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Article

Atypical work, worker voice and supervisor responses

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Abstract

We study atypical workers' experiences with voice of in the Netherlands. We take a relational approach to worker voice and hypothesize that atypical workers are particularly vulnerable to refrain from voice and to experience suppression. We test our hypotheses using unique data on workers' actual experiences with voicing discontent and supervisors' responses ($N=4708$; collected in 2017 and 2018). We find that temporary and freelance work, job insecurity, replaceability and precarious values are barriers to worker voice. Job insecurity and precarious values are associated with less support and more suppression from supervisors. These insights offer a valuable contribution to scholarly and public debates on atypical work by demonstrating how it not only affects workers' job security, income stability and entitlements but also reduces workers' ability to speak up and solve problems at work.

Key words: worker rights, atypical work, worker voice, conflict, precariat

JEL classification: J83 worker's rights

1. Introduction

We study how atypical workers speak up for themselves when they experience work-related issues. Atypical work (such as agency work; temporary, on-call and zero-hour contracts; and work performed outside the employment relationship, such as freelance and platform work) is associated with lower job satisfaction, higher perceived job insecurity, higher levels of sick leave and lower levels of mental and physical wellbeing (Eurofound, 2013, 2017) and more occupational accidents (SER, 2019). In particular, vulnerable groups in the labour market, that is, those who are young, low-skilled, female, migrant workers and workers with disabilities, work in atypical forms of employment (Dutch Statistics, 2013). The central question of this study is how atypical work affects worker voice and supervisor responses to it.

The increase in atypical forms of work and the number of people working in it causes concern for the quality of jobs (OECD, 2019) and is one of the main drivers of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) (European Union, 2016). One of the aims of the EPSR is to address ‘insufficient protection for workers in more precarious jobs’ (European Commission, 2017), through synchronizing social and employee rights for *all* workers, including those working outside a formal employment relationship.

It is, however, unclear how compliance with the policies resulting from the EPSR should be ensured. Member states may entrust social partners with it, for example, through collective bargaining. Given the decreasing membership rates of trade unions, along with the decreased collective bargaining coverage in (most) OECD countries, including the EU member states (OECD, 2017), the effectiveness of their role in the implementation of protective measures for atypical workers is debatable. For one, union membership is notoriously low among atypical workers. Moreover, collective bargaining agreements typically do not apply to workers without a formal employment relationship and their participation in workplace social dialogue, for example, the work council, is low.

Therefore, the potential role of unions and social dialogue in protecting workers’ rights, especially for atypical workers, is not very promising. In the worst-case scenario, some workers may be on their own as to claiming new and existing worker rights. Whether such an individual voice is, or can be, effective depends on the degree to which workers are able to voice claims and complaints and on supervisors’ response to it. If atypical work is also associated with lower levels of voice or less supportive responses to it, atypical workers may have lost their last resort to turn the tide. When worker voice is no longer effective to address issues at work, individual strategies such as remaining silent, quitting the job, neglect at work and resistance become more attractive responses to discontent (cf. Hirschman, 1970; Farrell, 1983; Hodson, 1997b; Roscigno and Hodson, 2004). This is problematic, because these strategies are often less effective for solving the source of discontent, so that potential unjust, unwanted and dangerous situations continue to exist, or deteriorate. Illustrative is the finding that deviant behaviour at work is higher among atypical workers in the Netherlands (Akkerman *et al.*, 2020).

While concerns about effects of atypical work on the quality of jobs and its consequences for social and economic inequality and the growing discontent among the middle class (OECD, 2019) lead to EU actions, there is little scientific and policy attention to the effects of atypical work on *worker voice*. This is unfortunate because worker voice is likely to play a crucial role in the success of the policies following from the EPSR. With worker voice, we understand ‘the ability to speak up for oneself, or the group one belongs to, regarding worker rights and work-related issues’. Worker voice is potentially a crucial factor for workers, in particular for atypical workers, in counterbalancing precarious work situations and claiming rights.

Previous studies suggest that atypical work is likely to reduce worker voice: workers refrain from voicing issues at work because they fear negative personal or professional consequences (cf. Kish-Gephardt *et al.*, 2009), one fear-inducing source being insecurity about one’s job (cf. De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, such perceived employment uncertainty is theoretically related to the adoption of a mode of domination (Bourdieu, 1998), where workers who experience employment insecurities adopt ‘precarious values’, that is, feeling less entitled to voice and prioritizing the interests of their employers instead of their own (Padavic, 2005). Still, we know little about the conditions under which workers, especially atypical workers, voice work-related issues.

Furthermore, empirical studies on supervisor responses to voice are also scarce (with exception of [Kassing, 2009](#)). We know that suppressive responses exist and that they take various forms. The International Trade Union Confederation ([ITUC, 2018](#)) and a few academics ([Bronfenbrenner, 1997, 2000](#); [Mehta and Theodore, 2005](#); [Bernhardt et al., 2009](#)) keep records of suppression by employers. However, systematic knowledge is lacking. This is unfortunate, especially because worker's ability to influence their own working conditions is mostly shaped relationally, namely in the interactions between workers and supervisors ([Clegg et al., 2006](#); [Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014](#); [Roscigno, 2019](#)). Moreover, the idea that workers with less power, or with insecure positions in the organization are more vulnerable to be targeted by those with more power ([Byron and Roscigno, 2014](#); [Roscigno et al., 2018](#), p. 1789; [Cassino and Besen-Cassino, 2019](#)) exemplifies the importance of studying supervisors' responses to atypical workers' voice.

This paper addresses this gap and studies some of the conditions under which worker voice is exercised and supported or suppressed by supervisors. We study the experiences of atypical workers with voicing discontent to their supervisor and theorize that when jobs are associated with employment uncertainty, less opportunity to become socially embedded in the organization and the adoption of precarious values—as is the case with much atypical work—workers' opportunities to solve problems at work decreases. Our research questions are: 'To what extent does atypical work affect worker voice?' and 'To what extent does atypical work affect supervisors' responses to voice?'

We study these questions using data from the Netherlands, which offers a context *par excellence* to study relations among atypical work, worker voice and supervisors' responses to voice. Recent figures for the Netherlands show that insecure contract types are increasingly popular: in 2018, more than 21% of the employees in the Netherlands worked on a temporary contract ([Eurostat, 2019](#)) or were solo self-employed, together comprising over one-third of the employed labour force ([Dutch Statistics, 2019](#)). While union membership is about 19% of the employees in the Netherlands, about 80% of the employees are covered by a collective agreement. Freelancers are not covered by a collective agreement because they are legally not employees. All workers are eligible for union membership, regardless what organization they work for or what type of contract they have. Furthermore, employment protection of temporary workers is low compared to that of permanent workers and the differences between the two are among the largest of OECD countries (OECD, 2013).

Altogether, our research advances the field of employment relations in five respects. First, our unique data collection enables us to map the voice behaviour of 2680 Dutch workers, 772 of whom have at least one atypical feature in their employment relation. This rich, systematic data set allows to study the effects of atypical work on workers' experiences with voicing. As such, we can generalize findings of previous ethnographic work on supervisors' responses ([Hodson, 1997a](#); [Roscigno and Hodson, 2004](#)). Secondly, theoretically, our relational approach adds suppression by supervisors to the repertoire of restrictions on employee voice studied by industrial relations and organizational behaviour theory ([Colvin, 2003](#); [Bingham, 2004](#); [Brewster et al., 2007](#); [Budd and Colvin, 2008](#)). Thirdly, we add worker voice to precarious work research ([Kalleberg, 2018](#)). Fourthly, we contribute to theory on means of control of work by showing how contract type and flexible arrangements affect workers' ability to control their own working conditions ([Smith, 1994](#); [Crowley, 2012](#)). Finally, our findings inform policy about the implicit assumption that (atypical) workers are able to claim worker rights.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Worker voice

Speaking up for one's rights as a worker and addressing difficult situations at work may provoke complex and unpredictable responses, making voice at work an uncertain endeavour. Worker voice is therefore considered a risky response to discontent (Organ, 1988; Ng and Feldman, 2012; Lebel, 2016). The costs of voicing issues at work can be high: signalling problems at work may evoke negative reactions from supervisors and/or colleagues (Milliken *et al.*, 2003), for instance, because voicing discontent can embarrass supervisors (Hsiung, 2012). Furthermore, co-workers may not always welcome voice because of the risk of collective punishment (cf. Liu *et al.*, 2015; Thommes and Akkerman, 2018). Hence, many may associate worker voice with high potential costs that function as barriers to voice. We argue that atypical work can impede worker voice for three reasons: an uncertain employment position, weaker social embeddedness in the organization and the cultural consequences of employment uncertainty on atypical workers' perceptions of 'voice entitlement'.

First, addressing difficult situations at work can be especially risky for atypical workers who are in uncertain employment, as this more often leads to obstacles to voicing discontent (cf. Turner and O'Sullivan, 2013; Jansen *et al.*, 2017). One reason for this is that workers worried about their job may fear retaliation and do not want to put their careers within the organization at risk (Ng and Feldman, 2012; Foster *et al.*, 2018). To make matters worse, the retaliation of using one's voice for atypical workers can also extend to their career outside the organization, e.g. supervisor's refusal to provide credentials. Such consequences increase the risks of workers, especially temporary workers, in using their voices.

Second, atypical workers may also lack the necessary support of peers due to their weaker social embeddedness in the organization. Less tenure and few, irregular and unpredictable working hours hinder the development of sustainable relationships and social capital with co-workers. German research, for example, shows that temporary agency workers report receiving less respect and recognition from their peers, being seen as outsiders and being of lower status (Noller, 2003; cf. Mitlacher, 2008). Something similar may apply to newcomers in the organization or workers in small part-time jobs. Resulting from this lack of social capital, atypical workers may anticipate few to no peer support when raising an issue at work. Moreover, colleagues are an important resource of information about voice strategies (Born *et al.*, 2013). A lack of embeddedness hinders access to this information, which makes voice endeavours more uncertain (Aronsson, 1999; Akkerman *et al.*, 2013).

Finally, in addition to the higher risks of voice and the poor embeddedness, the relative 'powerlessness' of atypical workers may result in the adoption of 'precarious values', including a lowered sense of voice entitlement. Very similar to the 'mode of domination' to which Bourdieu refers when stating that workers are being forced 'into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 85), working under conditions of uncertainty can pose a cultural barrier to voicing discontent. Workers' role and position in the organization shape their assumptions about their entitlement and potential influence, especially in the context of workplace relations (cf. Crowley, 2014, p. 420). Given their subordinate role and insecure position in the organization, some atypical workers may adopt a 'managerial ideology', that is, the idea that it is solely the job of managers to contemplate and make important decisions (Kohn *et al.*, 1990; Padavic, 2005). Adopting a 'managerial ideology' induces a

submissive rather than a critical stance towards supervisors and employers (Kalleberg and Vallas, 2017, p. 4). This is in line with the idea that atypical workers have a different psychological contract, that is, the ideas and expectations about one's employment relation with the employer that go beyond what is stated in the labour contract. Compared to standard workers, atypical workers are thought to have a narrower psychological contract that focuses on economic transaction: labour in exchange for a wage (Rousseau, 1995; Guest, 2004; De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008). This psychological contract thus includes fewer expectations about aspects that go beyond the exchange of labour and wages, leading atypical workers to the belief that it is not appropriate for them to engage in voice behaviour.

Thus, next to instrumental considerations based on the assessment of potential risks and co-worker support, the adoption of 'precarious values' may also form a barrier to voicing discontent among atypical workers. We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Atypical workers are less likely to voice discontent to their supervisors.

2.2 Supervisors' responses to worker voice

Atypical work may result in decreased responsiveness to worker voice by supervisors and employers. The few studies available on responses to worker voice show that a substantial proportion of atypical workers in the USA who voice an issue at work experience some form of non-supportive consequences (Mehta and Theodore, 2005; Bernhardt *et al.*, 2009). European studies indicate that atypical workers are less likely to receive support in case of unfavourable circumstances at work, as reflected by the following: greater levels of work stress among temporary workers, especially those without the prospect of a permanent contract (Dutch Statistics, 2013); less favourable treatment of temporary workers than of permanent workers (cf. De Cuyper *et al.*, 2008); and exploitation of migrant workers (SCP, 2013). However, previous studies have not directly assessed whether actual responses to worker voice account for these consequences of atypical work. Hence, they are only circumstantial evidence of diminished responsiveness to the voice of atypical workers.

The role of supervisors received some attention in the voice literature. For instance, studies have examined the (perceived) openness of supervisors to criticism (Lebel, 2016) or the relation between supervisors and employees (Botero and Van Dyne, 2009) as determinants of voice behavior. This indicates that workers take the anticipated response of supervisors into consideration before engaging in worker voice. Systematic data on the actual responses of supervisors to employees voicing discontent are lacking. An exception is Kassing's (2009) study on repeated expression of dissent. However, Kassing's research does not distinguish supervisors' responses to atypical *versus* standard workers' voice.

Possibly because of the lack of data on responses to worker voice by the supervisor/employer, it remains undertheorized whether supervisors respond differently to the voices of atypical and standard workers. We make the first attempt at such theorizing by mirroring the arguments used to theorize on the voices of atypical workers above. In what follows, we distinguish between supportive responses of supervisors, that is, actively helping to solve the issue at work or applaud the expression of discontent and suppression by the supervisors, that is, by ignoring, attempting to silence or punishing workers voicing discontent (Stanojevic *et al.*, 2020).

Support requires a willingness to invest (e.g. time, effort and money) in solving the issue. Because atypical workers have a shorter future in the organization, work fewer hours, are

usually more easily replaced and have less potential to mobilize peer support, supervisors may be less inclined to invest in them. Such a tendency was previously found for investment in training: research in the Belgian context shows that flexible workers receive employer-funded training less often than standard workers (Forrier and Sels, 2003). Similarly, we expect that supervisors respond less supportively to atypical workers' voice than to standard workers. Moreover, some argue that the transition to post-Fordist employment relations induced a shift from the typical arrangement in which workers obtain job security in exchange for loyalty and hard work to a 'we don't owe you' ethos, at least from an employer's perspective (cf. Padavic, 2005, p. 128). If this holds true, supervisors may be less inclined to respond supportively to worker voice. This may be especially true for atypical workers because they are often seen as relatively easily replaceable and are often explicitly hired for positions that cover employers' fluctuating needs (see also Kalleberg (2000) on contingent workers). Hence, supervisors may feel that atypical workers are less entitled to their support, which mirrors the logic of atypical workers who adopted 'precarious values' and feel less entitled to voice. These assumptions about voice entitlement, both by supervisors and workers, gain actual shape and meaning first and foremost in supervisor-worker interactions on worker voice (cf. Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2010, p. 166). Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Atypical workers are less likely than standard workers to receive supportive responses from their supervisors when they voice their discontent.

Following a similar logic, atypical workers are more prone to be suppressed after voicing. If atypical workers are seen as more easily replaceable, supervisors may think of them as being less entitled than standard workers to voicing their discontent. Furthermore, supervisors can feel embarrassed by the issues addressed by worker (Hsiung, 2012), even more so when 'challenged' by atypical workers, whom they would expect to have adopted 'precarious values', i.e., a submissive disposition at the workplace. Moreover, the issue addressed by workers can involve (high) costs or lead to (similar) claims or complaints by other workers. Suppression of worker voice can function as a barrier to future voice or prevent other workers from voicing discontent.

We argue that the social support and solidarity of colleagues has an inhibitory effect on suppression. Research on discrimination and sexual harassment indicates that good co-worker relations can work as a protective buffer (Roscigno, 2019, p. 12). Workers who are less socially embedded in the organization are less likely to be supported by their colleagues, which reduces the consequences of suppression for the supervisor. Moreover, compared to standard workers, atypical workers are more vulnerable to suppression because they are typically less protected by their contracts. This decreased protection limits their options in countering any punishment to using their voices. Therefore, we expect:

Hypothesis 3: Atypical workers are more likely than standard workers to suffer suppression from their supervisors when they voice their discontent.

3. Data and measurements

3.1 Data

Our study uses the Work and Politics 2018 Survey (Akkerman *et al.*, 2018). This tailor-made data set measures experiences with voice at work. The questionnaire was developed

through insights from previous research (Miceli and Near, 1989; Cortina and Magley, 2003; Bernhardt *et al.*, 2009), input from experts, input from a pilot study and input from the first wave. The fieldwork was carried out by Kantar Public, using the TNS NIPObase panel. This Online panel contains approximately 235 000 respondents from 145 000 households in the Netherlands. Panel members are recruited through random sampling, ensuring that each member of society has a chance to be selected.

The Work and Politics 2018 Survey is the second wave of the three-wave Work and Politics Panel Study. A total of 12 013 respondents from the Dutch labour force were selected and invited to participate in the first wave in 2017. In total 7599 respondents completed the full questionnaire in the first wave, the initial response rate was thus 64%. A total of 6,008 of the initial respondents completed the second wave of the study; these data were collected from October to early November 2018. Thus, the overall panel attrition is approximately 21%. Approximately 5% is due to respondents unsubscribing from the general TNS NIPObase panel. We, therefore, calculate the net panel attrition based on the 7244 initial respondents who were still part of the sample in 2018, resulting in approximately 17% net panel attrition, or a response rate of 83%. The data is representative of the Dutch labour force aged 15–67 years in terms of gender, age and education (Kantar Public, 2018). In our 2018 wave 26% of the workers with a permanent contract are union members, temporary workers 10% and freelancers 8% (all atypical workers 9.5%), which is representative regarding the union membership rates of the Dutch labour force (Dutch Statistics, 2012).

For our analyses, we selected respondents who, at the time of the second wave, worked in an organization as employees as well as temporary agency workers, payroll contracts and freelancers working within an organization ($N = 4708$).

3.2 Measurements

3.2.1 Worker voice

We first established whether respondents experienced discontent about a work-related issue in the previous year. We presented respondents a list with possible sources of discontent, including an option where respondents could specify any other issue and an option indicating they had no issue. Respondents could select multiple issues, and if so, we asked them to indicate the most important issue. [Online Appendix A](#) presents an overview of the responses on the issues experienced and the issues considered most important.

Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents experienced a work-related issue in the past year. We selected these respondents ($N = 2758$) and, to account for worker voice, we asked them, ‘Did you, alone or with colleagues, act on the issue, and, if so, how?’ Respondents who experienced several issues were asked to keep in mind the issue they indicated as most important. We then presented a list with possible ways to act on issues. Respondents could select multiple answers. To account for *worker voice* in the analyses in this study, we used the item ‘I have raised the issue to my supervisor.’ Of the respondents who experienced discontent about a work-related issue, 72% voiced it to their supervisor. Workers with a permanent contract most often voiced their discontent (74%). Voice is lowest among freelancers (55%).

3.2.2 Supervisors’ responses to workers’ voice

Obviously, supervisors need to be aware of the workers’ voiced discontent before they can respond to it. For our analyses regarding the supervisors’ response, we selected respondents

who voiced directly to their supervisor, and respondents who voiced their discontent elsewhere, but whose supervisor was aware of this ($N = 2219$). We asked these respondents, 'After voicing the issue, did this lead to any of the following responses of your supervisor?' We presented respondents with a list of possible responses from their supervisors. Respondents had the option to report responses not included in this list. Note that we measure workers' experiences of supervisor responses, which do not necessarily equal the supervisors' view of what happened.

We classified supervisor's responses into different types: support, passivity and suppression (cf. Stanojevic *et al.*, 2020). When possible, we recoded the 'other' responses added by the respondents into one of these categories. Each type of employer/supervisor reaction is measured by one variable, indicating whether a respondent has (score 1) or has not (score 0) reported any of the underlying supervisor responses. Respondents can report more than one type of supervisor response.

Table 1 presents an overview of the items used to measure the categories of supervisors' responses to worker voice and shows that supportive responses to voice are the most frequently reported by our respondents: 44% of the respondents experienced supportive supervisor responses, 42% experienced passive supervisor responses, 29% experienced suppression by the supervisor. We have no explicit expectations regarding the passive responses of supervisors, where supervisors do not actively invest in solving the issue or encourage voice behaviour, but neither suppress worker voice. We, therefore, do not examine passive responses in our analyses, the supervisor responses we do include are thus *support* and *suppress*.

Workers with a permanent contract and freelancers most often receive supportive responses to voice (45% and 44%, respectively). Temporary workers with and without the

Table 1 Supervisor's responses to discontent ($N = 2219$)

Response	%
Support	44
My supervisor helped me solve the issue	37
My supervisor gave me a compliment	14
Passivity	42
My supervisor gave a good explanation	28
My supervisor convinced me that (s)he could not solve the problem	19
Suppression	29
My supervisor ignored the issue	12
My supervisor did not want me to talk about it	3
My supervisor brushed me off by saying that (s)he could not do anything about it	15
My supervisor criticized me	7
My supervisor obstructed my career (e.g. by denying promotion or training/education possibilities)	3
It resulted in my dismissal/my contract was not renewed	1
My supervisor gave me a bad review during the performance appraisal	2
I received an official warning	1
My supervisor bullied/threatened/intimidated me	1
My supervisor made my work less pleasant	4

prospect of a permanent contract most often receive suppressive responses to voice (35% and 34%, respectively).

3.2.3 Atypical work

We measure atypical work in two ways. First, we use contract type, for which we distinguish between a permanent contract, a temporary contract with the prospect of a permanent contract, a temporary contract without the prospect of a permanent contract, and freelancers hired within an organization. Secondly, we look at whether respondents have flexible arrangements in their contracts, that is, temporary agency work, on-call work and zero-hour contract and a payroll contract.

3.2.4 Perceived employment uncertainty

We include three measures for perceived employment uncertainty. Job insecurity is measured by asking respondents whether they are greatly worried about losing their job, using a five-point scale ranging from (1) totally not applicable to (5) totally applicable. *Labour market insecurity*, which is the inverse of what is often labelled as employability, measures, again on a five-point scale, whether respondents think it will be hard to find a job as good as, or better than, their current job. *Replaceability* depicts how difficult it is for an employer to replace an employee. Again using a five-point scale, we asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they think it will be difficult for their employer to find a suitable candidate for their position if the respondent decided to leave. We recoded this variable so that higher scores indicate that the respondent thinks that it would be easier to replace him/her.

3.2.5 Social embeddedness

We measure social embeddedness of a worker in the organization by the time spent in the organization, in two ways. First, we examine the number of *working hours*. We asked respondents how many hours they actually work per week. We asked respondents to give the number of working hours for an average week in case working hours changed by the week. When respondents indicated to work more than forty hours per week, we recoded their answer to forty, reflecting a standard full-time workweek. We also include one's *tenure*, measured as the number of years that the respondent worked in the organization. We consider workers who have worked for fewer years in the organization, and/or who work fewer hours per week, less embedded.

3.2.6 Precarious values

Further, we account for precarious values. First, we asked respondents to indicate to what extent (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree) they agreed with the statement 'It is worth listening to the opinion of employees like me about working terms and working conditions'. We recoded the answer categories so that higher scores indicate that it is less worthwhile to listen to the opinions of such employees. As such, this variable reflects precarious values regarding the lack of entitlement to voice, hence *no voice entitlement*. We use this variable in the models explaining voice behaviour.

Secondly, we asked to what extent (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree) respondents agreed with the statement 'Employees like me have no influence on the policies of the organization'. This item reflects to what extent respondents believe that they are not entitled to

responsiveness to their voice. We label this *no entitlement to responsiveness*. We use this variable in the models explaining supervisors' responses to worker voice.

Both variables indicate the extent to which the respondent has adopted precarious values related to voice. We argue that these precarious values can explain voice experiences, but we acknowledge that they are also likely to be affected by such experiences: negative experiences can result in more precarious values, and positive experiences can reduce precarious values. To avoid this reversed causality, we use the respondents' responses in the first wave of the Work and Politics Panel Survey. The first wave of the Work and Politics Panel Survey (Akkerman *et al.*, 2017) was collected in August and September 2017, and the variables thus measure the precarious values obtained immediately prior to the period under study.

3.2.7 Control variables

We control for the respondents' sex (1 = male), age and *educational level* by including dummy variables for middle and higher educational levels in our analyses. People with no education, primary education, or lower-level secondary education as the highest-attained educational level are considered less educated. People with middle- and higher-level secondary education or vocational education are considered middle educated. People who graduated from tertiary education are considered higher educated. We also account for the *ethnic background* of respondents, distinguishing native Dutch, Western migrants and non-Western migrants, following the definition of Dutch Statistics (2018). We include a dummy variable to account for the union membership of respondents. Furthermore, we include the employment class (*EGP*) of the respondent. This is measured using the Erikson, Goldthorpe and Portocarero scheme, which distinguishes among eleven types of employment. We recoded this scheme to distinguish between higher professionals, lower professionals, routine non-manual employees, self-employed individuals and farmers and (manual) workers.

Finally, we also add dummy variables to account for the type of *issue* that is experienced. Here, we distinguish among issues related to terms of employment, working conditions, career development, interpersonal conflicts and other issues. After listwise deletion of missing values, we have 2680 respondents in our analyses of worker voice and 2169 respondents in our analyses of supervisor responses to voice.

The descriptive statistics and correlation matrices are shown in [Online Appendices B–D](#).

4. Methods

Because both dependent variables are binary, we apply logistic regression analyses. We present the outcomes of the models explaining worker voice in [Table 2](#) and the outcomes of the models explaining supervisors responses to worker voice in [Table 3](#). For each dependent variable, we first estimate a model including contract type, flexible arrangements and the control variables and add the variables pertaining to perceived employment uncertainty, embeddedness and precarious values in a second model. For each model, we present the odds ratios (i.e. the exponential function of the regression coefficient), the associated standard errors and significance, the AIC value and the Nagelkerke R^2 . While the control variables are included in all models, we do not present the results of these in [tables 2 and 3](#). The full models, including control variables, can be found in [Online Appendices E and F](#).

Table 2 Logistic regression analysis on voice to supervisor ($N = 2680$).

	Model 1		Model 2	
	OR	SE	OR	SE
Permanent contract	(Ref.)		(Ref.)	
Temporary contract (w/ prospect)	0.69*	0.15	0.72*	0.15
Temporary contract (w/o prospect)	0.60**	0.19	0.71	0.20
Freelancer	0.48**	0.25	0.54*	0.25
Temporary agency	0.95	0.22	0.94	0.22
On-call/zero-hour	0.90	0.18	0.93	0.19
Payroll	1.60	0.27	1.63	0.27
Job insecurity			0.90*	0.04
Labour market insecurity			1.04	0.04
Replaceability			0.89**	0.04
Working hours			1.01	0.01
Tenure			1.00	0.01
No voice entitlement			0.85**	0.06
Intercept	3.93***	0.25	6.18***	0.36
AIC	3105.4			3088.1
Nagelkerke R^2 (%)	6			8

Note: Control variables included in both models.

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$; two-tailed test.

5. Results

5.1 Worker voice

The odds ratios in Model 1 in Table 2 show that temporary workers with the prospect of a permanent contract are 0.69 times less likely to voice discontent to their supervisor than workers with a permanent contract. Similarly, the chances to voice discontent to supervisors is 0.60 times smaller for temporary workers without the prospect of a permanent contract and 0.48 times smaller for freelancers. These findings are in line with Hypothesis 1 predicting that atypical work decreases the likelihood of voicing discontent to the supervisor. None of the flexible arrangements are significantly related to worker voice. Next, we add the measures for perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values in Model 2. Workers who are more insecure about their job are less likely to voice their discontent, and each point of increase on the 5-point scale decreases the odds of worker voice by a factor of 0.90. For replaceability, we find that workers are less likely to voice discontent when they feel that they are easier to replace by the employer, and each point of increase on the 5-point scale decreases the odds by a factor 0.89. We find no significant effect for labour market insecurity, i.e. the extent to which one thinks it would be hard to find a job as good as, or better than, their current job.

Furthermore, the number of working hours and tenure are unrelated to worker voice, hence, social embeddedness is not related to voice. Having more precarious values reduces the likelihood to voice discontent to the supervisor: people who feel least entitled to voice are about twice as likely to remain silent than people who feel most entitled to voice ($0.85^{5-1} = 0.52$).

Table 3 Logistic regression analysis on supportive and suppressive supervisor responses to voice ($N=2169$)

	Support 1		Support 2		Suppression 1		Suppression 2	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
Permanent contract	(Ref.)		(Ref.)		(Ref.)		(Ref.)	
Temporary contract (w/ prospect)	0.66**	0.16	0.70*	0.17	1.40*	0.16	1.22	0.17
Temporary contract (w/o prospect)	0.59*	0.22	0.71	0.23	1.53	0.22	1.35	0.24
Freelancer	0.85	0.31	0.84	0.32	0.81	0.35	0.87	0.37
Temporary agency	1.12	0.25	1.20	0.25	1.05	0.25	0.87	0.26
On-call/zero-hour	0.98	0.19	0.99	0.20	1.47	0.20	1.40	0.20
Payroll	1.50	0.23	1.53	0.24	0.76	0.27	0.75	0.27
Job insecurity			0.80**	0.05			1.29***	0.05
Labour market insecurity			1.05	0.04			0.89**	0.04
Replaceability			0.97	0.04			1.00	0.04
Working hours			1.01	0.01			1.02*	0.01
Tenure			1.00	0.01			0.99	0.01
No entitlement to responsiveness			0.84***	0.04			1.32***	0.05
Intercept	0.46*	0.31	0.93	0.41	0.2***9	0.32	0.07***	0.44
AIC	2839.1		2801.2		2558.7		2490.4	
Nagelkerke R^2 (%)	11		14		8		12	

Note: control variables included in all models.

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$; two-tailed test.

When the variables measuring perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values are included, the estimates of atypical work are partly affected: temporary workers with the prospect of a permanent position and freelancers remain less likely to voice their discontent. Temporary workers with prospect of a permanent position may fear to put their future permanent position at stake when they voice concerns, or, because they anticipate on a long(er) stay in the organization, refrain from voice in order not to jeopardize their relation with their supervisor. Freelancers may risk being hired for future projects in the same organization. We no longer find differences between permanent workers and temporary workers without the prospect of a permanent contract. These findings indicate that perceived employment uncertainty, in particular job insecurity, replaceability and precarious values, that is, voice entitlement, partly explain why atypical workers are less likely to voice their discontent.

5.2 Supervisors' responses to worker voice

The first two models in Table 3 present the outcomes of the analyses on supervisors' supportive responses to voice. Hypothesis 2 predicts that atypical workers are less likely than standard workers to receive supportive responses from their supervisors. From

Support-model 1, we learn that temporary workers, both with ($OR = 0.66$) and without ($OR = 0.59$) the prospect of a permanent position, are less likely to indicate receiving supportive responses. We find that atypical workers—except freelancers—are indeed less likely to receive supportive supervisor responses. Flexible characteristics are not significantly related to supportive responses.

When we include the measures for perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values in Support-model 2, we first see that job insecurity ($OR = 0.80$) is negatively related to receiving supportive responses to expression of discontent. The other two measures of perceived employment uncertainty are not significantly related to supervisor support. Both measures of social embeddedness are unrelated to supervisor support, while precarious values, measured as low entitlement to responsiveness ($OR = 0.84$), are negatively related to receiving supportive responses to expressions of discontent. Hence, more job insecurity and a lowered sense of entitlement to supervisor responsiveness are both associated with a lower chance of receiving supportive supervisor responses to voice.

We also find that some differences between contract types disappear after adding the measures for perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values: only temporary workers with the prospect of a permanent position remain less likely to receive supportive responses from their supervisor ($OR = 0.70$). This finding indicates that perceived employment uncertainty and precarious values contribute to some of the differences between standard and atypical workers with regard to how supportively their supervisors respond to their expressions of discontent.

Suppression-models 1 and 2 present the outcomes of the analyses on suppressive responses from supervisors. From Suppression-model 1, we learn that workers with temporary contracts with the prospect of a permanent position are more likely to indicate suppression by their supervisor after having voiced their discontent ($OR = 1.40$). Other aspects of atypical work, including flexible characteristics, appear to be unrelated to suppressive responses from supervisors.

We add the measures for perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values in Suppression-model 2. We then find that people who experience more job insecurity ($OR = 1.29$) and more precarious values, measured as low entitlement to responsiveness ($OR = 1.32$), more often indicate that they received suppressive responses from their supervisor. Contrary to Hypothesis 3, labour market insecurity is negatively related to such responses ($OR = 0.89$); workers who fear that it will be hard to find an equivalent or better job elsewhere report less often that they have been suppressed. Additional analyses showed that job insecurity moderates the relation between labour market insecurity and suppression: with high levels of job insecurity, labour market insecurity increases the likelihood of being suppressed, while the opposite holds when job insecurity is low. Hence, lacking job alternatives only becomes a risk factor for suppression when one's current job is at stake. Also contrary to Hypothesis 3, working more hours per week contributes to the likelihood of being suppressed ($OR = 1.02$). Possibly, social embeddedness does not work as a buffer for supervisor suppression, or, is not adequately captured by the number of weekly work hours. Or, working more hours simply increases the exposure to suppression.

After adding these variables, the only initial relation between atypical work and supervisor suppression, namely temporary work with prospect of a permanent contract, in Suppression-model 1 disappears after adding our measures for perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values.

5.3 Atypical work and perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values

The overall picture arising from [Tables 2](#) and [3](#) is that some forms of atypical work, most notably temporary work and freelance work, are associated with less worker voice and with less supportive supervisor responses to voice. The barriers to voice for these atypical workers seem to be partly explained by some of the circumstances that we considered associated with atypical work, especially job insecurity and precarious values. So far, however, we did not study to what extent atypical work and perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values are indeed associated. Additionally, we examined this by estimating the effects of atypical work on, respectively, the measures for perceived employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values, by applying OLS regression analyses. The results of these analyses are presented in [Table 4](#). We included our set of control variables in these analyses, but do not present this in [Table 4](#). The full models, including control variables, can be found in [Online Appendices G1](#) and [G2](#).

Overall, [Table 4](#) shows a mixed picture: for all dependent variables, we find that some form of atypical work is associated with it in the expected direction. However, there is also quite some variation. In the following, we only discuss the relation with atypical work for those measures of employment uncertainty, social embeddedness and precarious values that were found relevant, and in the expected direction, for worker voice and supervisor responses to voice in the previous analyses. Thus, we first look at job insecurity and replaceability, thereafter at both measures for precarious values.

First, concerning perceived employment uncertainty, we find that temporary work, both with and without prospect of a permanent contract, is positively related to job insecurity, while freelance work is unrelated to job insecurity. From the flexible characteristics, only

Table 4 OLS regression analyses on job insecurity, replaceability and precarious values of workers

	Job insecurity		Replaceability		No voice entitlement		No entitlement to responsiveness	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Permanent contract	(Ref.)		(Ref.)		(Ref.)		(Ref.)	
Temporary contract (w/ prospect)	0.34***	0.07	0.11	0.08	-0.05	0.05	-0.03	0.08
Temporary contract (w/o prospect)	0.44***	0.09	0.37***	0.10	0.07	0.06	0.18	0.11
Freelancer	0.05	0.13	0.47***	0.14	0.02	0.09	-0.41*	0.16
Temporary agency	0.32**	0.11	0.08	0.12	0.00	0.08	0.13	0.13
On-call/zero-hour	0.07	0.09	0.22*	0.09	0.05	0.06	0.00	0.10
Payroll	-0.05	0.11	-0.12	0.12	0.20*	0.08	0.14	0.12
Intercept	1.80***	0.12	2.54***	0.13	2.32***	0.08	2.92***	0.14
Adjusted R ² (%)	4		4		4		4	
N	2680		2680		2680		2169	

Note: Control variables included in all models.

* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$, *** $P < 0.001$; two-tailed test.

temporary agency work is positively related to job insecurity. Temporary work without prospect of a permanent contract, and freelance work are positively related to replaceability. Also, from the flexible characteristics, on-call/zero-hour work is associated with greater replaceability.

As such, we conclude that our previous finding that workers with a temporary contract without prospect of a permanent contract are less likely to voice discontent, compared to standard workers, is partly explained by job insecurity and replaceability. Also, the finding that temporary workers without prospect of a permanent contract are less likely to receive supportive responses to voice, compared to standard workers, is partly explained by job insecurity. Similarly, the finding that temporary workers with prospect of a permanent contract are more likely to receive suppressive responses to voice, compared to standard workers, is partly explained by job insecurity. So, job insecurity and replaceability seem to mediate some of the relationships between atypical work and (supervisor responses to) worker voice.

Second, concerning precarious values, we find that only workers with a payroll contract are more likely to believe that their voice is not worth listening to, compared to standard workers. Furthermore, freelancers are less likely to believe that they are not entitled to responsiveness to voice, compared to standard workers. Since we did not find a significant effect of payroll contract on worker voice (Table 2), nor of freelance work on supervisor responses to voice (Table 3), we conclude that precarious values do not function as a mediator between atypical work and (supervisor responses) to worker voice. Precarious values do have a direct effect on both worker voice and supervisor responses to voice, as theoretically expected, but do not explain differences in (supervisor responses to) worker voice between standard and atypical workers.

6. Conclusions and discussion

In sum, our study finds that atypical work, particularly temporary contracts, first and foremost negatively impacts workers' propensity to voice discontent to their supervisors. This is likely due to an instrumental logic of (fear of) the consequences of voicing discontent. Regarding precarious values, while certainly important for voicing discontent, these are not held by atypical workers exclusively and can therefore not explain differences in worker voice between standard and atypical workers. A note of caution is in place here: precarious values may already manifest themselves at an even earlier stage: workers holding precarious beliefs already may perceive fewer issues at work. We also find that some forms of atypical work are related to less supportive or more suppressive responses by supervisors, and job insecurity partly explains these relations. Precarious values are directly related to less supportive and more suppressive supervisor responses to voice. These findings demonstrate that atypical work restrains the influence of workers on their working situations. Whereas voicing issues is a meaningful strategy for permanent workers to improve or maintain certain working conditions, it seems to be a less fruitful strategy for some of those in atypical work.

As a limitation to our findings, we note that we measured supervisor responses to voice as reported by workers. As such, we measure *perceived* supervisor responses to voice, and not so much the actual supervisor responses. In some cases, there may be a discrepancy between reported and actual responses to voice. However, by presenting respondents with a list of concrete examples of supervisor responses to voice, of which respondents could

choose, we stimulated respondents to focus on the actual response rather than on their feelings associated with this response.

In our study, we looked at the effect of atypical work on worker voice and supervisor response to voice, controlled for personal characteristics such as education, gender and migration background. It is, however, possible that some aspects of atypical work, such as employment uncertainty, are more important for worker voice when people also experience uncertainties resulting from other life-spheres. In future research, it might, therefore, be fruitful to focus on the intersections of work-related precariousness with precariousness induced from other spheres of life, such as educational background and ethnic, migrant and other minority backgrounds (Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt, 1984; cf. Kalleberg, 2009, p. 10; Acar and Sümer, 2018).

Notwithstanding this limitation and idea for future research, and next to our main finding that atypical work affects worker voice and supervisor responses to voice, we believe our study makes several other empirical and theoretical contributions. First, empirically, it provides a measurement tool for more systematic, comparable data collection on supervisor responses to voice. This enables the monitoring and further investigation of the conditions and levels under which they appear. Second, theoretically, our study innovates industrial relations and organizational behaviour theory (Colvin, 2003; Bingham, 2004; Brewster *et al.*, 2007; Budd and Colvin, 2008) by adding supervisor suppression to their repertoire of restrictions on employee voice. Third, our examination of differences in supervisors' responses to worker voice among atypical workers and standard workers, adds to the research on precarious work (Kalleberg, 2009, 2018) by including voice as an important but to date largely ignored consequence of precarious work. Fourth, we contribute to literature on the importance of social interactions for power relations and inequalities at work. For example, our work contributes to the ethnographic studies into means of control of work literature in the tradition of Braverman's work (Smith, 1994) by theoretically and empirically investigating a new, structural means of controlling work (Crowley, 2012). Given the barriers to speak up about discontent that atypical workers face, it could also lead them to other strategies to cope with discontent at work, such as neglect (Farrell, 1983), individual resistance (cf. Hodson, 1997b; Roscigno and Hodson, 2004) or deviant workplace behaviour (Akkerman *et al.*, 2020).

By considering both structural and cultural factors while comparing worker voice and supervisor responses to voice for standard and atypical workers, we connect structure, meaning and organizational conditions in the context of relational claims-making, which was suggested a key issue for researchers in this field (cf. Vallas and Cummins, 2014, p. 246).

6.1 Policy implications

Our study shows that atypical work is a barrier to worker voice, and that job insecurity and cultural values increase the risk of obtaining less support and more negative responses to worker voice. In light of the development towards more flexible employment and the growth of atypical work in EU labour markets, our study implies that workers will be increasingly less able or willing to speak up for themselves, and experience suppression when voicing discontent. Both being detrimental for workers in claiming their rights and improving their own working conditions.

The EU, its member states and its social partners are thus faced with a challenge to develop and implement instruments to create work environments where barriers to worker voice are minimized. Provisions targeting compliance with EU social policy derived from the European Pillar of Social Rights should be aimed at reducing the risks of voicing discontent for workers and tackling precarious values among atypical and standard workers.

In particular, our finding that a lowered sense of entitlement to voicing discontent and the belief that it is not appropriate to do so impedes workers from addressing dangerous, unfair, unhealthy or unsatisfactory work conditions, provides important new terrain for policy interventions. Given that such cultural processes are usually embedded in broader societal structures and institutions (cf. Lamont *et al.*, 2014), a twofold strategy seems applicable. On the one hand, the formation of precarious values can be circumvented in the early stages of socialization. One way of doing so may be through the inclusion of worker rights, the awareness of (different perspectives on) fair and just work conditions and the training of communicative skills to effectively address issues at work in the formal curriculum of vocational education in particular. This may reduce the development of precarious values in future generations of both atypical and standard workers. On the other hand, research into the cultural processes underlying the role of precarious values of worker voice and responses to it is essential in the creation of workplace interventions that allow for worker voice in 21st-century organizations.

Supplementary material

[Supplementary material](#) is available at *Socio-Economic Review* online.

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