al., 2004). Freeman and Medoff (1984) developed the notion of employee voice in terms of industrial relations and human resource management. They argued that it made good sense for both employer and employee to have a voice mechanism. This had both a consensual and a conflictual potential. On the one hand, participation could lead to a beneficial impact on quality and productivity, whilst on the other it could deflect problems which otherwise might explode (Gollan and Wilkinson, 2007). Freeman and Medoff (1984) saw trade unions as the best agents to provide such voice as they were generally independent of the employer, which adds a degree of voice legitimacy. As Benson (2000: 453) notes, 'for some commentators independent unions are the only source of genuine voice'.

The high performance work system (HPWS) literature has generated different insights into the role of employee voice in human resource management (see Harley, Chapter 6). HPWS theory argues that informing and allowing employees input into work and business decisions can result in better decisions and improve understanding (Boxall and Purcell, 2003). This links to analysis which treats voice as a key ingredient in the creation of organizational commitment (Lewin and Mitchell, 1992; Pfeffer, 1998). It also overlaps with the OB related discussions concerning the idea of employee engagement as something distinct to voice (Emmott, 2005; Welbourne, 2011) and has implications for the management of employee voice in organizations. Among the implications are that hierarchy and compliant rule-following are inappropriate for employees who are expected to expend discretionary effort. As Strauss (2006: 778) observes, giving workers voice 'provides a win-win solution to a central organizational problem – how to satisfy workers' needs while simultaneously achieving organizational objectives'. However, theory and practice can diverge (Harley et al., 2005).

The main aim of the HPWS approach to voice reflects management's desire to increase employee understanding and commitment and raise their contribution to the organization's bottom line. Many such claims are predicated on a positivistic and arguably misplaced method of seeking to validate worker intentions and behaviours through coefficient scores that are detached from context and place. Thus, while some forms of voice in the HRM and HPWS space provide employees with new channels of communication and potential routes to influence issues of concern, facilitating employee voice does not involve any *de jure* sharing of authority or power. Moreover, in the absence of influence and power, any link between voice and the decision-making outcome is always tenuous at best. This is what Kaufman and Taras (2010) nicely suggest is 'voice without muscle'.

The political science literature, which often views voice in terms of rights, links voice to notions of industrial citizenship, legal protection or democratic humanism. The concept of industrial democracy, which draws from notions of industrial citizenship,

sees participation as a fundamental democratic right enabling workers to extend a degree of control over managerial decision-making in an organization (see Foley, Chapter 5). Some use the term organizational democracy (Harrison and Freeman, 2004) to describe a higher form of voice than individualistic channels of communication. This also brings in notions of free speech and human dignity (Budd, 2004). An important claim is that workplace democracy allows workers to develop skills and values that then have a role in broader society (Foley and Polyani, 2006).

The economics approach stemming from the work of Hirschman (1970) and Freeman and Medoff (1984) finds expression in transaction costs economics (TCE) (see Willman et al., Chapter 4). Here, voice is premised on an economic exchange that carries with it certain assumed costs and benefits. TCE assumes workers are like customers in a marketplace. If employees demand a voice and it is not heard, they exit the relationship. Likewise, managers (employers) may change preferences and opt for one particular voice arrangement over another, subject to cost implications. For example, managers may 'make' their own voice system (for example, non-union) rather than 'buying' an alternative from a contract supplier (for example, recognizing a trade union). In addition, a 'hybrid' dual union and non-union voice can emerge depending on the nature of the economic transaction, the type of workers, union power, management preference, or perception of risk. Using TCE to analyse voice trends, Willman et al. (2003) and Gomez et al. (2010) show that some 30 to 40 per cent of organizations switched their voice regime between 1980 and 1998, mostly toward non-union and dual hybrid variants over union-only channels of voice (see Willman et al., Chapter 4).

Labour process theory (LPT – see Marks and Chillas, Chapter 7) offers another twist on the voice concept. LPT is less forgiving of the neutral nomenclature of the term 'employee' voice and instead prefers concepts of participation, representation and countervailing sources of power and collective worker mobilization against the inherent tensions of a capitalist economic system. Whereas other perspectives noted above have gravitated to Hirschman (1970) or Freeman and Medoff (1984) as initial anchor points against which to assess voice, at the heart of LPT is Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*. Ramsay's (1977) 'cycles of control' thesis offers insights from this perspective. It views worker participation as a ruse employed by management threatened with union power in order to maintain its domination of workplaces – employee voice as a form of employer control, as it were. But, as Marks and Chillas observe, LPT has a more complex and nuanced analysis that considers the coexistence of consent and compliance as much as control.

Finally, there are analyses of voice rooted in work psychology and OB perspectives (see Brinsfield, Chapter 8). Debates in this area connect voice practices with developments and outcomes such as employee engagement (see Gruman and Saks, Chapter 28). Voice as engagement connects with better teamwork, individual job satisfaction or improved workforce commitment. The creation of semi-autonomous work groups gives workers a say in task allocation, scheduling, monitoring of attendance, flow and pace of production and even redesigning work roles and target setting, which ideally produces better engagement (Wall and Martin, 1987; Morrison, 2011; Welbourne, 2011). These practices have a long pedigree in seeking to counter the degradation of work and employee alienation (Proctor and Mueller, 2000), with many schemes formed as part of a series of work psychology experiments in the 1960s and 1970s (for example, by the

*Table 1.2   Employee voice: theory, focus and philosophy*

| Theoretical strand | Indicative voice schemes | Voice rationale | Form of voice | Philosophy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| HRM / HPWS | Focus groups<br>Open door policy | Performance | Individual | Managerial/unitarist:<br>Engender loyalty<br>Enhance performance |
| Political science | Workers on boards<br>Joint consultation | Citizenship | Representative | Legalistic:<br>Democracy and rights-based |
| TCE | Dual (union and/or non-union) voice | Cost switching | Representative | Utilitarian:<br>Transaction efficacy |
| LPT | Collective bargaining<br>Works councils<br>Partnership | Power and control | Collective | Pluralist:<br>Power-sharing<br>Countervailing power |
| OB | Teamworking<br>Speak-up programmes | Job design | Individuals and groups | Humanist/unitarist:<br>Engagement<br>Commitment |

Tavistock Institute and QWL (quality of working life) programmes in the USA and Sweden; see Berggren, 1993).

The above categorization of the diversity of analyses towards employee voice offers potential for greater theoretical specificity within the wide range of perspectives that shape understanding and can help identify conceptual overlap. An alternative way to view the different literatures is to relate them to a series of expected or indicative voice schemes that operate in practice. Table 1.2 presents such an analysis, tying each of the theoretical or disciplinary perspectives to the practices on which they largely focus, the preferred rationale for voice and desired form, all of which may be underpinned by an ideological or philosophical position shared by dominant actors or social groups concerned with employee voice.

There is further scope for refinement and analysis regarding what any specific voice scheme or practice means to the actors involved, and whether various schemes can improve organizational effectiveness and employee well-being or allow workers to have a genuine say in organizational decisions. The way voice initiatives actually work may depend on whether participants perceive them as faddish or as being embedded within the organization (Cox et al., 2006). Clearly, forms of employee voice through participation can differ in regard to the scope of decisions, the amount of influence workers can exercise over management and the organizational level at which the decisions are made. Some forms are purposely designed to give workers a voice but only a modest role in decision-making, while others are intended to give the workforce a more significant say in organizational governance.

**Actors in Employee Voice**

Studies that examine the importance of voice outcomes and processes from the point of view of different actors include not only workers and employers but line managers, trade

unions and other vested interest groups in society. This moves the voice literature from a simple worker–firm or labour–capital approach to incorporate a wider array of agents.

Most studies focus on managers as strategic policy actors operating within a framework of legislation or public policy prescriptions. Management plays a key part in adapting and interpreting legislation, corporate initiatives, consultancy panaceas and benchmark schemes to the workplace. This is important in the context of statutory regulation intent on extending employee voice. In many European countries the state plays a much more active role on top of voluntary collective bargaining. The way actors interpret and affect voice – both as a process of engagement in the workplace and as an outcome of organizational performance – is important in shaping the psychological and economic well-being of employees and indeed the health of families as well as the quality of a country's democratic process (Budd and Zagelmeyer, 2010). Thus the range of actors and their roles in affecting employee voice is of crucial importance, and several key groups can be observed as having a particular vested interest.

First and foremost are employers (and managers) as a distinct group affecting voice processes and outcomes. However, as Kaufman (Chapter 2) points out, management as a distinct function is relatively new in modern business terms, emerging in the late 1800s and developing first in the USA around 1910 and shortly after in Britain, mostly in response to collective organization of labour. Until then management as a distinct discipline was mostly haphazard. Taylor's model of scientific management is even credited as promoting 'equal' voice between worker and manager (Kaufman, Chapter 2); albeit a somewhat twisted understanding of equality given Taylor's core separation between capital/management as those who conceive of the work to be done and labour (employees) as those who carry it out. The idea of voice in terms of the design of jobs or work task involvement was alien to early management theorists.

In addition to the emergence of organized labour pushing management to consider how best to give workers a voice, Holland (Chapter 9) explains a whole set of considerations shaping employer choice around voice. Economic competition and global patterns of restructuring – such as shifts into large-scale bureaucratic organizations at the turn of the twentieth century followed by decline in manufacturing to smaller, more flexible specialization and knowledge and service industries – all affect options for the form of voice that employers may find most appealing. Employers interested in paternalism, social welfare or HRM arrangements would tend to eschew the traditional collectivist adversarial model for direct communications of voice rather than negotiation and bargaining. However, as important as employers are in the voice debate, it is line managers who act as the agents of employers, and as Townsend (Chapter 10) remarks, line managers are the ones who may hear or not hear the employees' voices. Management and employers are far from homogeneous. While a chief executive or human resource function may give strategic direction, line managers form relationships at the workplace level that can frustrate, lubricate or bypass voice opportunities.

Trade unions have probably occupied the lion's share of interest around employee voice in the industrial relations literature. Kaine (Chapter 11) revisits Freeman and Medoff's contention that union voice is most effective given that unionization has all but collapsed in advanced countries (though it is developing from a government-dominated institution in China). Kaine argues that while union voice is often viewed in terms of the diminishing role of collective bargaining, this is only one form of union voice. The point

is that unions have adapted and changed considerably. While some criticize Freeman and Medoff's view of collective union power as outdated or a narrow concept of union representation (Turnbull, 2003; Hirsch, 2004), forms of union voice have themselves changed (Heery, 2009), extending beyond the remit of collective bargaining to include articulation of worker concerns at multiple levels: individual, workplace, industry, national, transnational. Moreover, Kaine argues that what matters is what unions or workers qualitatively attain at a particular level and context. Therefore union voice is more nuanced, extends beyond pay and includes grievances, safety, training and workplace learning, among many other matters that have redefined the union voice agenda since Freeman and Medoff's contribution.

The decline of union voice in advanced countries raises a broad intellectual concern about how voice is affected in workplaces that do not have union recognition rights. Pohler and Luchak (Chapter 12) address a range of actor roles (unions, works councils, dispute resolution bodies) that can help fill the gap left by those missing employee voices.

In part because of union decline, and also as a result of employees lacking the opportunity for a formal agent to articulate their concerns, analysts have examined other societal agents who express voice for workers and marginalized groups. Piore and Safford (2006) argued that mission based organizations often substitute for unions in independent advocacy. Similarly, Williams et al. (2011) highlight the growth of social movement forms of employee representation and Heery et al. argue in this volume (Chapter 13) that Civil Society Organizations are based first and foremost on an 'expressive' identity – that is, on celebrating factors such as age or disability, sexual orientation or an ideological stance such as feminism. In contrast, trade unions have tended to portray a more 'instrumental' or 'vested-interest' logic toward benefits for members. However CSOs are also highly diverse which reflects variation towards voice and representation, albeit generally falling into advocacy, identity and issue-based movements in terms of supply of voice. Yet, despite the advocacy provided, these organizations face both representation and legitimacy issues. In representative terms, they often lack democratic foundations. Furthermore, they often seek solutions to issue-based agendas, rather than advocating specific occupational or sector/industry concerns of workers. Finally, there is a possibility of employer capture of initiatives which may compromise the independence of representation.

**Forms of Employee Voice**

Although in decline in most countries, union bargaining remains an important form of voice for millions of workers and employers around the world. Several chapters of the book re-evaluate unions as institutions of collective voice in a broader, more inclusive way than the labour relations literature has classically viewed them. In addition to collective bargaining (Doellgast and Benassi, Chapter 14) a range of forms includes such institutions as works councils (Nienhüser, Chapter 15) and joint consultative committees (Pyman, Chapter 16). In contrast to collectivist forms there are individualized mechanisms such as individual and grievance voice discussed by Lewin (Chapter 17). Other forms that are not as easily categorized as either collective or individual binaries but tend to dovetail with a more complex web of union and non-union, individual and collective or semi-collective group mechanisms include the likes of task involvement and

teamworking (Proctor and Benders, Chapter 18), workplace partnership (Johnstone, Chapter 19), mutual gains voice (Avgar and Owens, Chapter 20) and non-union employee representation (Dobbins and Dundon, Chapter 21).

These contributions analyse the broader changes in voice form from a variety of perspectives. We also see the growth and importance of informal voice, that is, ad hoc or non-programmed interactions between managers and their staff which provide opportunities for information-passing, consultation and the seeking of ideas (Marchington and Suter, 2013). Strauss (1998: 15) specifically defines informal involvement as 'the day-to-day relations between supervisors and subordinates in which the latter are allowed substantial input into decisions . . . a process which allows workers to exert some influence over their work and the conditions under which they work'.

It is important to note that the provision and practice of these different voice forms and mechanisms vary considerably across countries (Lansbury and Wailes, 2008). In European countries government policy and legislation provide for a statutory right to voice in certain areas and in both union and non-union establishments. But this is by no means typical. Other countries, including the USA and Australia, place much less emphasis on statutory provisions for employee voice with more emphasis on the freedom of managers and unions to establish their own preferred arrangements. In many organizations, the result is a mix of direct and indirect voice. It is also worth noting that, depending on the societal regime within which employee voice is situated, the benefits tend to be seen from rather different perspectives. Thus, in liberal market economies, voice is seen in terms of contribution to profit and shareholder value at the organizational level and in customer service, and product quality and staff retention at the workplace level. Issues to do with worker commitment, job satisfaction and alignment with organizational goals are often the proxies used to measure the success of employee voice schemes, but in themselves these may tell us little about the impact of particular schemes on the bottom line or the consolidation of management prerogative. In coordinated market economies, the focus is longer term and more widely defined in terms of a range of stakeholder interests, including that of the government, employers, trade unions and workers. The focus is on peak level institution representation. In these situations the expectation is more likely to be of mutual gains, either at the level of the individual employing organization or more broadly in terms of citizenship and long-term social cohesion (Wilkinson et al., 2010). As Budd and Zagelmeyer (2010) remind us, voice is not necessarily a private affair and it is not simply about improving economic performance.

**Evaluating the Future of Employee Voice**

Most employees want the opportunity to have a say and to contribute to the work issues that matter to them (Bryson et al., 2006). There are a variety of practices that can be utilized to deal with this desire for voice. Evidence suggests that many of these practices reflect the history of an organization or workplace and consist of ad hoc adjustments to problems rather than a fine-tuned employee voice strategy, which can make employee voice fragile in terms of its structure and efficacy. There is, as Syed (Chapter 26) shows, need for a diversity voice agenda given the many missing and neglected voices from parts of a labour force. There is also (see Balnave et al., Chapter 27) need to supplement traditional voice practices such as face-to-face bargaining, consultation or involvement with

social media and modern communication technology. Future generations of workers will almost certainly use new systems of voice and participation, possibly in ways that managers may find alien. As Pyman et al. (2006) have argued, a critical issue will be the configuration of multiple channels of voice and engagement rather than any single method, a configuration that technology will play a role in shaping. They conclude that the interaction and coexistence of multiple channels of voice and plurality of arrangements are most effective and legitimate from an employee's perspective in achieving organizational outcomes. Similarly, Handel and Levine (2004: 14) point out that bundles should be more effective than the simple sum of effects for the individual practices, and hence the existence of voice schemes may tell us little about the quality of the process (Wilkinson and Fay, 2011).

The operation of systems of voice and evaluation inevitably differs according to the power resources held by the respective actors within a firm, the size of the organization, and the constraints of particular legislative frameworks within a country (see Gollan et al., Chapter 22) or across international borders (see González Menéndez and Martínez Lucio, Chapter 23). Small firms where family relations and close personal links exist between management and workers often override employment regulations and policies in determining channels of voice and their success or failure (see Sameer and Özbilgin, Chapter 25).

Many firms have invested in programmes to increase employee involvement or engagement. Practitioner research seems to indicate that employee voice is an important driver of engagement and the former is a necessary prerequisite (process) for the latter (outcome) (Macey and Schneider, 2008). But it has not been without criticism. As Luisa Kroll (2005) notes, when writing for *Forbes* and quoting Randall MacDonald of IBM: 'Soon we'll be talking about marrying all those employees to whom we're engaged.' Welbourne (2011) points out that the beauty of employee engagement is that it can be all things to all people and that most people think employee engagement sounds good. As she argues, employee engagement speaks to something most social scientists, employees and managers truly believe, and that is the fact that when employees go 'above and beyond' and are not robots just doing a simple, repetitive job, then organizations do better (Welbourne, 2011). Likewise, as Gruman and Saks (Chapter 28) point out, many of the best-known organizational disasters – the Columbia space shuttle tragedy or the BP Deepwater drilling rig explosion – were connected to employee disengagement, situations when workers failed to report problems. Some argue that when employees do not speak up and instead remain silent they can be engaging in a type of protest, an active silence. In some contexts remaining silent can carry as much or more of a message than speaking out (see Brinsfield, Chapter 8; Cullinane and Donaghey, Chapter 24). This is the 'thunder in silence' in the Chinese sage Lao-tzu's philosophy about how to voice discontent. But while 'getting-back' or protesting against employer actions by actively not offering ideas may carry the message of discontent, it does not offer the mechanism for finding solutions. Related debates include the idea of employee whistle-blowing as voice, especially given the growth in corporate and government scandals surrounding unethical business conduct – such as the information communicated by Edward Snowden concerning alleged unethical practices at the US National Security Agency (NSA) when he was working there as a contract employee. Therefore how voice is evaluated concerns not just the type of practice, its form and mechanism, or who the particular actors are. More

important is the nature of the process, its intended purpose and meaning, and the ethical and moral fibre of those in positions of authority and the degree to which they are interested in power-sharing exercises that can effect change and enable a genuine say. These matters are picked up in the final chapter when Budd (Chapter 29) considers a number of challenges: the conceptualization of voice, and in particular whether voice can have an intrinsic self-determination role or be expressive of aims and interests as outcomes. Future challenges include what happens when there is no voice (or voice is minimal): do employees suffer in silence or exit the relationship? Voice also has to be re-evaluated in relation to time and space so as to capture its relevance and substance in relation to different types of work, occupations and industries. Future issues in this regard include the changing role of government institutions and legislative regimes for voice, corporate governance and business ethics, which affect both individual and collective rights for voice. Above all, the future of employee voice research is vibrant, challenging and intellectually stimulating with implications for policy, practice and theory.

# REFERENCES

Addison, J.T. (2005), 'The determinants of firm performance: unions, works councils, and employee involvement/high-performance work practices', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, **52** (3), 406–50.

Benson, J. (2000), 'Employee voice in union and non-union Australian workplaces', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, **38** (3), 453–9.

Berggren, C. (1993), *The Volvo Experience: Alternatives to Lean Production in the Swedish Auto Industry*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Boxall, P. and J. Purcell (2003), *Strategy and Human Resource Management*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Braverman, H. (1974), *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Monthly Review Press.

Bryson, A., A. Charlwood and J. Forth (2006), 'Worker voice, managerial response and labour productivity: an empirical investigation', *Industrial Relations Journal*, **37** (5), 438–55.

Budd, J. (2004), *Employment with a Human Face: Balancing Efficiency, Equity and Voice*, Ithaca: ILR Press.

Budd, J. and S. Zagelmeyer (2010), 'Public policy and employee participation', in A. Wilkinson, P. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Budd, J., P. Gollan and A. Wilkinson (2010), 'New approaches to employee voice and participation in organizations', *Human Relations*, **63** (3), 1–8.

Cox, A., S. Zagelmeyer and M. Marchington (2006), 'Embedding employee involvement and participation at work', *Human Resource Management Journal*, **16** (3), 250–67.

Donaghey, J., N. Cullinane, T. Dundon and A. Wilkinson (2011), 'Re-conceptualising employee silence: problems and prognosis', *Work, Employment and Society*, **25** (1), 51–67.

Dundon, T. (2002), 'Employer opposition and union avoidance in the UK', *Industrial Relations Journal*, **33** (3), 234–45.

Dundon T. and P. Gollan (2007), 'Re-conceptualising non-union voice', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **18** (7), 1182–98.

Dundon, T., A. Wilkinson, M. Marchington and P. Ackers (2004), 'The meanings and purpose of employee voice', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **15** (6), 1150–71.

Emmott, M. (2005), 'What is employee relations?', Change Agenda, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London.

Foley, J. and M. Polanyi (2006), 'Workplace democracy: why bother?', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, **27** (1), 173–91.

Freeman, R.B. and R. Medoff (1984), *What Do Unions Do?* New York: Basic Books.

Freeman, R.B., P. Boxall and P. Haynes (eds) (2007), *What Workers Say: Employee Voice in the Anglo-American World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gollan, P. and A. Wilkinson (2007), 'Contemporary developments in information and consultation', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, **18** (7), 1133–44.

Gomez, R., A. Bryson and P. Willman (2010), 'Voice in the wilderness: the shift from union to non-union voice', in A. Wilkinson, P. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Handel, M. and D. Levine (2004), 'The effects of new work practices on workers', *Industrial Relations*, **43** (1), 1–43.

Harley, W.G., J. Hyman and P. Thompson (eds) (2005), *Participation and Democracy at Work: Essays in Honour of Harvie Ramsay*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Harlos, K. (2001), 'When organizational voice systems fail: more on the deaf-ear syndrome and frustration effects', *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, **31** (3), 324–42.

Harrison, J. and E. Freeman (2004), 'Is organizational democracy worth the effort?', *Academy of Management Executive*, **18** (3), 49–53.

Heery, E. (2009), 'The representation gap and the future of worker representation', *Industrial Relations Journal*, **40** (4), 324–36.

Heery, E. and M. Simms (2011), 'Seizing an opportunity? Union organizing campaigns in Britain, 1998–2004', *Labor History*, **52** (1), 23–47.

Hirsch, B. (2004) 'What do unions do for economic performance?', *Journal of Labour Research*, **25** (3), 415–55.

Hirschman, A. (1970), *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Johnstone, S. and A. Wilkinson (2013), 'Employee voice, partnership and performance', in G. Saridakis and C. Cooper (eds), *How Can HR Drive Growth?*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, pp. 141–69.

Johnstone, S., P. Ackers and A. Wilkinson (2010) 'Better than nothing? Is non-union partnership a contradiction in terms?', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, **52** (2), 151–68.

Kahn-Freund, O. (1977), *Labour and the Law*, London: Stevens.

Kaufman, B. and D. Taras (2010), 'Employee participation through non-union forms of employee representation', in A. Wilkinson, P. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kochan, T.A. and P. Osterman (1994), 'The mutual gains enterprise: forging a winning partnership among labor, management and government', Harvard Business School, Harvard.

Kroll, L. (2005), 'No employee left behind', Forbes.com, New York, 15 September, available at: http://www.forbes.com/home/free_forbes/2005/1003/060.html (accessed 26 November 2013).

Lansbury, R. and N. Wailes (2008), 'Employee involvement and direct participation', in P. Blyton, N. Bacon, J. Fiorito and E. Heery (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Industrial Relations*, London: Sage, pp. 434–46.

Lewin, D. (2010), 'Employee voice and mutual gains', in A. Wilkinson, P.J. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lewin, D. and D. Mitchell (1992), 'Systems of employee voice: theoretical and empirical perspectives', *California Management Review*, **34** (3), 95–111.

Macey, W.H. and B. Schneider (2008), 'The meaning of employee engagement', *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, **1** (1), 3–30.

Marchington, M. (2008), 'Employee voice systems', in P. Boxall, J. Purcell and P. Wright (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marchington, M. and J. Suter (2013), 'Where informality really matters: patterns of employee involvement and participation in a non-union firm', *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, **52** (1), 284–313.

Minford, P. (1985), 'Trade unions destroy a million jobs', in W.E. McCarthy (ed.), *Trade Unions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 365–75.

Morrison, E. (2011), 'Employee voice behavior: integration and directions for future research', *Academy of Management Annals*, **5**, 373–412.

Morrison, E.W., S.L. Wheeler-Smith and D. Kamdar (2011), 'Speaking up in groups: a cross-level study of group voice climate and voice', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **96** (1), 183–91.

Pfeffer, J. (1998), *The Human Equation: Building Profits by Putting People First*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Piore, M.J. and S. Safford (2006), 'Changing regimes of workplace governance, shifting axes of social mobilization, and the challenge to industrial relations theory', *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, **45** (3), 299–325.

Poole, M. (1986), *Towards a New Industrial Democracy: Workers' Participation in Industry*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Proctor, S. and F. Mueller (eds) (2000), *Teamworking*, London: Macmillan.

Pyman, A., B. Cooper and J. Teicher (2006), 'A comparison of the effectiveness of employee voice arrangements in Australia', *Industrial Relations Journal*, **37** (5), 543–59.

Ramsay, H. (1977), 'Cycles of control: worker participation in sociological and historical perspective', *Sociology*, **11** (3), 481–506.

Rittau, Y. and T. Dundon (2010), 'The roles and functions of shop stewards in workplace partnership: evidence from the Republic of Ireland', *Employee Relations*, **32** (1) 10–27.

Sashkin, M. (1976), 'Changing toward participative management approaches: a model and methods', *Academy of Management Review*, July, 75–86.

Strauss, G. (1998), 'Participation works – if conditions are appropriate', in F. Heller, E. Pusic, G. Strauss and B. Wilpert (eds), *Organizational Participation: Myth and Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Strauss, G. (2006), 'Worker participation – some under-considered issues', *Industrial Relations*, **45** (4), 778–803.

Turnbull, P. (2003), 'What do unions do now?', *Journal of Labor Research*, **24** (3), 491–527.

Turnbull, P. and V. Wass (2000) 'Redundancy and the paradox of job insecurity', in E. Heery and J. Salmon (eds), *The Insecure Workforce*, London: Routledge, pp. 57–77.

Wall, T.D. and R. Martin (1987), 'Job and work design', in C. Cooper and I. Robertson (eds), *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Chichester: Wiley.

Welbourne, T.M. (2011), '50 years of voice in HRM', *Human Resource Management*, **50** (1), 1–2.

Wilkinson, A. and C. Fay (2011), 'New times for employee voice?', *Human Resource Management*, **20** (1), 65–74.

Wilkinson, A., T. Dundon, M. Marchington and P. Ackers (2004), 'Changing patterns of employee voice', *Journal of Industrial Relations*, **46** (3), 298–322.

Wilkinson, A., P. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (2010), 'Conceptualising employee participation in organizations', in A. Wilkinson, P.J. Gollan, M. Marchington and D. Lewin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–25.

Wilkinson, A., T. Dundon and M. Marchington (2013), 'Employee involvement and voice', in S. Bach and M. Edwards (eds), *Managing Human Resources*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Williams, S., B. Abbott and E.J. Heery (2011), 'Civil regulation and HRM: the impact of civil society organisations on the policies and practices of employers', *Human Resource Management Journal*, **21** (1), 45–59.

Willman, P., A. Bryson and R. Gomez (2003), 'Why do voice regimes differ?', Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science.

Willman, P., R. Gomez and A. Bryson (2009), 'Voice at the workplace: where do we find it, why is it there and where is it going?', in W. Brown, A. Bryson, J. Forth and K. Whitfield (eds), *The Evolution of the Modern Workplace*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.