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# You better watch out: How the supervisor response to worker voice affects promotive voice

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**Abstract.** *This study investigates the relationship between worker voice – individual workers speaking up for their own interests – and promotive voice – individual workers speaking up to promote the interests of the organizations that employ them. We apply structural equation modelling to our unique data set on the voice behaviour of workers in the Netherlands (N = 3,159) to test our hypotheses. The results indicate that the supervisor response to worker voice has an indirect effect on promotive voice, suggesting that workers' experiences with speaking up for their own interests impact their contributions to the functioning of the organization.*

**Keywords:** *worker voice, promotive voice, supervisor response, affective organizational commitment, organizational behaviour, employment relations, human resource management.*

## 1. Introduction

In this article, we study the theoretical and empirical relationship between promotive voice and worker voice. Promotive voice refers to individual workers speaking up with new ideas, suggestions or remarks that can improve organizational functioning (Liang, Farh and Farh 2012; Morrison 2011), while worker voice refers to individual workers speaking up about issues related to their own interests (Sluiter, Manevska and Akkerman 2022). The worker–employer relationship has changed considerably over the last half century. The rise of globalization, technological progress and the introduction of certain policies have shifted the balance of power in this relationship in favour of employers (Kalleberg 2011). Work has become increasingly precarious, with a rise in

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atypical forms of employment, such as freelance or temporary agency work, which typically fall outside union coverage (Gumbrell-McCormick 2011; Heiland 2020). This development, together with the overall decline in union membership among workers, has made individual forms of worker voice increasingly important in allowing workers to challenge unfair situations and claim their rights. For its part, promotive voice has become an important way in which organizations are made aware of production problems or other issues that hamper organizational performance (Brinsfield, Edwards and Greenberg 2009; Morrison and Milliken 2000). Moreover, scholars have argued that this form of voice can also stimulate organizational innovation, which helps organizations gain or maintain a competitive advantage (Bashshur and Oc 2015; Liang, Farh and Farh 2012). In this way, promotive voice has become an important tool for organizations as it enables them to explore their full potential.

Promotive voice and worker voice differ significantly in terms of their content and motive, the one stimulating or protecting organizational interests and the other defending workers' interests. In recent decades, there has been considerable debate within the voice literature about how theoretical insights based on different definitions of voice, as is the case with promotive and worker voice, can be combined to form an integrative theory (Klaas, Olson-Buchanan and Ward 2012; Mowbray, Wilkinson and Tse 2015; Barry and Wilkinson 2016; Kaufman 2015; Wilkinson, Barry and Morrison 2020; Morrison 2023 and 2011). However, promotive voice has mostly been studied at the individual level (Morrison 2023; Bashshur and Oc 2015), whereas the predominant level of analysis of worker voice is the collective or organizational level, investigating unions, works councils or other voice channels (Dundon and Gollan 2007; Dobbins and Dundon 2014; Gollan et al. 2015; Benson 2000; Kaufman 2014). Despite the increasing importance of individual-level worker voice in contemporary employment relationships, this type of voice has received little attention (Pohler, Luchak and Harmer 2020; Barry and Wilkinson 2016). As a result, we know a lot about the individual determinants of promotive voice, but less about individual worker voice or the relationship between worker and promotive voice. It is a logical assumption that workers' experiences of speaking up for their own interests would affect their contributions to the organization. Surprisingly, however, this relationship remains unexplored in the existing literature.

Accordingly, we seek to contribute to the voice literature by investigating the relationship between promotive voice and worker voice. In doing so, we take up the suggestion of Mowbray, Wilkinson and Tse (2015) to study how different motives and contents of voice are related. Specifically, we study the supervisor's response to worker voice as an antecedent of promotive voice. Numerous studies have acknowledged the importance of supervisor behaviour in relation to promotive voice. Factors such as transformational leadership (Detert and Burris 2007; Liu, Zhu and Yang 2010), ethical leadership (Avey, Wernsing and Palanski 2012; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck 2009) and a positive leader-member exchange relationship (Burris, Detert and Chiaburu 2008; Botero and Van Dyne 2009) have been shown to have a positive impact. This research illustrates the strong emphasis in the literature on positive supervisor behaviour, and we contend that more attention should be given to the impact that negative

supervisor behaviour can have. Furthermore, there has been surprisingly little empirical research on the actual response of supervisors to voice (some recent work includes Kassing 2009; Sluiter, Manevska and Akkerman 2022; Stanojevic, Akkerman and Manevska 2020a; Geurkink, Akkerman and Sluiter 2022) and the impact that experiencing such supervisor responses may have on workers' other voice behaviours.

Previous research has shown that workers' expectations of supervisor responsiveness to voice affect promotive voice (Saunders et al. 1992; Detert and Burris 2007). Furthermore, the underlying motive for promotive voice is to help the organization, and such other-regarding behaviour implies commitment to the organization and its members (Morrison 2014). It makes sense, therefore, that workers' experiences of speaking up for their own interests may influence these attitudes and, in turn, promotive voice. In this light, the research question in this study is:

*How do supervisor responses to worker voice affect promotive voice?*

We thus study how managerial responses to workers' interests impact worker initiatives and suggestions to improve the organization. We test our hypotheses by performing structural equation modelling (SEM) on data from the Work and Politics Panel Survey 2020.<sup>1</sup> This unique and rich data set contains information on the worker voice and promotive voice behaviour of 3,159 workers in the Netherlands.

Overall, our study contributes to the integration of the voice literature and the current debate on democracy at work. Specifically, we consider how giving workers a voice related to their rights can lead to an increase in overall knowledge sharing within organizations (cf. Herzog 2018, 107–139; Herzog 2022). Furthermore, our study has relevant practical implications for organizations and policymakers.

This article is organized as follows. The second section traces the development of the different concepts of voice, establishing our focus on the relationship between promotive voice and worker voice. The third section sets out our methodology and the fourth discusses our results. The fifth section presents our conclusions, discussing the contributions and limitations of our study, and outlining avenues for future research and the practical implications of our findings.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1. Voice

Contemporary voice research began with the seminal work by Hirschman (1970), who introduced the concept of voice as a response by customers or members of an organization to declining organizational performance. Farrell (1983) applied this theory to workers, suggesting that they could use voice as a response to job

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<sup>1</sup> Agnes Akkerman, Bram Geurkink, Katerina Manevska, Roderick Sluiter, Arjuna Snoep and Antonia Stanojevic, "Work and Politics Panel Survey 2020" [data set], Nijmegen, Radboud University.

dissatisfaction. During the 1980s, voice research was focused on several different behaviours at the same time, as exemplified in this definition:

Voice describes actively and constructively trying to improve conditions through discussing problems with a supervisor or co-workers, taking action to solve problems, suggesting solutions, seeking help from an outside agency like a union, or whistleblowing. (Rusbult et al. 1988, 601)

This all-encompassing definition was used in research but inconclusive findings on the antecedents of voice led to the conclusion that it might underestimate the complexity of the concept (Withey and Cooper 1989; Rusbult et al. 1988). In the following decades, researchers began to study these different forms of voice separately. As a result, voice research fragmented into different fields, each with its own claim to the term “voice”. In this article, we follow the distinction made by Mowbray, Wilkinson and Tse (2015) and discuss two perspectives of the research on voice: voice research in the fields of employment relations and human resource management (ER/HRM) and voice research in the field of organizational behaviour (OB).

## 2.2. The perspective of voice in ER/HRM: Worker voice

Research on voice in the fields of ER/HRM has mostly focused on voice as a tool for workers to protect their interests and participate in organizational decision-making (Wilkinson and Fay 2011; Dundon et al. 2004; Gollan et al. 2015; Mowbray, Wilkinson and Tse 2015). Voice was first studied in the union context because unions provide a way for workers to voice their dissatisfaction to organizations collectively. Through collective bargaining, it was argued that unionized voice can provide workers with better wages and improved working conditions (Freeman and Medoff 1984). However, with the decline of unionization, worker participation (for example, problem-solving teams or suggestion schemes) and formal voice channels (such as formal grievance procedures or works councils) became more relevant within organizations (Dundon and Gollan 2007; McCabe and Lewin 1992; Spencer 1986; Freeman, Boxall and Haynes 2007). ER/HRM scholars therefore included voice in non-unionized workplaces in their research. These non-union forms of voice have been characterized as fostering greater collaboration between workers and the organization and integrating both their interests.

This development highlights the considerable change that has come about in the content and motive of voice in ER/HRM over the last few decades. Voice has gone from being an adversarial process, where the interests of workers and organizations could come into conflict, to being a collaborative process, described as “mutual gain” for workers and organizations (Gollan et al. 2015). Critics, however, have argued that this process of mutual gain is mostly beneficial to organizational interests because, in practice, it is less concerned with unions and, therefore, worker interests (Dundon et al. 2004). In addition, research has shown mixed results on the effectiveness of these non-union forms of voice in improving organizational performance and protecting worker interests (Pyman et al. 2006; Holland, Cooper and Sheehan 2017).

The focus within ER/HRM on collective forms of voice and voice channels has resulted in a lack of research on individual voice behaviour related to worker

interests (Barry and Wilkinson 2016; Pohler, Luchak and Harmer 2020). To fill this gap, some recent research has focused on individual worker voice, defined as workers speaking up about discontent with regard to their working conditions, employment conditions, career development and interpersonal conflicts (Sluiter, Manevska and Akkerman 2022). This research includes studies on the antecedents and effects of this type of voice (Snoep-Delleman et al. 2024; Sluiter, Manevska and Akkerman 2022), as well as its potential spillover to behaviour outside work (Stanojevic, Akkerman and Manevska 2020b; Geurkink, Akkerman and Sluiter 2022; Stanojevic, Akkerman and Manevska 2020a).

### 2.3. The perspective of voice in OB: Promotive voice

Concurrently, voice has been studied as a promotive behaviour in the field of OB. Van Dyne, Cummings and McLean Parks (1995) introduced voice as a promotive and challenging “extra-role behaviour” among workers. From this perspective, voice is seen as a way for workers to contribute and stimulate organizational growth (Detert and Burris 2007; Van Dyne and Lepine 1998). Such voice behaviour subsequently became the focus of several studies in the field of OB, each with its own slightly different definition (Brinsfield, Edwards and Greenberg 2009; Morrison 2011). We would like to highlight two of the conditions that voice must meet in order to qualify as promotive behaviour. First, workers have to speak up in a *constructive and challenging* way, with the intention of bringing about changes that benefit the organization. This excludes voice that focuses only on workers’ interests (McClellan, Burris and Detert 2013). Second, voice is a *discretionary* behaviour, meaning that workers voluntarily decide if and when they want to speak up.

OB scholars posit that voice not only has positive outcomes for the organization but can also advance the careers of workers who identify opportunities for organizational growth. However, empirical research has shown that this type of voice behaviour also carries risks for workers’ careers. Workers who speak up may face reprimands (for example, warnings or lower performance ratings) from their supervisors or management (Burris 2012; Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin 2003). This highlights the notion that several factors influence how voice is received, including the issue raised and the manner in which workers speak up. Liang, Farh and Farh (2012) therefore make a distinction between promotive voice – speaking up with suggestions to improve organizational functioning – and prohibitive voice – speaking up with concerns about practices that harm the organization. They emphasize that both forms seek to benefit the organization, but that prohibitive voice can result in conflict with the person or people responsible for these harmful practices. Speaking up prohibitively can therefore have consequences for how the workers that do so are viewed. Indeed, a recent meta-analysis of voice research in OB found that workers who use promotive voice are viewed as more efficient workers, while those who use prohibitive voice are viewed as less efficient (Chamberlin, Newton and Lepine 2017). The dependent variable, and therefore the focus of this article, is promotive voice, as defined within the field of OB (Liang, Farh and Farh 2012).

## 2.4. Voice in this study

Table 1 summarizes the differences between the two types of voice studied in this article. When comparing the focus of interest of these forms of voice, there is potential for conflict. Organizational and worker interests can be aligned but they can also come into conflict. By disregarding voice that is focused on worker interests, the research on promotive voice has not taken this potential conflict into consideration (Barry and Wilkinson 2016; Wilkinson, Barry and Morrison 2020). The assumption that workers are intrinsically motivated to help the organization, without taking worker interests into account, oversimplifies the role of workers within organizations. This oversimplification is further highlighted by the fact that promotive voice is considered a discretionary behaviour: workers decide for themselves if and when they express promotive voice. It is a logical assumption that some workers will take the organization's response to issues related to worker interests into account before speaking up to promote the organization's interests. For example, a worker who has spoken up about experiencing high levels of work-related stress may be more inclined to point out opportunities to increase revenue if they feel that the issue of work-related stress was properly addressed. This assumption, however, has been absent in the research on promotive voice.

Moreover, some empirical research suggests that worker voice and promotive voice share some antecedents, namely in workers' expectations about the supervisor's responsiveness to voice (Morrison 2011; Geurkink 2023). Experiences with one type of voice can influence such expectations, which in turn can impact the decision to express another type of voice. We therefore want to study how workers' experiences with speaking up for their own interests – that is, worker voice – can influence promotive voice by shaping expectations about the supervisor's responsiveness.

**Table 1. Overview of the definitions of worker and promotive voice**

Type of voice	Focus of interest	Definition
Promotive voice	Organizational	Workers speaking up with new ideas or suggestions for improving the overall functioning of their organization (Liang, Farh and Farh 2012).
Worker voice	Worker	Workers speaking up about discontent with regard to their working conditions, employment conditions, career development and interpersonal conflicts (Sluiter, Manevska and Akkerman 2022).

Source: Own compilation.

## 2.5. The role of the supervisor

Research on promotive voice has mainly focused on the supervisor as the target of voice. Supervisors hold higher positions within the organization and are therefore more likely to be able to bring about organizational change (Morrison 2011). However, much less attention has been paid to supervisor–worker interaction in relation to workers speaking up for their own interests. In this article, we examine the impact of two types of supervisor response to worker voice:

supervisor support (that is, when the supervisor helps the worker fix the issue) and supervisor suppression (when the supervisor punishes the worker for bringing up the issue). Intuitively, we would expect the supervisor's response to voice to affect the worker's expectations of their responsiveness to voice. These expectations, in turn, affect how likely the worker is to raise issues with that supervisor on another occasion (Morrison 2011; Detert and Burris 2007). Indeed, recent studies show that the manner in which the supervisor responds to workers who speak up for their interests affects how responsive they are perceived to be (Geurkink, Akkerman and Sluiter 2022; Snoep-Delleman et al. 2024). Therefore, we expect supervisor support of worker voice to have a positive effect on workers' expectations of supervisor responsiveness. Conversely, we expect supervisor suppression of worker voice to have a negative impact on workers' expectations of supervisor responsiveness.

Several studies have shown the importance of workers' perceptions of supervisors in stimulating promotive voice. Workers are more likely to speak up with ideas and suggestions to improve organizational functioning when they perceive their supervisor as approachable and receptive to worker input (Detert and Burris 2007; Detert and Treviño 2010; Janssen and Gao 2015; Saunders et al. 1992; Van Dyne, Kamdar and Joireman 2008). Such perceptions can signal to workers that there are relatively few costs associated with speaking up and challenging the status quo. Therefore, we anticipate that workers' expectations of supervisor responsiveness to voice will impact their promotive voice. In the remainder of this article, we mostly refer to workers' expectations of the supervisor's responsiveness to voice as perceived supervisor responsiveness (PSR). This leads to the following hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1 (H1): Supervisor support of worker voice has a positive effect on perceived supervisor responsiveness.*
- *Hypothesis 2 (H2): Supervisor suppression of worker voice has a negative effect on perceived supervisor responsiveness.*
- *Hypothesis 3 (H3): Perceived supervisor responsiveness has a positive effect on promotive voice.*

## 2.6. Organizational commitment

Whether workers decide to speak up with ideas and suggestions to improve the organization can also depend on how committed and attached they are to that organization. Workers' organizational commitment has been studied extensively over the years. This is unsurprising given that a committed workforce can have beneficial effects for organizations, thanks to lower turnover rates, for instance (Jaros 1997; Vandenberghe, Bentein and Stinglhamber 2004; Tett and Meyer 1993). In this article, we focus on affective organizational commitment (Meyer and Allen 1991; Allen and Meyer 1996; Meyer, Allen and Smith 1993). Workers with strong affective commitment feel emotionally attached to, and identify with, their organization. These feelings lead to a desire to continue working for the organization.



Affective commitment is influenced by workplace experiences (Meyer et al. 2002; Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli 2001). Positive experiences foster commitment, while negative experiences can weaken it. We therefore expect the supervisor's response to worker voice to evoke emotions and impact the affective commitment of workers.

The role of the supervisor is one of the key theoretical antecedents in studies on workers' affective organizational commitment. Although there have been no studies on the influence of supervisor responses to worker voice on affective commitment, research into the role of the supervisor provides insight into the possible effects of these responses. Specifically, some studies have found that overall feelings of supervisor support, such as taking an interest in the worker's goals or providing the worker with the means to excel at work, can have a positive effect on workers' affective organizational commitment (van Vuuren, de Jong and Seydel 2007; Çakmak-Otluoğlu 2012). These feelings of supervisor support fulfil workers' needs and lead to more positive evaluations of their work environment, thereby increasing workers' identification with the organization. Similarly, we expect workers who receive supervisor support when speaking up for their own interests to experience an increase in affective commitment.

With regard to the impact of negative supervisor behaviour, previous studies have indicated that abusive supervision – that is, hostile, non-physical supervisor behaviour directed at subordinates – is negatively related to workers' organizational commitment (Tepper 2000; Duffy, Ganster and Pagon 2002; Tepper 2007; Schyns and Schilling 2013). Supervisor abuse makes workers feel threatened at work, and such experiences will reduce their emotional attachment to the organization. Supervisor punishment of workers who speak up for their own interests can be seen as a form of abusive supervision. We therefore expect supervisor suppression of worker voice to negatively impact workers' affective organizational commitment. This leads to the following two hypotheses:

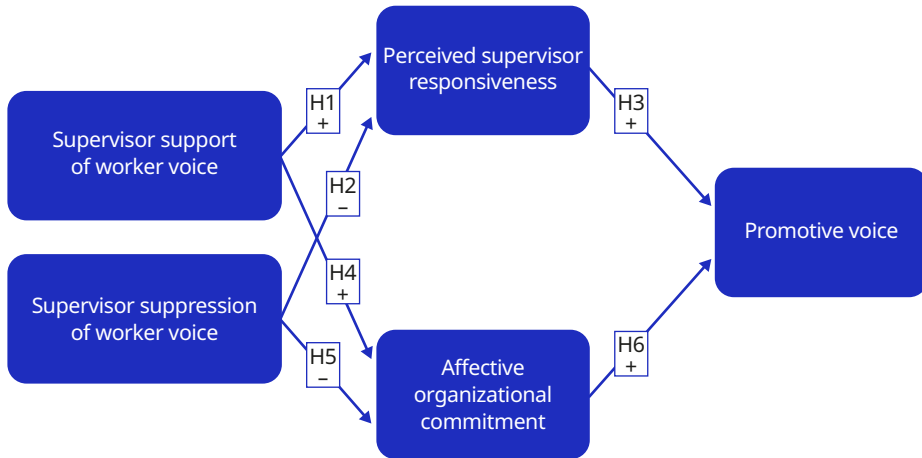
- *Hypothesis 4 (H4): Supervisor support of worker voice has a positive effect on affective organizational commitment.*
- *Hypothesis 5 (H5): Supervisor suppression of worker voice has a negative effect on affective organizational commitment.*

Some research has found support for the notion that affective commitment has a positive effect on promotive voice (Tangirala and Ramanujam 2008; Wang et al. 2014). Workers who feel committed to their organization feel more responsibility and ownership for organizational problems and goals compared to workers with low affective commitment. These feelings make workers want to contribute to organizational interests; therefore, they will be more likely to speak up with ideas and give suggestions to benefit the organization. This leads to the last hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 6 (H6): Affective organizational commitment has a positive effect on promotive voice.*

An overview of all hypothesized relationships is provided in our conceptual model in figure 1.

**Figure 1. The hypothesized relationships between the supervisor response to worker voice and promotive voice**



Source: Own compilation.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data

We use data from the 2020 wave of the Work and Politics Panel Survey to test our hypotheses.<sup>2</sup> Respondents were selected from the TNS NIPObase, which is an online panel consisting of approximately 235,000 people from 145,000 households in the Netherlands.<sup>3</sup> The respondents were part of the labour force in the Netherlands, meaning that they either had a job or were looking for a job and were aged between 16 and 67. A sample of 7,599 respondents, representative in terms of age, region in the Netherlands and level of education, participated in a first wave in 2017.<sup>4</sup> Owing to panel dropout, 6,672 respondents were available for the 2020 wave. Data collection for the 2020 wave took place between March and April 2020, with 4,855 respondents (73 per cent response rate). The 2020 survey was also sent to a new sample of 4,500 respondents from the TNS NIPObase who had not participated in any of the previous waves of the Work and Politics Panel Survey. These respondents were selected using the same criteria from the first wave of the survey. Data collection for this additional sample took place between

<sup>2</sup> See note 1. The Work and Politics Panel Survey is part of a research project that aims to capture people's experiences at work and in politics in the Netherlands. The survey consists of questions covering a range of topics, including work-related issues and voting behaviour. It has been conducted three times between 2017 and 2020. Data from the survey have been used in several studies examining attitudes and voice behaviour at work, political attitudes and behaviour, and the potential link between these factors.

<sup>3</sup> The data were collected by Kantar Public.

<sup>4</sup> Agnes Akkerman, Katerina Manevska, Roderick Sluiter and Antonia Stanojevic, "Work and Politics Panel Survey 2017" [data set], Nijmegen, Radboud University.

May and June 2020, with 2,166 respondents (48 per cent response rate). Our data set is a combination of the data from the 2020 wave and this additional sample.<sup>5</sup>

To test our hypotheses, we selected respondents from our data set who were employed at the time of the data collection and who reported experiencing an issue in the previous year related to working conditions, employment conditions, career development or interpersonal conflicts ( $N = 3,321$ ). We excluded respondents who reported experiencing both support and suppression of their voice from a supervisor ( $N = 64$ ). The combination of experiencing such contradictory supervisor responses could have unanticipated effects on the results of our statistical model. In addition, 98 respondents were removed owing to missing values for their level of educational attainment or type of contract, resulting in our final sample of 3,159 respondents.

## 3.2. Measures

### 3.2.1. Promotive voice

The items measuring the dependent variable of our study, promotive voice, were based on items from Liang, Farh and Farh (2012). Respondents indicated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) whether they agreed with the following three items:

- I proactively make suggestions to solve problems in my organization (PV1).
- I raise suggestions to improve the functioning of my organization (PV2).
- I proactively voice constructive suggestions to help my organization reach its goals (PV3).

### 3.2.2. Supervisor response to worker voice

To compare the effects of supervisor support and supervisor suppression of worker voice with workers who did not express worker voice, we created the categorical variable *worker voice* with the following categories: “*No worker voice*” (reference category), “*Supervisor support of worker voice*”, “*Supervisor suppression of worker voice*” and “*Voice, no support or suppression*”. These categories were measured through a series of sequential questions.

First, respondents were asked if they had experienced an issue at work in the past year relating to their working conditions, employment conditions, career development or interpersonal conflicts. They could choose from a list of issues or specify an issue that was not on the list.<sup>6</sup> Those who indicated more than one issue were asked which issue they considered most important. Respondents were then asked how they had handled that particular issue. Those who indicated that they had not voiced the issue were placed in the “*No worker voice*” category.

Respondents who indicated that they had voiced the issue to their supervisor, or that their supervisor was aware that they had voiced the issue elsewhere,

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<sup>5</sup> We did not make use of any of the previous waves of the Work and Politics Panel Survey because promotive voice and organizational commitment were only measured in the 2020 wave. The data set can be made available upon request.

<sup>6</sup> This list can be found in Appendix A in the online appendices.

were asked the following question: “After you voiced the issue, did that action result in one of the following responses by your supervisor?”. Respondents could choose from a list of supervisor responses and could select multiple items.<sup>7</sup> Supervisor support of worker voice was measured with two items. Respondents who indicated that their supervisor had responded in one or both of these ways were placed in the “*Supervisor support of worker voice*” category.

Supervisor suppression of worker voice was measured with ten items. Respondents who indicated that their supervisor had responded in at least one of these ways were placed in the “*Supervisor suppression of worker voice*” category.

Two items were used to measure a passive supervisor response to worker voice, but we had no expectations about the effect of such responses. Respondents could also describe other supervisor responses in the open-ended item: “Other, namely ...”. These responses were reviewed and coded as supervisor support, supervisor suppression, or a passive supervisor response, where appropriate.

Lastly, one item measured whether the supervisor had not responded to their voice. Respondents who indicated receiving only a passive supervisor response, a supervisor response that could not be considered either supportive or suppressive, or no supervisor response were placed in the category “*Voice, no support or suppression*”.

Our sample was distributed across the four different categories as follows: “*No worker voice*” ( $n = 298$ ), “*Supervisor support of worker voice*” ( $n = 1,126$ ), “*Supervisor suppression of worker voice*” ( $n = 691$ ) and “*Voice, no support or suppression*” ( $n = 1,044$ ).

### 3.2.3. Perceived supervisor responsiveness

Workers’ expectations of supervisor responsiveness to voice were measured by adapting items on the responsiveness of political leaders (Niemi, Craig and Mattei 1991; Craig and Maggionto 1982) to the workplace environment. Similar to our approach for promotive voice, we used a five-point Likert scale with the following three items:

- Generally, my supervisor does not really care about my interests (PSR1).
- Generally, my supervisor listens to the problems of employees like me (PSR2).
- My supervisor is only interested in job performance, not in the opinions of employees like me (PSR3).

### 3.2.4. Affective organizational commitment

We measured affective organizational commitment (AOC) based on items from Allen and Meyer (1990). Again, we used a five-point Likert scale with the following four items:

- I feel that I am truly part of this organization (AOC1).
- I feel emotionally attached to this organization (AOC2).
- I feel “part of the family” in this organization (AOC3).
- This organization means a lot to me (AOC4).

<sup>7</sup> The list can be found in Appendix B in the online appendices.

### 3.3. Control variables

We control for the effects on our dependent variables of age, gender, level of educational attainment (middle-level and high-level education, compared to low-level education<sup>8</sup>), type of contract (temporary contract with the prospect of a permanent contract, temporary contract without the prospect of a permanent contract and solo self-employment, compared to a permanent contract), tenure (measured as years working in the current organization) and holding a supervisory position.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.4. Analyses

To test our conceptual model and hypotheses, we use structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM views our model as an integrated set of relationships and allows us to test all of the hypotheses within our model simultaneously without having to conduct separate analyses (Kline 2011; Williams, Vandenberg and Edwards 2009). We first perform a confirmatory factor analysis to test whether the three latent variables in our study – perceived supervisor responsiveness, affective organizational commitment and promotive voice – are coherent and distinct constructs. These latent variables are then implemented in the structural regression model that we use to test our hypotheses. We use the maximum likelihood (ML) method to estimate the parameters within our model. All analyses are performed by using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel 2012).

#### 3.4.1. Testing our models

We first discuss the results of the confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model. The factor loadings and the covariances between the latent variables within the measurement model are presented in table 2.<sup>10</sup> The results show that the standardized factor loadings for all items easily exceed the threshold of 0.4, suggesting that all items are good indicators of their respective construct (Saris, Satorra and van der Veld 2009). Furthermore, table 2 shows that the covariances between the latent variables are all well below the threshold of 0.85 (ranging from 0.172 to 0.480), suggesting that there is sufficient discriminant validity between these different constructs. This means that the latent variables are distinct constructs. To test the internal factor reliability of our latent variables, we use McDonald's omega ( $\omega$ ) (McDonald 1999). All scores are comfortably above the threshold of 0.700 (perceived supervisor responsiveness:  $\omega = 0.848$ ; affective organizational commitment:  $\omega = 0.918$ ; and promotive voice:  $\omega = 0.916$ ), indicating good internal reliability for our constructs.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Concordances with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-11) are the following: low-level education = ISCED-11 levels X, 0, 1 and 2; middle-level education = ISCED-11 levels 3 and 4; high-level education = ISCED-11 levels 6, 7 and 8.

<sup>9</sup> Descriptive statistics and a correlation matrix of all the items and variables used can be found in tables C1 and C2 of Appendix C in the online appendices.

<sup>10</sup> A path diagram with a graphical representation of the measurement model can be found in Appendix D in the online appendices.

<sup>11</sup> Cronbach's alpha scores also indicated good internal reliability (de Heus, van der Leeden and Gazendam 1999): perceived supervisor responsiveness –  $\alpha = 0.846$ ; affective organizational commitment –  $\alpha = 0.916$ ; and promotive voice –  $\alpha = 0.915$ .

**Table 2. Factor loadings and covariances for the measurement model**

	Unstandardized estimate	Standard error	Standardized estimate
Perceived supervisor responsiveness (PSR)			
PSR1	1.000		0.838
PSR2	0.862***	0.020	0.752
PSR3	0.984***	0.021	0.826
Affective organizational commitment (AOC)			
AOC1	1.000		0.772
AOC2	1.204***	0.022	0.876
AOC3	1.241***	0.023	0.888
AOC4	1.160***	0.021	0.892
Promotive voice			
PROM1	1.000		0.847
PROM2	1.126***	0.017	0.939
PROM3	1.038***	0.017	0.869
PSR ↔ AOC	0.328***	0.016	0.480
PSR ↔ Promotive voice	0.130***	0.015	0.172
AOC ↔ Promotive voice	0.205***	0.014	0.313

\*\*\* indicates statistical significance at the 0.1 per cent level.

Source: Own calculations based on data from the Work and Politics Panel Survey 2020.

**Table 3. Fit indices for the measurement model and the structural regression model**

	Measurement model	Structural regression model
	Value	Value
$\chi^2$	269.220 ( $p < 0.001$ )	804.371 ( $p < 0.001$ )
df	32	158
CFI	0.989	0.973
TLI	0.984	0.963
RMSEA	0.048	0.040
RMSEA 90% confidence interval	0.043–0.054	0.037–0.042
SRMR	0.030	0.021

Notes:  $N = 3,159$ . CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI: Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean squared residual.

Source: Own calculations based on data from the Work and Politics Panel Survey 2020.

We use several fit indices to determine the fit of the measurement model. These indices are presented in table 3. The chi-square of our measurement model is significant, indicating a poor model fit. However, the chi-square is sensitive to sample size, and our study has a relatively large sample size ( $N = 3,159$ ). Chi-square should therefore always be interpreted alongside other fit indices (Kline 2011). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which is not sensitive to sample size, indicates a good model fit (Steiger 2007; Hu and Bentler 1999; Hooper, Coughlan and Mullen 2008). Other fit indices of the measurement model also indicate a good model fit (CFI > 0.95; TLI > 0.95; SRMR < 0.05)

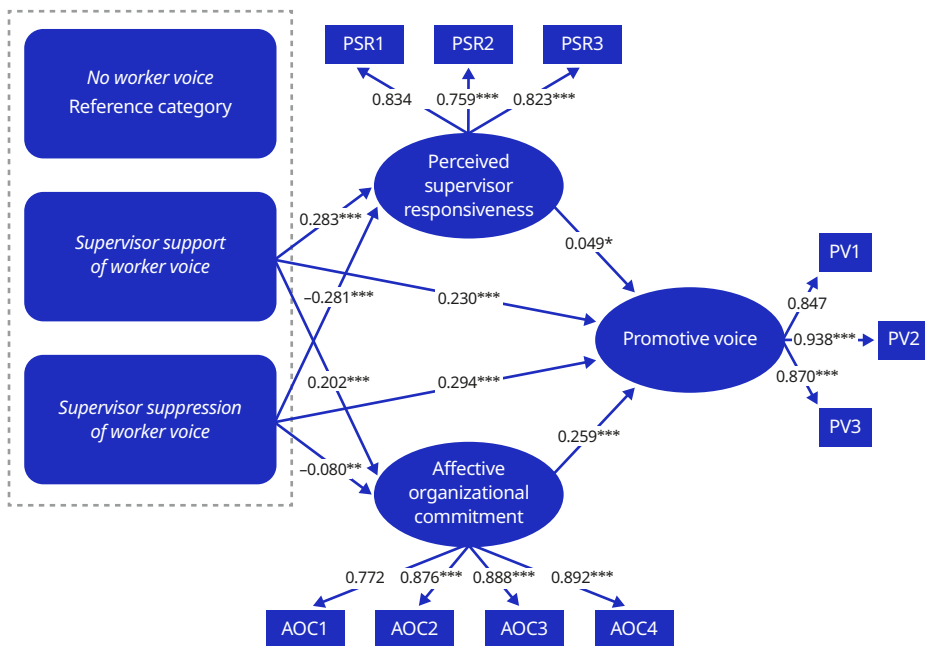
(Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger and Müller 2003; Hooper, Coughlan and Mullen 2008). We therefore accept our latent variables as coherent constructs.

We now turn to the structural regression model. The fit indices for this model are also presented in table 3. Similar to the measurement model, the chi-square is significant, suggesting a poor model fit, but again this is likely to be the result of our large sample rather than a poor fit. The other fit indices of the structural regression model all indicate a good model fit (CFI > 0.95; TLI > 0.95; RMSEA < 0.06; SRMR < 0.05). These results imply that our theoretical model fits the data well. Accordingly, we move on to test our hypotheses.

## 4. Results

Figure 2 displays a path diagram with the standardized estimates of the structural regression model.<sup>12</sup> For clarity, the reference category “No worker voice” is also shown in figure 2. The effects of the “Voice, no support or suppression” category

Figure 2. Path diagram of the structural regression model



\* \*\* and \*\*\* indicate statistical significance at the 5, 1 and 0.1 per cent levels, respectively.

Note: Control variables were included in the analysis but are not presented in the figure.

Source: Own calculations based on data from the Work and Politics Panel Survey 2020.

<sup>12</sup> We also tested an alternative model in which prohibitive voice was added as a dependent variable. This model provided similar results to the structural regression model. Additional information and the results of this model can be found in Appendix F in the online appendices.

were estimated in the structural regression model, but we do not display this category in figure 2 as we have no hypotheses about its effects.<sup>13</sup>

Hypothesis 1 predicts a positive effect of supervisor support of worker voice on perceived supervisor responsiveness. Figure 2 shows that this effect is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.283, p < .001$ ), indicating support for Hypothesis 1. This suggests that workers who receive support from their supervisor when they speak up for their interests are more likely to perceive their supervisor as responsive to voice.

Hypothesis 2 states that supervisor suppression of worker voice has a negative effect on perceived supervisor responsiveness. Figure 2 shows that this effect is negative and significant ( $\beta = -0.281, p < .001$ ), signalling support for Hypothesis 2. This supports the notion that a suppressive supervisor response to worker voice makes it more likely that workers perceive the supervisor as less responsive to voice.

Hypothesis 3 predicts that perceived supervisor responsiveness positively affects promotive voice. Indeed, we find a positive and significant effect, as shown in figure 2 ( $\beta = 0.049, p < .05$ ), suggesting that workers who perceive their supervisor as responsive to voice are more likely to express new ideas or suggestions to stimulate organizational functioning.

Hypothesis 4 predicts that supervisor support of worker voice has a positive effect on affective organizational commitment. Figure 2 shows a significant positive effect ( $\beta = 0.202, p < .001$ ), which supports the hypothesis. This suggests that workers who receive supervisor support when they speak up for their interests are more likely to feel attached to the organization.

Hypothesis 5 predicts that supervisor suppression of worker voice has a negative effect on affective organizational commitment. The results in figure 2 show that this effect is indeed negative and significant ( $\beta = -0.080, p < .01$ ). This result supports the notion that workers who are punished by their supervisors when they speak up for their interests are less likely to feel attached to their organization.

Lastly, Hypothesis 6 states that affective organizational commitment has a positive effect on promotive voice. Figure 2 shows that this effect is positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.259, p < .001$ ), which supports this hypothesis and indicates that workers who feel attached to the organization are more likely to express ideas or suggestions to improve organizational functioning.

Overall, our results suggest that supervisors can play an important role in shaping workers' attitudes in the workplace. By supporting worker voice, supervisors can improve their image and stimulate commitment among workers. Conversely, by suppressing worker voice, supervisors risk alienating workers and appearing less approachable. These attitudes, in turn, may influence whether workers provide feedback that can help the organization.

To test the expected indirect mechanisms of our theoretical model, we also estimate the indirect effects of supervisor support of worker voice and

<sup>13</sup> The results of the full model, including the unstandardized estimates and standard errors, can be found in Appendix E.



**Table 4. Estimates for the indirect effects of the structural regression model**

	Estimate	Standardized estimate
Supervisor support → PSR → promotive voice	0.025 (0.012)	0.014*
Supervisor support → AOC → promotive voice	0.093 (0.016)	0.052***
Supervisor suppression → PSR → promotive voice	-0.028 (0.014)	-0.014*
Supervisor suppression → AOC → promotive voice	-0.042 (0.016)	-0.021**

\*, \*\* and \*\*\* indicate statistical significance at the 5, 1 and 0.1 per cent levels, respectively.  
Notes: PSR = perceived supervisor responsiveness; AOC = affective organizational commitment.  $N = 3,159$ . Standard errors appear in parentheses.  
Source: Own calculations based on data from the Work and Politics Panel Survey 2020.

supervisor suppression of worker voice on promotive voice. These estimates are presented in table 4. The results show that supervisor support of worker voice has a significant indirect effect on promotive voice through perceived supervisor responsiveness ( $\beta = 0.014$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and through affective organizational commitment ( $\beta = 0.052$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The results also indicate that supervisor suppression of worker voice has a significant indirect effect on promotive voice through perceived supervisor responsiveness ( $\beta = -0.014$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and through affective organizational commitment ( $\beta = -0.021$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results provide support for the notion that the response of the supervisor to worker voice can indirectly influence whether workers provide new ideas and suggestions to improve organizational functioning.

Lastly, figure 2 shows that, in addition to their indirect effects, supervisor support ( $\beta = 0.230$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and supervisor suppression ( $\beta = 0.294$ ,  $p < .001$ ) of worker voice also have direct and positive effects on promotive voice compared to workers who did not express worker voice.

In summary, the results of the structural regression model provide support for all six of the hypotheses in our study. The model also indicates support for the notion that supervisor support and suppression of worker voice have an impact on the promotive voice behaviour of workers via workers' expectations of supervisor responsiveness to voice and workers' affective organizational commitment. Overall, the model explains 22 per cent of the variance in promotive voice, which is the dependent variable of our study. It also explains 25 per cent of the variance in perceived supervisor responsiveness and 10 per cent of the variance in affective organizational commitment.

## 5. Conclusion

The goal of this article was to examine how workers' experiences of speaking up for their own interests influence promotive voice. We hypothesized that the supervisor response to worker voice impacts workers' expectations of supervisor responsiveness and affective organizational commitment, which in turn affects their promotive voice. We found that supportive supervisor responses to worker voice are positively related to perceived supervisor responsiveness and affective

organizational commitment. Conversely, supervisor suppression of worker voice is negatively related to perceived supervisor responsiveness and affective organizational commitment. We also found that both workers' expectations of supervisor responsiveness to voice and affective organizational commitment are positively related to promotive voice.

## 5.1. Theoretical contribution

The results of our study provide support for the notion that workers' experiences with speaking up for their own interests are linked to their contributions to the organization via promotive voice. These findings suggest that when workers speak up with ideas to stimulate organizational functioning, they take into account how they are treated when they speak up for their own interests. In addition to the effects of positive supervisor behaviour, which has been widely studied in the voice literature, our study also explores the consequences of supervisor suppression of worker voice. Research on abusive supervision has shown the impact that it can have within organizations (Martinko et al. 2013) and our study suggests that suppression of worker voice can have a negative influence on workers' contributions to organizational interests.

Another interesting finding of our study is the relationship between the supervisor response to worker voice and workers' affective organizational commitment. The positive and negative effects of supervisor support and suppression, respectively, are consistent with our hypotheses and highlight the important role that supervisors play in stimulating or dampening workers' affective commitment.

Based on the findings of our study, we would advocate for a more integrated perspective within the voice literature, where both worker and organizational interests are taken into account. In recent decades, the position of individual workers on the labour market has become increasingly insecure and individual worker voice is becoming more important for workers to defend their own interests (Gumbrell-McCormick 2011; Heiland 2020). At the same time, organizations have suffered major incidents or failed because of an inadequate response to workers' promotive voice (Greenberg and Edwards 2009). However, the interaction between worker voice and promotive voice has not received much attention in the voice literature. We believe that it is in the interests of both workers and employers to create more balance in this regard. A better understanding of worker voice can lead to a better understanding of promotive voice. This article marks a first empirical step, and we hope to inspire scholars within the voice literature to continue down this path.

## 5.2. Limitations and future research

Our study provides some compelling avenues for future research. Although our findings are based on data from the Netherlands, the approach and context of this study are potentially applicable to other countries where worker voice is threatened by declining union membership and increasing numbers of atypical workers. Our findings are thus likely to have (policy) implications beyond the context of the Netherlands. Nevertheless, replicating our study in a different

institutional and cultural context will help to further establish the external validity of our findings.

One of the limitations of our study is the use of cross-sectional data. We hypothesized a causal sequence from the supervisor response to worker voice to promotive voice, but we cannot rule out reverse causal effects. Future research would therefore benefit from using longitudinal data to better understand the causal directions and long-term effects of supervisor support and suppression of voice (Bashshur and Oc 2015).

Furthermore, although we did not formulate hypotheses on the direct relationship between supervisor support or suppression of worker voice and promotive voice, we did find a positive relationship between them. These findings suggest that workers who express worker voice are more likely to speak up with ideas to improve organizational functioning, regardless of whether their voice is supported or suppressed by their supervisor. Future research could therefore explore whether some people are more likely to speak up than others (cf. LePine and Van Dyne 2001), regardless of the motive or content of voice.

Another avenue for future research is to examine the impact of the national or organizational context on individual voice behaviour. In this study, we focus on voice at the individual level of analysis and provide support for the notion that individual worker voice is indirectly linked to individual promotive voice. However, the national or organizational context (for example, the presence of certain voice channels or certain institutions) is also an important factor that influences the voice of individual workers (Wilkinson, Barry and Morrison 2020; Morrison 2023). Such information was lacking in this study. Accordingly, future research focusing on the relationship between the national or organizational contexts and individual voice could further improve our understanding of voice behaviour in the workplace.

### 5.3. Implications of our study

Overall, the findings of our study have several practical implications for employers and policymakers. First, employers should be mindful of their treatment of worker voice because of its potential implications for promotive voice. Supporting workers when they speak up for their own interests indirectly influences whether they contribute on organizational issues, make helpful comments, or put forward new and innovative ideas, which are crucial for organizations (Brinsfield, Edwards and Greenberg 2009; Morrison and Milliken 2000; Liang, Farh and Farh 2012). Accordingly, it may be useful for employers to implement training programmes to teach supervisors how to respond appropriately to worker voice. Moreover, our findings suggest that such training programmes may be useful for employers who wish to stimulate organizational commitment in their workforce. Organizational commitment is certainly relevant within today's labour market, where it is difficult to find and retain skilled personnel.

Second, our study can be applied beyond the employment context to a broader concept of knowledge sharing, given that promotive voice involves sharing skills, ideas and knowledge to improve organizational processes (Herzog 2022). Hence, our finding that supporting worker voice increases workers'

willingness to share knowledge is related to the debate on democracy at work, where scholars have argued that we need to increase overall knowledge sharing in order to tackle major societal problems such as climate change or social inequality (Herzog 2018 and 2022). Policymakers should focus on protecting worker voice as a step in this direction.

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