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# 7 The Impact of Network Ties on Worker Voice

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and Agnes Akkerman*

## Introduction

Current developments at the labour market have increased the importance of academic research on worker voice. First, the traditional institution for *collective* voice, i.e., labour unions, has lost power in the past decades. For instance, Dutch figures show that labour union membership has dropped rapidly. The total number of members of Dutch labour unions declined 300,000 from 1999 to 2019 (Statistics Netherlands 2020), comprising a loss of 17%. As a consequence of the weakened position of labour unions, workers more and more have to rely on individual acts of voice, such as speaking up to their supervisor. Second, flexible labour contracts are increasingly popular in Western labour markets. In the Netherlands anno 2020, almost one in four persons in waged labour have a temporary or flexible labour contract (23%), compared to one in six persons in waged labour at the start of the century (cf., 16% in 2003) (Statistics Netherlands 2021). For these workers, their insecure position increases the risks of speaking up at work (Sluiter et al. 2020). Hence, although workers more and more have to rely on individual voice to address work-related issues, this vehicle is unattractive for a large group of workers. This may not only lead to (continued) unjust, unsafe working conditions, and dissatisfied workers, research also suggests that lack of access to voice can have undesired outcomes for the organisation, such as deviant behaviour at the work floor (e.g., Akkerman et al. 2020b).

Ample research exists on voice behaviour at work (Morrison 2014; Ng and Feldman 2012). A lion's share of these studies has examined the determinants of workers that explain why they speak up at work (e.g., LePine and Van Dyne 1998), focused on the role of the supervisor (e.g., Detert and Burris 2007) or characteristics of the organisation (e.g., Milliken et al. 2003). In this chapter, we add a social network perspective to this literature. We specifically focus on worker voice, i.e., speaking up to one's supervisor about work-related issues, and study the role of co-workers on worker voice, responses to worker voice, and worker voice outcomes.

The social networks at work remain relatively understudied in the literature of voice, despite earlier calls for research on peer influences (Morrison 2014), with exception of Dixon and Roscigno (2003). Recently, the role of social networks for worker collective voice, such as strikes, has gained more attention (Born et al. 2016; Ertan et al. 2021; Thommes and Akkerman 2018). The few studies that examined the impact of social networks on individual voice focused on how ties with co-workers can influence *employee* voice, i.e., speaking up to the supervisor with the intention to improve the organisation (Ng and Feldman 2012; Tucker et al. 2008; Venkataramani et al. 2016). In these studies, the rationale is that speaking up is a risky endeavour. Voice may be an unwelcomed message by supervisors and co-workers (Sluiter et al. 2020), even when it is intended to improve the organisation, and potentially leads to negative responses, weakened ties and social rejection (Milliken et al. 2003; Morrison 2011, 2014). Given that employee voice is an individual act, speaking up makes one stand out from the crowd and vulnerable to retaliations. Workers with more (friendly) ties with co-workers stand stronger, primarily because they can anticipate on their support, which reduces these risks of voicing (Morrison 2014; Tucker et al. 2008; Venkataramani et al. 2016). Empirical tests indeed suggest that workers are more likely to voice with the intention to improve the organisation when they have more friendly ties with co-workers (Ng and Feldman 2012; Venkataramani et al. 2016).

In this chapter, we take the research on the role of social networks at work a step further by examining *individual worker voice*, i.e., speaking up to a supervisor when discontented about a work-related issue. Similar to employee voice, worker voice is upward communication from a worker to its supervisor. In contrast with employee voice, however, worker voice does not (necessarily) have the intention to improve the organisation, but is primarily aimed to address issues that workers experience, such as discontent about the wage, unsafe conditions at work, high work pressure. This makes worker voice presumably even riskier than employee voice. Because of these higher risks involved with worker voice, ties with co-workers may be even more important.

To fully understand the role of co-worker ties for workers' ability to address work-related issues, we not only study whether or not people voice their dissent to their supervisor but we also examine what happens *after* workers have voiced their dissent. As argued above, worker voice may come with the risks of retaliation by supervisors and co-workers and damaged social relations. On the other hand, supervisors and co-workers may also support workers after they voiced. In addition, worker voice is aimed to address work-related issues, but voicing itself is merely a first step towards actually solving such issues. We argue that the focus should also be on the outcome of worker voice: the extent to which the issue has been satisfactorily resolved. Therefore, we also take the

supportive and suppressive responses of co-workers and supervisors, and the outcome of worker voice into consideration.

Two types of co-worker ties can be important for worker voice, responses to worker voice and its results: friendly ties and counselling ties. Similar to this previous work, we examine friendly ties (Venkataramani et al. 2016) and argue that friendly ties not only increase the likelihood of voice, but also increase co-worker and supervisor support and satisfactorily outcomes of voice, while decreasing co-worker and supervisor suppression.

Friendly ties are, however, not the only useful ties that workers form at work that can turn out to be beneficial for workers contemplating expressing their discontent. Co-workers can also be an important source of information, and may assist in providing helpful strategies about how to deal with work-related issues. We label ties with workers who can provide such advice and information *counselling ties*, and hypothesise that counselling ties help people to voice dissent at work, making them more confident about voicing and resulting in a better pronunciation of their dissent. This would, in turn, increase both supportive responses of the supervisor and the likelihood that the issue is solved, and decrease suppression by the supervisor.

All in all, we aim to answer the following three research questions:

- 1 To what extent does having friendly ties and counselling ties affect worker voice?
- 2 To what extent does having friendly ties and counselling ties influence the responses of co-workers and supervisors to worker voice?
- 3 To what extent does having friendly ties and counselling ties influence the extent to which the outcome of worker voice is satisfactory?

We set out to answer these questions in the remainder of this chapter. We start by describing the data that we use. Next, we examine the relation between network ties and worker voice, by first formulating our expectations, then discussing our measurements and lastly, presenting the outcomes of our analyses. In the same way, we will then discuss the relation between network ties and co-worker and supervisor responses to worker voice, and lastly, the relation between network ties and the (satisfactory) outcome of worker voice. After that, we conclude this chapter with a discussion, where we reflect upon our findings and answer the research questions.

## **Work and politics survey**

To answer our research questions, we make use of the Work and Politics (WOPO) Panel survey (Akkerman et al. 2017, 2018, 2020a). The WOPO Panel survey is a three-wave survey with an online questionnaire that

was specifically designed to map the experiences workers have with voicing discontent at work. The fieldwork was conducted by Kantar, making use of their TNO NIPObase (Kantar Nederland 2021). The TNO NIPObase is a panel that contains about 235,000 members from 145,000 households in the Netherlands. From this panel, we first selected members of the Dutch labour force. Next, 12,013 members were selected using stratified sampling procedure, stratified by sex, age and education. These members were then invited by mail to participate in the first wave of our survey. Of the 12,013 invitations, 71 directly bounced due to invalid email addresses. The fieldwork of the first wave took place in July and August 2017, using internet questionnaires. 7,599 respondents participated in the first wave, yielding a response rate of 64% ( $7,599/(12,013 - 71) \times 100\%$ ). These respondents were also invited to participate in the second and third wave of the WOPO Panel Survey. The fieldwork for the second wave took place in October and November 2018. By then, about 5% of the participants of wave 1 had unsubscribed from the TNO NIPObase or were unreachable due to invalid contact information ( $N = 368$ ). 6,008 respondents completed the second wave, yielding a net response rate of 83% ( $6,008/(7,599 - 368) \times 100\%$ ). The fieldwork for the third wave took place in March and April 2020. By then, 12% of the participants of wave 1 unsubscribed from the TNO NIPObase ( $N = 927$ ). 4,855 respondents participated in the third wave, yielding a response rate of 73% ( $4,855/(7,599 - 927) \times 100\%$ ).

Ultimately, 4,408 respondents (58%) participated in each wave, 1,600 respondents (21%) participated in wave 1 and 2,447 respondents (6%) participated in wave 1 and wave 3, and 1,144 respondents (15%) only participated in the first wave. We stacked these three waves, leading to a data set with 18,462 observations of 7,599 unique respondents. For this chapter, we make use of the respondents who, at the time of were either worker within an organisation, or who were freelancer and hired by an organisation at the moment of the interview. After excluding respondents who did not meet these criteria, our data set contains information about 14,406 observations from 5,935 respondents.

## **Network ties and worker voice**

In this paragraph, we study whether network ties are related to worker voice. We expect that both friendly ties and counselling ties reduce the risks that are associated with worker voice, for two distinct reasons (Dixon and Roscigno 2003; Ertan et al. 2021). First, friendly ties reduce the risks of retaliation because workers with friendly ties anticipate the support of their co-workers (e.g., Fantasia 1989; Ng and Feldman 2012). The anticipated co-worker support reduces the chance of suppression by supervisors and other co-workers. Workers that can count on their co-workers may also feel less on their own when speaking up to their supervisor. Hence, we expect that

*workers with friendly ties to co-workers are more likely to speak up to their supervisor when experiencing a work-related issue.*

Second, co-workers can also provide useful information about engaging in worker voice. They can help to adequately formulate grievances, e.g., based on past experienced or knowledge about voice strategies (Ertan et al. 2021). This information can be used to frame the dissent in such a way that it reduces the risks of conflict and retaliation. In particular, co-workers can provide information on how to best formulate dissent to a particular supervisor to maximise the support from the supervisor and reduce the suppression by the supervisor. Moreover, workers may feel more confident in their own ability to speak up when they when they have co-workers with whom they can discuss work issues and voice strategies, which will, in turn, make them more likely to actually engage in worker voice behaviour. We thus expect that *workers with counselling ties to co-workers are more likely to speak up to their supervisor when experiencing a work-related issue.*

### **Measurements**

We define worker voice as speaking up to the supervisor about work-related issues (cf. Sluiter et al. 2020). To measure worker voice, we therefore first asked respondents whether they experienced a work-related issue in the past year(s),<sup>1</sup> and presented them a list of possible issues, including an open category to be specified by the respondent. These issues include issues concerning labour terms (e.g., about wages), working conditions (e.g., work stress), career development (e.g., changes in tasks), and interpersonal issues (e.g., being threatened worse than others). Respondents could select multiple issues. Respondents who indicated that they experienced more than one issue were then asked to think about the issue that was most important to them. In more than 60% of the cases ( $N_{\text{observations}} = 8,739$ ), respondents indicated that they experienced at least one work-related issue. Because experiencing such issue is a prerequisite for worker voice, we analyse these cases when focusing on worker voice.

Subsequently, we asked respondents whether they voiced the (most important) issue, and presented a list with voice outlets, including the supervisor. Respondents could select multiple outlets. We use the supervisor answer category to measure *worker voice*, measuring 0 for respondents who did not voice the issue to the supervisor, and 1 for respondents who did so.

We further asked respondents about the ties they have at work. To measure *friendly ties*, we asked whether the respondent have someone at work (1) with whom they can do something fun, and (2) with whom they can be sociable. Respondents who said yes to one or both questions, score a 1 on the friendly ties measure, while respondents that said no to both questions score a 0 on the friendly ties measure. Our data show

that men, older workers, lower educated workers and freelancers and temporary workers without the prospect of a permanent contract (reference category: permanent contract) are less likely to indicate that they have friendly ties with their co-workers.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, we asked respondents whether they have someone at work who can help with voicing discontent or help you solve conflicts at work. Respondents who indicated that they have such person at work score a 1 on the *counselling ties* measure, while respondents who indicated that they did not have such a person at work score a 0 on *counselling ties*.<sup>3</sup> For counselling ties, our data shows that men, non-western migrants (reference category: natives), older workers, lower educated workers and freelancers and temporary workers without the prospect of a permanent contract (reference category: permanent contract) are less likely to indicate that they have counselling ties.<sup>4</sup>

## **Results**

To analyse whether having friendly and counselling ties influence the likelihood to engage in worker voice, we estimated logistic regression models. Because we make use of panel data with repeated observations for respondents, the observations in our analyses are not independent. This could lead to biased standard errors. To account for the hierarchical nature of our data, we therefore present clustered standard errors in all the regression tables in this chapter.

We also control for several background characteristics of the respondents, namely the sex of the respondent (female as reference category), and the age, ethnic background, educational level, and contract type of the respondent.<sup>5</sup> We also add dummy variables to account for the three waves. [Table 7.1](#) presents the outcomes of these variables.

Our findings show that both types of ties increase the likelihood that workers engage in worker voice. To further understand the impact that these ties have on worker voice, we turn to the odds ratios (ORs). ORs indicate how much the odds of worker voice change with a 1-unit increase in the independent variable. Because both friendly ties and counselling ties are measured as dummy-variables, the OR indicates the differences in the odds for people without and people with these ties. Hence, workers with friendly ties are 1.30 times more likely to engage in worker voice than workers without friendly ties, and workers with counselling ties are 1.40 times more likely to engage in worker voice than workers without counselling ties. These findings are in line with our expectations that both kinds of network ties are positively related to worker voice. The findings indicate that workers are more likely to voice their discontent when they can anticipate on co-worker support, and have co-workers with whom they can discuss strategies to voice effectively.

Table 7.1 Logistic regression of worker voice (N = 8,739)

	<i>Est.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>OR</i>
Ties			
Friendly ties	0.26 **	0.09	1.30
Counselling ties	0.34 ***	0.07	1.40
Control variables			
Sex (female = ref.)	0.06	0.05	1.06
Age (15 years = 0)	0.00	0.00	1.00
Migrant background			
Native	Ref.		
Western migrant	0.10	0.16	1.10
Non-western migrant	-0.21	0.11	0.81
Educational level			
Low	Ref.		
Middle	0.37 ***	0.10	1.44
High	0.49 ***	0.10	1.63
Contract type			
Permanent	Ref.		
Temporary (with prospect)	-0.42 ***	0.08	0.66
Temporary (w/o prospect)	-0.67 ***	0.10	0.51
Freelance	-1.04 ***	0.12	0.35
Wave			
Wave 1	Ref.		
Wave 2	0.05	0.05	1.05
Wave 3	0.00	0.06	1.00
Intercept	0.08	0.14	1.08
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.04		

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Two-tailed test. Standard errors clustered by respondent.

When we turn to our control variables in Table 7.1, we also find that educational level and contract type are significantly related to worker voice. Middle (OR = 1.44) and higher (OR = 1.63) educated workers are more likely to engage in worker voice. In line with previous research (cf. Sluiter et al. 2020), we see that temporary workers with the prospect of a permanent contract (OR = 0.66), temporary workers without such prospect (OR = 0.51) and freelancers (OR = 0.35) are less likely to engage in worker voice than permanent workers. The finding that workers with more vulnerable contract types are less likely to express their discontent to their supervisor may be related to fair for retaliation, the lack of future in the organisation, the idea that voice will not help solving the issue, or not knowing how to raise the issue (Akkerman 2021).

### Network ties and responses to worker voice

In this section, we study whether network ties are related to responses to worker voice. The anticipated response to worker voice is an important



consideration when deciding whether or not to voice dissent. Above, we argued that workers with friendly ties anticipate on the support of their co-workers. While workers may be disappointed in their expectation that co-workers will support their voice, it is likely that workers validate their expectations before actually expressing their voice, e.g., by asking co-workers for their support in advance, or by previous experiences of co-workers' solidarity. Further, co-workers with friendly ties to the person who voiced to the supervisor are less likely to suppress, as this will likely harm the friendship. Hence, our first expectation is that, after engaging in worker voice, *workers with friendly ties to co-workers are more likely to receive support from co-workers, and vice versa, are less likely to be suppressed by their co-workers.*

We also expect that friendly ties influence the response of the supervisor to worker voice. One way for supervisors to respond is by suppressing the voice: either by attempting to silence the worker, e.g., by ignoring the voice, or by punishing the worker, e.g., by threatening with negative consequences. Just like worker voice comes with risks to the employee, suppressive responses to worker voice comes with risks to the supervisor (Sluiter et al. 2020). The situation may escalate when suppressing the voice of a worker, and this risk is higher when co-workers can count on the support of their co-workers. Friendly ties therefore not only function as an indication of co-worker support for the worker, but also for the supervisor, and suppressive tactics are riskier for the supervisor when workers have more friendly ties (Sluiter et al. 2020). Moreover, the anticipated support from co-workers may also make supervisors supportive towards the voice complaints.

Assuming that the supervisor is aware of the friendly ties of the worker who engaged in worker voice, we thus expect that workers with friendly ties to co-workers are more likely to receive support from their supervisor and are less likely to be suppressed by their supervisor.

For counselling ties, we argue that if one has co-workers to rely on when preparing worker voice, this will also turn into the support of these co-workers *after* voicing, compared to those workers who prepare their voice without consulting co-workers and surprising them with their voice. Furthermore, counselling ties likely improve voice articulation, which can also help gaining the support of other co-workers and, consequently, reducing hostile co-worker responses to worker voice. Hence, here we also expect that *workers with counselling ties to co-workers are more likely to receive support from co-workers, and vice versa, are less likely to be suppressed by their co-workers.*

We expected that workers with such ties are able to formulate their worker voice in a more adequate way, which would increase the likelihood of support and reduce the likelihood of suppression by the supervisor. Our analyses in this paragraph allow us to test whether workers who can rely on their co-workers for advice on worker voice, actually

experience different responses from their supervisor. Hence, we hypothesise that, after engaging in worker voice, *workers with counselling ties are more likely to receive support from their supervisor, and less likely to be suppressed by their supervisor.*

### **Measurements**

To understand why co-workers respond (differently) to worker voice, we argue that the co-workers first need to be aware of the worker voice. Hence, to test the hypotheses on the responses of co-workers, we use a subset of our data that includes those respondents who voiced a work-related issue *and* indicated that their co-workers were aware that they did so ( $N = 5,265$ ). With regard to the type of response of co-workers, we distinguish between co-worker support and co-worker suppression. To account for *co-worker support*, we asked respondents who had indicated that their co-workers were aware that they had voiced a work-related issue: “*After you voiced the issue, did this lead to one of the following responses of your co-workers*”. We then presented a list with three (supportive) responses, namely (1) “*(Some of) my co-workers participated in voicing the issue, or backed me up*”, (2) “*(Some of) my co-workers encouraged me, advised me or offered a listening ear*”, and (3) “*(Some of) my co-workers supported me in another way, namely...*”.<sup>6</sup> Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not their co-workers responded in the described way. Respondents could give multiple answers to this question. Co-worker support measures 1 in case a respondent indicated that (s)he received at least one of these responses, and 0 if a respondent indicated that (S)he received none of these responses.

*Co-worker suppression* is measured in a similar way. Again, we asked: “*After you voiced the issue, did this lead to one of the following responses of your co-workers*”, but now we presented a list of five (suppressive) responses, namely (1) “*(Some of) my co-workers bullied, threatened, or intimidated me*”, (2) “*(Some of) my co-workers criticised me*”, (3) “*(Some of) my co-workers made my work difficult*”, (4) “*(Some of) my co-workers acted as if nothing was wrong*”, and (5) “*(Some of) my co-workers responded negatively in another way, namely...*”. Again, respondents could indicate whether or not their co-workers responded in these ways, and were allowed to give multiple answers. Co-worker suppression measures 1 if a respondent experienced at least one of these responses, and it measures 0 if a respondent experienced none of these responses.

Regarding the responses of the supervisor, we selected the respondents that voiced the work-related issue to the supervisor ( $N = 6,188$ ). Here, we also distinguish between *support* and *suppression*. We first asked all respondents who experienced a work-related issue and voiced it to a voice outlet, whether their supervisor was aware of the voice. If so, we

then asked: “After you voiced the issue, did this lead to one of the following responses from your supervisor?”. We then presented a list with the following responses:

- 1 My supervisor helped me solve the issue
- 2 My supervisor gave me a compliment
- 3 My supervisor gave a good explanation
- 4 My supervisor convinced me that (s)he could not solve the problem
- 5 My supervisor brushed me off by saying that (s)he could not do anything about it<sup>7</sup>
- 6 My supervisor ignored the issue
- 7 My supervisor did not want me to talk about it
- 8 My supervisor criticised me
- 9 My supervisor obstructed my career (e.g., by denying promotion or training/education possibilities)
- 10 It resulted in my dismissal/my contract was not renewed
- 11 My supervisor gave me a bad review during the performance appraisal
- 12 I received an official warning
- 13 My supervisor bullied/threatened/intimidated me
- 14 My supervisor made my work less pleasant

Respondents could then indicate whether their supervisor responded in any of the described ways, and were allowed to give multiple answers. Respondents were also asked to specify another response if their supervisor responded in a way that was not described in the list.<sup>8</sup> A latent class analysis suggested four types of responses: supportive responses (response 1 and 2), passive responses (responses 3 and 4), silencing responses (responses 5, 6, and 7) and punishing responses (responses 8–14). Since we do not have expectations about the effect of co-worker ties and passive responses of the supervisor, we do not present the analyses for it in this chapter. Furthermore, because theoretically, both silencing and punishing responses can be understood as suppression by the supervisor (cf. Sluiter et al. 2020), and empirically, we find no noteworthy differences in the effects on, or the effects of silencing and punishing responses of the supervisor, we combined both types of responses into one overarching category, which we label *supervisor suppression*. This dummy variable measures 0 for respondents who did not receive silencing or punishing responses from their supervisor, and 1 for respondents who received silencing and/or punishing responses from their supervisor.

## Results

Similar to the previous analyses, we apply logistic regression analysis with clustered standard errors. We also include the same set of control

Table 7.2 Logistic regression of co-worker responses (N = 5,265)

	Co-worker support			Co-worker suppression		
	Est.	SE	OR	Est.	SE	OR
Ties						
Friendly ties	0.46 ***	0.13	1.58	-0.50 ***	0.14	0.61
Counselling ties	1.27 ***	0.10	3.54	-0.28 *	0.12	0.75
Control variables						
Sex (female = ref.)	-0.38 ***	0.07	0.69	0.10	0.08	1.11
Age (15 years = 0)	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.01	0.00	1.01
Migrant background						
Native	Ref.			Ref.		
Western migrant	-0.05	0.20	0.95	0.36	0.21	1.44
Non-western migrant	-0.03	0.17	0.97	0.15	0.18	1.17
Educational level						
Low	Ref.			Ref.		
Middle	-0.04	0.16	0.96	0.02	0.18	1.02
High	0.06	0.16	1.06	-0.18	0.18	0.3
Contract type						
Permanent	Ref.			Ref.		
Temporary (with prospect)	-0.38 ***	0.11	0.68	0.40 ***	0.12	1.51
Temporary (w/o prospect)	-0.49 **	0.16	0.62	0.39 *	0.18	1.47
Freelance	0.03	0.26	1.03	1.01 ***	0.21	2.76
Wave						
Wave 1	Ref.			Ref.		
Wave 2	-0.10	0.08	0.91	-0.16	0.08	0.85
Wave 3	0.15 **	0.08	1.16	-0.02	0.09	0.98
Intercept	0.04	0.22	1.04	-1.11 ***	0.24	0.33
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.10			0.03		

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Two-tailed test. Standard errors clustered by respondent.

variables in our models. We present the co-worker responses to worker voice in Table 7.2. Table 7.3 shows the outcomes for the supervisor responses to worker voice.

The first model in Table 7.2 shows the regression coefficients for co-worker support. We expected that friendly ties would be positively related to co-worker support and negatively related to co-worker suppression. In line with our expectations, we find that friendly ties indeed increase the likelihood that workers receive support from their co-worker: the odds of co-worker support for workers with friendly ties are 1.58 times higher than for workers without friendly ties. The second model in Table 7.2 presents the estimates for co-worker suppression. Here, we see the opposite image: workers with friendly ties (OR = 0.61) are less likely to be suppressed by co-workers. The findings for counselling ties are similar, and also in line with our expectations: workers with such ties are more likely to receive co-worker support (OR = 3.54) and less likely to experience co-worker suppression (OR = 0.75).

Table 7.3 Logistic regression of supervisor responses ( $N = 6,188$ )

	<i>Supervisor support</i>			<i>Supervisor suppression</i>		
	<i>Est.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>Est.</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>OR</i>
Ties						
Friendly ties	0.35 **	0.11	1.41	-0.19	0.11	0.82
Counselling ties	0.50 ***	0.08	1.66	-0.45 ***	0.09	0.64
Control variables						
Sex (female = ref.)	0.00	0.06	1.00	0.04	0.07	1.04
Age (15 years = 0)	-0.02 ***	0.00	0.98	0.01 ***	0.00	1.01
Migrant background						
Native	Ref.			Ref.		
Western migrant	0.08	0.15	1.08	0.32	0.16	1.38
Non-western migrant	-0.02	0.12	0.98	0.06	0.14	1.06
Educational level						
Low	Ref.			Ref.		
Middle	0.03	0.12	1.03	-0.04	0.13	0.96
High	0.20	0.12	1.22	-0.04	0.13	0.97
Contract type						
Permanent	Ref.			Ref.		
Temporary (with prospect)	-0.63 ***	0.09	0.53	0.55 ***	0.09	1.73
Temporary (w/o prospect)	-0.46 ***	0.13	0.63	0.30 *	0.14	1.35
Freelance	0.21	0.18	1.23	0.13	0.19	1.14
Wave						
Wave 1	Ref.			Ref.		
Wave 2	-0.03	0.06	1.03	0.27 ***	0.06	1.30
Wave 3	-0.01	0.06	0.99	0.27 ***	0.07	1.31
Intercept	-0.40 *	0.17	0.67	-0.96 ***	0.19	0.38
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.05			0.03		

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Two-tailed test. Standard errors clustered by respondent.

Theoretically, we expected that workers with friendly ties with their co-workers would receive more support from their co-workers. While this is indeed the case – the odds of positive co-worker responses are 1.58 higher when one has friendly ties – what is striking here is how much stronger the effect of counselling ties is. The odds to receive support from their co-workers for workers with counselling ties are 3.54 times higher than the odds for workers without counselling ties. Empirically, this suggests that counselling ties appear to be a better predictor of co-worker support than friendly ties, while we find little differences in their effects on co-worker suppression.

We also find that female workers are less likely to receive co-worker support ( $OR = 0.69$ ). For contract type, we see that temporary workers are less likely to be supported by their co-workers (respectively  $OR = 0.68$  for temporary workers with the prospect of a permanent contract and  $OR = 0.62$  for workers without this prospect). Compared to permanent

workers, suppressive co-worker responses are more likely for temporary workers with the prospect of a permanent contract (OR = 1.51), temporary workers without such prospect (OR = 1.47) and freelancers (OR = 2.76). Lastly, we find that, compared to Wave 1, respondents were more likely to receive co-worker support in Wave 3 (OR = 1.16).

The first model in [Table 7.3](#) presents the outcomes for supportive supervisor responses. We expected that workers with friendly ties are more likely to receive supported from their supervisor. [Table 7.3](#) shows that the odds that workers with friendly ties receive supportive responses from their supervisor are 1.41 times higher than those of workers without these ties. Further, we expected that counselling ties are positively related to supervisor support. In line with this expectation, we find that workers with counselling ties are more likely to experience supportive responses from their supervisor after voicing discontent. The OR is 1.66, implying that the odds of receiving supportive responses from the supervisor are 1.66 times higher when workers have counselling ties.

With regard to the control variables in this model, we see that older workers are less likely to receive support from their supervisor (OR = 0.98). Again, we see that contract type is also related to receiving support responses from the supervisor. Supervisors appear to respond more supportive to the voice of permanent workers than to the voice of workers with temporary contracts (ORs are, respectively, 0.53 and 0.63 for workers with and without the prospect of a permanent contract). We found no differences between permanent workers and freelancers.

When we now turn to the model for the suppressive responses of the supervisor, we find no evidence that friendly ties are related to supervisor suppression. Apparently, the supervisors' actual response to worker voice does not depend on the friendly ties that a worker has with co-workers. This is in contrast with our expectations. This could imply that the supervisor does not take co-worker support into consideration when deciding to respond in a suppressive manner. It could also be that the friendly ties are simply not as visible to the supervisor as assumed, and the supervisor is thus not (always) aware of the friendly ties that workers have.

We also expected that counselling ties are negatively related to co-worker suppression. Our findings show that counselling ties do influence the likelihood that supervisors respond in a suppressive way. The odds of being suppressed by the supervisor are 0.64 times lower for workers who can rely on help from co-workers on how to deal with work-related issues.

Regarding our control variables, we see that the effects of age and contract type mirror the effects in the first model: we now see that older workers are more likely to experience suppressive responses from the supervisor (OR = 1.01), while temporary workers are more likely to experience these responses than permanent workers (respectively OR = 1.73

and 1.35 for workers with and without the prospect of a permanent contract). We now also find differences between waves. Suppressive responses are more often observed in Wave 2 and 3.<sup>9</sup>

### Network ties and the outcome of worker voice

In this paragraph, we study whether network ties are related to the extent to which the outcomes of worker voice are satisfactory. Previously, we argued that having friendly ties is an indication of anticipated support from co-workers, which induces supervisor support and reduces co-worker and supervisor suppression. Also, counselling ties at work would result in more adequately formulated voice and more effective voice strategies, also resulting in more support and less suppression by supervisors and co-workers. Here, we argue that these beneficial effects of the ties at work on the responses of co-workers and supervisors at work will also have its impact on the outcome of voice: because co-workers and supervisors take a more positive stand towards the voice complaint, there is more willingness to solve the issue. Hence, we expect that *workers with friendly ties and workers with counselling ties to co-workers are more satisfied with the outcome of worker voice, and this is (partly) explained by the more positive responses of supervisors and co-workers to worker voice they receive.*

### Measurements

To account for the *worker voice outcome*, we asked respondents who indicated that they had an issue at work *and* had voiced it, to what extent they were satisfied with the way the issue was solved. Answer categories ranged from (1) Not satisfied at all, to (5) Very satisfied. These answers are used to measure worker voice outcome. Further, respondents could also indicate that the issue was not solved (yet). 664 Respondents indicated that this was the case. We excluded these respondents from our analyses.

### Results

We applied OLS regression analyses to estimate the outcome of worker voice. Again, we clustered standard errors to account for the nested structure of our data. The outcomes of these analyses are presented in [Table 7.4](#). Here, we estimate two models. First, we present a model including both types of ties with co-workers, and the same set of control variables as in our previous models. In the second model, we also include the co-worker and supervisor responses.

In model 1, we find a positive and significant effect of counselling ties on a satisfactory worker voice outcome. On average, workers with

Table 7.4 OLS regression of worker voice outcome (N = 4,684)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>b</i>	SE
Ties				
Friendly ties	0.16	0.09	0.02	0.07
Counselling ties	0.34 ***	0.07	0.10	0.06
Supervisor response				
Support			1.11 ***	0.04
Suppression			-0.64 ***	0.04
Co-worker response				
Support			-0.02	0.04
Suppression			-0.16 ***	0.05
Control variables				
Sex (female = ref.)	-0.01	0.04	0.00	0.03
Age (15 years = 0)	-0.02 ***	0.00	-0.01 ***	0.00
Migrant background				
Native	Ref.		Ref.	
Western migrant	-0.05	0.10	-0.01	0.09
Non-western migrant	-0.03	0.10	-0.06	0.08
Educational level				
Low	Ref.		Ref.	
Middle	-0.03	0.10	-0.04	0.08
High	0.02	0.10	-0.05	0.08
Contract type				
Permanent	Ref.		Ref.	
Temporary (with prospect)	-0.47 ***	0.07	-0.22 ***	0.05
Temporary (w/o prospect)	-0.49 ***	0.10	-0.32 ***	0.08
Freelance	-0.05	0.13	-0.02	0.11
Wave				
Wave 1	Ref.		Ref.	
Wave 2	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.04
Wave 3	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.04
Intercept	2.94 ***	0.14	2.80 ***	0.12
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.04		0.34	

Notes: \**p* < 0.05; \*\**p* < 0.01; \*\*\**p* < 0.001. Two-tailed test. Standard errors clustered by respondent.

counselling ties score 0.34 higher on such worker voice outcomes. This is in line with our expectation that having counselling ties with co-workers increases the likelihood that the issue is solved after it being voiced. However, we find no significant effect of having friendly ties.

When we turn to the next model, we see that supervisor responses and co-worker responses also matter. Receiving support from their supervisor after worker voice, in general, has a positive effect on the issue being solved satisfactory (*b* = 1.11), while receiving suppressive responses from the supervisor has a negative effect (*b* = -0.64). For co-worker responses, we found no differences in outcomes between workers who did and who



did not receive supportive responses from their co-workers. Suppressive co-worker responses have a negative effect on the outcome being solved ( $b = -0.16$ ).

After including the co-worker and supervisor responses, we now find that the effect of counselling ties no longer reaches statistical significance. Including these variables also leads to a sharp increase in explained variance, from about 4% to over 34% of the total variance. Because we also found that these responses are affected by the ties one has with its co-workers, these findings indicates that while there is no direct effect of co-worker ties on worker voice outcome in the final model, they do have their impact on worker voice outcome via an indirect path. Counselling ties with co-workers shape the responses that workers receive from their supervisor and co-workers, which in turn affects the outcome of worker voice.

Again, we find that contract type is of high importance. Having a temporary contract is negatively related to worker voice outcomes (in Model 2:  $b = -0.22$  for temporary workers with the prospect of a permanent contract, and  $b = -0.32$  for workers without this prospect). Age is also negatively related to worker voice outcome ( $b = -0.01$ ), indicating less-positive outcomes for older workers.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined how social networks impact worker voice, the responses to worker voice from co-workers and the supervisor, and ultimately on the outcome of worker voice. We scrutinised the effects of two distinct types of ties with co-workers: friendly ties, which reflect whether one has co-workers with who (s)he gets along, and counselling ties, i.e., having co-workers that can advise and provide information on effective voice strategies. We expected that co-workers with friendly ties anticipate on social support from their network, which removes barriers to worker voice, and results in more positive and less negative responses from co-workers and supervisors, and results in more beneficial outcomes of worker voice. For counselling ties, we hypothesised that these ties lead to a more adequately pronounced voice and more effective voice strategies, increasing the likelihood of employees to voice dissent, inducing positive responses to voice and voice outcomes and reducing negative responses to voice.

We tested our expectations using a large-N three-wave panel study including employees in the Netherlands. Our findings show that friendly ties and counselling ties are both positively related to worker voice and supportive responses from co-workers and the supervisor. Friendly ties are negatively related to co-worker suppression, whereas counselling ties are negatively related to both co-worker and supervisor suppression.

Hence, the social network at work impacts how people deal with issues at work, and what responses people receive when they voice their dissent. Our analyses regarding the worker voice outcome further signalled the importance of these responses to worker voice. Our findings suggest that workers with counselling ties are more satisfied with the way that their voice is dealt with than workers without such ties, and this is explained by the more positive responses that these ties provoke.

In this chapter, we aimed to bring the research on the role of social networks on voice a step further, by focusing on two types of ties that one can have with co-workers. Although having unique data at hand, our measures of ties have some limitations. First, we were able to measure whether someone had friendly or counselling ties at work, but we did not have data on *how many* of these ties one has, or with whom exactly. More detailed information on the indegree and outdegree of co-worker friendly ties should shed more light on the role that co-workers have on worker voice. Further, although making use of panel survey data, our analyses are, in essence, cross-sectional. Given this cross-sectional nature of the analyses, we must be careful when making causal claims.

Notwithstanding these limitations, our study shows that having co-worker ties impacts the likelihood of worker voice, responses to worker voice, and indirectly, (satisfaction with) the outcome of worker voice. It also shows the importance of distinguishing between friendly ties and counselling ties, where the latter seem more consequential for the responses to and outcomes of voice. As such, our social network approach to studying worker voice has furthered the understanding of workers' ability to address work-related issues.

## Notes

1. In wave 1, we asked whether they experienced a work-related issue in the past three years. In wave 2 and 3, we asked whether they experienced a work-related issue since the previous wave, which is a period of one year between wave 1 and 2, and one and a half years between wave 2 and wave 3.
2. We applied logistic regression with clustered standard errors to examine, *ceteris paribus*, the difference in background characteristics of people with and without friendly ties and counselling ties. The outcomes of these analyses are available upon request.
3. Descriptive statistics for the variables used in our analyses can be found in Appendix A, [Tables A7.1–A7.5](#).
4. We applied logistic regression with clustered standard errors to examine, *ceteris paribus*, the difference in background characteristics of people with and without friendly ties and counselling ties. The outcomes of these analyses are available upon request.
5. We distinguish three types of ethnic backgrounds, following the standard categories of the Dutch Bureau of Statistics, namely *natives* (people whose parents are born in the Netherlands), *western migrants* (people with at least one parent born in European countries, North America,

Indonesia, or Japan), and *non-western migrants* (people with one or both parents born in any other country). We also distinguish three types of educational levels, namely low (up to lower secondary vocational training), middle (middle-level secondary education, middle-level vocational education and higher-level secondary education), and high (higher level vocational education and university). Lastly, regarding contract type, we distinguish between workers with a permanent contract, a temporary contract with the prospect of a permanent contract, a temporary contract without such prospect, and freelancers. Note that freelancers are only included in the analyses if they indicated that they are hired by an organisation.

6. A team of five researchers recoded the open answers to these questions, to make sure that it actually measured co-worker support or co-worker suppression.
7. Responses 4 and 5 were not included in the first wave. Instead, we asked respondents “My supervisor told me that (s)he could not change the situation”. This response was not included in the supervisor suppression measurement for wave 1.
8. A team of five researchers recoded the open answers to these questions. In doing so, the open answer was recoded into one of the four categories of responses (support, passive, silencing, punishing), or coded as a missing value.
9. Plausibly, the differences between wave 1 and the two other waves are explained by the differences in the measurement instrument (see Note 7).

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## Appendix A

Table A7.1 Descriptive statistics

	Range	<i>Worker voice</i>		<i>Co-worker responses</i>		<i>Supervisor responses</i>		<i>Worker voice outcome</i>	
		N = 8,739		N = 5,265		N = 6,188		N = 4,684	
		M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD
Worker voice	0–1	71%							
<i>Co-worker response</i>									
Support	0–1			77%				77%	
Suppression	0–1			17%				17%	
<i>Supervisor responses</i>									
Support	0–1					46%		47%	
Suppression	0–1					27%		28%	
Worker voice outcome	1–5							2.91	1.32
<i>Ties</i>									
Friendly ties	0–1	90%		93%		91%		93%	
Counselling ties	0–1	83%		88%		85%		88%	
<i>Control variables</i>									
Sex (female = ref.)	0–1	51%		49%		51%		49%	
Age (15 years = 0)	0–52	26.73	12.04	27.15	11.77	26.93	11.88	26.90	11.83
<i>Migrant background</i>									
Native	0–1	91%		92%		91%		92%	
Western migrant	0–1	3%		3%		3%		3%	
Non-western migrant	0–1	6%		5%		5%		5%	
<i>Educational level</i>									
Low	0–1	7%		6%		6%		5%	
Middle	0–1	44%		43%		43%		43%	
High	0–1	49%		51%		51%		52%	

(Continued)

Table A7.1 Descriptive statistics (Continued)

	Range	<i>Worker voice</i>		<i>Co-worker responses</i>		<i>Supervisor responses</i>		<i>Worker voice outcome</i>	
		N = 8,739		N = 5,265		N = 6,188		N = 4,684	
		M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD
<i>Contract type</i>									
Permanent	0-1	79%		83%		82%		82%	
Temporary (with prospect)	0-1	12%		11%		11%		11%	
Temporary (w/o prospect)	0-1	6%		5%		5%		5%	
Freelance	0-1	4%		2%		2%		2%	
<i>Wave</i>									
Wave 1	0-1	43%		43%		42%		47%	
Wave 2	0-1	32%		31%		32%		27%	
Wave 3	0-1	26%		26%		26%		26%	

Table A7.2 Descriptive statistics for the worker voice subset, by wave

	<u>Overall</u>			<u>Wave 1</u>		<u>Wave 2</u>		<u>Wave 3</u>	
	N = 8,739			N = 3,737		N = 2,753		N = 2,249	
	M/%	SD	Range	M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD
Worker voice	71%		0–1	70%		71%		71%	
<i>Ties</i>									
Friendly ties	90%		0–1	90%		89%		92%	
Counselling ties	83%		0–1	83%		82%		84%	
<i>Control variables</i>									
Sex (female = ref.)	51%		0–1	51%		51%		49%	
Age (15 years = 0)	26.73	12.04	0–52	25.75	12.24	26.92	12.03	28.13	11.58
<i>Migrant background</i>									
Native	91%		0–1	91%		91%		91%	
Western migrant	3%		0–1	3%		3%		3%	
Non-western migrant	6%		0–1	6%		5%		6%	
<i>Educational level</i>									
Low	7%		0–1	8%		7%		6%	
Middle	44%		0–1	44%		45%		42%	
High	49%		0–1	48%		48%		52%	
<i>Contract type</i>									
Permanent	79%		0–1	77%		78%		81%	
Temporary (with prospect)	12%		0–1	12%		11%		12%	
Temporary (w/o prospect)	6%		0–1	7%		6%		4%	
Freelance	4%		0–1	4%		4%		3%	
<i>Wave</i>									
Wave 1	43%		0–1						
Wave 2	32%		0–1						
Wave 3	26%		0–1						

Table A7.3 Descriptive statistics for the co-worker responses subset, by wave

	<u>Overall</u>			<u>Wave 1</u>		<u>Wave 2</u>		<u>Wave 3</u>	
	N = 5,265			N = 2,245		N = 1,644		N = 1,376	
	M/%	SD	Range	M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD
<i>Co-worker response</i>									
Support	77%		0-1	77%		75%		80%	
Suppression	17%		0-1	18%		16%		17%	
<i>Ties</i>									
Friendly ties	93%		0-1	93%		91%		95%	
Counselling ties	8%		0-1	89%		86%		88%	
<i>Control variables</i>									
Sex (female = ref.)	49%		0-1	50%		48%		48%	
Age (15 years = 0)	27.15	11.77	1-52	26.23	11.89	27.41	11.84	28.32	11.37
<i>Migrant background</i>									
Native	92%		0-1	91%		93%		91%	
Western migrant	3%		0-1	3%		3%		3%	
Non-western migrant	5%		0-1	5%		4%		6%	
<i>Educational level</i>									
Low	6%		0-1	6%		6%		5%	
Middle	43%		0-1	44%		44%		41%	
High	51%		0-1	51%		49%		55%	
<i>Contract type</i>									
Permanent	83%		0-1	82%		83%		84%	
Temporary (with prospect)	11%		0-1	10%		11%		11%	
Temporary (w/o prospect)	5%		0-1	5%		5%		4%	
Freelance	2%		0-1	3%		2%		2%	
<i>Wave</i>									
Wave 1	43%		0-1						
Wave 2	31%		0-1						
Wave 3	26%		0-1						



Table A7.4 Descriptive statistics for the supervisor responses subset, by wave

	<i>Overall</i>			<i>Wave 1</i>		<i>Wave 2</i>		<i>Wave 3</i>	
	<i>N = 6,188</i>			<i>N = 2,623</i>		<i>N = 1,961</i>		<i>N = 1,604</i>	
	<i>M/%</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>M/%</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M/%</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M/%</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Supervisor responses</i>									
Support	46%		0–1	47%		46%		46%	
Suppression	27%		0–1	24%		29%		29%	
<i>Ties</i>									
Friendly ties	91%		0–1	91%		90%		93%	
Counselling ties	85%		0–1	86%		83%		86%	
<i>Control variables</i>									
Sex (female = ref.)	51%		0–1	52%		51%		50%	
Age (15 years = 0)	26.93	11.88	0–52	26.03	12.06	27.02	11.99	28.29	11.50
<i>Migrant background</i>									
Native	91%		0–1	91%		92%		91%	
Western migrant	3%		0–1	3%		3%		3%	
Non-western migrant	5%		0–1	5%		5%		6%	
<i>Educational level</i>									
Low	6%		0–1	6%		7%		5%	
Middle	43%		0–1	44%		45%		42%	
High	51%		0–1	50%		49%		53%	
<i>Contract type</i>									
Permanent	82%		0–1	81%		81%		84%	
Temporary (with prospect)	11%		0–1	11%		10%		11%	
Temporary (w/o prospect)	5%		0–1	5%		6%		4%	
Freelance	2%		0–1	3%		3%		2%	
<i>Wave</i>									
Wave 1	42%		0–1						
Wave 2	32%		0–1						
Wave 3	26%		0–1						

Table A7.5 Descriptive statistics for the worker voice outcome subset, by wave

	<u>Overall</u>			<u>Wave 1</u>		<u>Wave 2</u>		<u>Wave 3</u>	
	N = 4,684			N = 2,219		N = 1,286		N = 1,179	
	M/%	SD	Range	M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD
Worker voice outcome	2.91	1.32	1–5	2.90	1.34	2.93	1.30	2.91	1.32
<i>Co-worker response</i>									
Support	77%		0–1	77%		74%		79%	
Suppression	17%		0–1	18%		16%		18%	
<i>Supervisor responses</i>									
Support	47%		0–1	46%		49%		47%	
Suppression	28%		0–1	25%		31%		30%	
<i>Ties</i>									
Friendly ties	93%		0–1	93%		92%		95%	
Counselling ties	88%		0–1	89%		86%		88%	
<i>Control variables</i>									
Sex (female = ref.)	49%		0–1	50%		47%		48%	
Age (15 years = 0)	26.90	11.83	1–51	26.24	11.90	26.77	11.85	28.29	11.57
<i>Migrant background</i>									
Native	92%		0–1	91%		92%		92%	
Western migrant	3%		0–1	3%		3%		3%	
Non-western migrant	5%		0–1	5%		5%		5%	
<i>Educational level</i>									
Low	5%		0–1	5%		6%		4%	
Middle	43%		0–1	44%		43%		42%	
High	52%		0–1	51%		51%		54%	
<i>Contract type</i>									

(Continued)

Table A7.5 Descriptive statistics for the worker voice outcome subset, by wave (*Continued*)

	<u>Overall</u>			<u>Wave 1</u>		<u>Wave 2</u>		<u>Wave 3</u>	
	N = 4,684			N = 2,219		N = 1,286		N = 1,179	
	M/%	SD	Range	M/%	SD	M/%	SD	M/%	SD
Permanent	82%		0–1	82%		82%		84%	
Temporary (with prospect)	11%		0–1	10%		11%		11%	
Temporary (w/o prospect)	5%		0–1	5%		5%		4%	
Freelance	2%		0–1	3%		3%		2%	
<i>Wave</i>									
Wave 1	47%		0–1						
Wave 2	27%		0–1						
Wave 3	25%		0–1						