THE ROLE OF CONTEXT IN PROACTIVE AND VOICE BEHAVIOR

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Summary

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the role of context in voice behaviour as one of the most controversial type of proactivity. In today’s world of a fast pace of change and increased need for innovation, organisations rely on employees for improving and changing things and therefore proactivity is more and more mentioned in job specifications. Existing research shows that organisations perform better and are more efficient when they take on board the input of their employees. Therefore, employee voice of suggestions for improvement and alarming about potential or existing harm plays an important role. However, managers are not always open and receptive to these behaviors. These behaviors challenge the status quo, might be perceived as criticism of the voice target and can lead to extra workload. This controversy makes voice a very interesting topic of research in organisational psychology. The context where voice behaviors occur has a big influence on whether those behaviors occur, when, why, and how they occur, which is the main focus of this dissertation.

The three studies presented in this dissertation operationalized context each from a different angle: national context, target openness and leader reactions to these employee behaviors. The first study serves as inspiration to further work out the identified themes of proactive behaviour in the follow up studies of voice behaviour. The themes that can be followed across all the studies of proactive and voice behaviour are 1) proactivity and voice are threatening for the target, 2) those behaviors can be disruptive, and 3) undesirable, leading to extra work as well as 4) fear of negative consequences is a barrier for employees to be proactive and voice.

The goal of the first study is to explore the meaning as well as the social acceptance of proactivity in the Eastern European context (the Ukraine). I examine the following research question: What are the perceptions and acceptance of proactive work behavior in the Ukraine
as an example of an Eastern country in a postcommunist world? ‘Western’ research and theorizing on proactivity is compared to the Russian literature and then the results of a qualitative study among 20 employees and managers in the Ukraine are presented. The findings suggest that some forms of proactivity exist both in the ‘Western’ context and the Ukraine. However, the Western findings on proactivity only seem applicable in the Ukraine to a certain extent. In the Ukraine, particularly pro-self-oriented proactivity with the goal of working around the system or sustaining one’s job is socially accepted. More challenging forms of proactivity such as speaking up are far less common as these are seen as supervisor-threatening, disruptive and leading to extra work and are less desirable. Employees report a strong fear of negative consequences of showing such forms of proactivity.

The second study aims to explore the influence of the voice content challenging the leader of the team on the employee decision to speak up, and out or remain silent while moderated by leader openness and psychological safety. The research question that this study addresses is: How does the challenging nature of voice content influence speaking up, speaking out or staying silent when moderated by the context openness (leader openness and psychological safety)? While voice is critical to organizational functioning and performance, employees are often afraid to speak up and rather remain silent. The decision of whether to voice or not is influenced by employees’ anticipation of voice targets’ (leader, team) reactions to their suggestions. Such reactions depend on the voice content (degree of challenge or threat for others) and the openness of the voice target (openness to suggestions for change). This is a quantitative multi-source survey study with the sample of 157 triads (employee-colleague-leader) from the Faculty of Business and Economics of teaching and support staff from the largest university of applied sciences in the Netherlands. It is found that the nature of the voice content is less crucial for the decision whether to speak up, when leader openness is high than when it is low. In the latter case, employees are more likely not to speak up but to speak out
only to their colleagues or stay silent. For team openness (psychological safety), it is found that when psychological safety is high, people are more silent about the voice content with low degree of challenge than with high degree of challenge. This is also the case for low psychological safety, which is surprising. This finding suggests that the importance of the message to be voiced seems to overcome the fear of negative reactions from these colleagues and the message urgency and importance might overshadow low psychological safety.

The goal of the third study (a multi-study, consisting of Study 1a, 1b and Study 2) is to test a fit/congruence of voice type (promotive or prohibitive) with emotional framing (enthusiasm or anxiety) on supervisor reactions to employee voice. The study explores which potential mediating factors contribute to those reactions and test a congruence model including the mediating factors. The research questions of this study are the following: Is there a congruence fit of a voice type and emotional framing used in order to make employee voice behavior more effective? and Which mediating factors contribute to supervisor reactions to employee voice? The third study is divided into several studies. In Study 1a, which is a scenario experiment, I test the fit idea between the voice type and the emotional framing on the sample of 159 employed part-time students, supplemented with a number of qualitative interviews with leaders (Study 1b) in order to explore possible mechanisms that influence leader reactions to employee voice. Study 2 is a second scenario experiment of 117 employed respondents replicating the first experiment while adding perceived confidence of the voicer and perceived threat to decision-making as potential mechanisms of how the voice type x emotional framing interaction affects leader reactions to voice. The findings suggest that prohibitive voice results in less positive leader reactions than promotive voice and there is an interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing, such that promotive voice with enthusiasm results in much more positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety. However, while there is congruence of the message and the emotional framing, this seems to be more the case for
promotive voice and positive emotions. The findings confirm that leaders tend to react more favorably to voice when they perceive an employee as confident and show that the congruence idea of promotive voice with positive emotions does lead to more perceived confidence. This is not the case for negative emotions, which seem to overrule the prohibitive voice message. Perceived threat to decision-making has a negative impact on leader reactions and prohibitive voice increases the perceived threat to decision-making due to its challenging and more threatening nature. Emotional framing on its own does not influence perceived threat to decision-making, which suggests that the message type (voice type) is more important for the perceived threat to decision-making. Alarming the leader about a current or potential harm (prohibitive voice) without providing a solution might signal lack of confidence of the voicer as well as increase the perceived threat to decision-making, so an employee who voices should voice not only the problem but also a solution to it whenever possible.

This dissertation aims to provide more understanding for both employees and managers on proactivity and voice behavior processes given the influence of the context of such behaviors. While employees are the ones who engage in these behaviors, managers continue to perform a crucial role in the reception of such behaviors. Based on the findings of this research, this dissertation provides a few practical recommendations of how to engage in proactive and voice behaviors in a more effective manner.
Chapter 1

Introduction. The Role of Context in Proactive and Voice Behavior

In today’s world of a fast pace of change, intensity of competition, and increased need for innovation, firms expect employees to be proactive (Bolino et al., 2010; Bindl & Parker, 2010; Parker & Collins, 2010). As a reaction to this changing business environment, organizations not only become flatter and leaner, but also a decentralized decision-making model is appreciated by more and more organizations. These organizations are relying more on employees for improving and changing things, for innovating and for taking initiative to help the strategic direction of the organization. Therefore, proactivity is more and more mentioned in job specifications (Campbell, 2000). At the same time, more and more employees want to be proactive in managing their person-work relationship (Claes et al., 2005). They do not just let life happen to them, but they try to affect and shape what happens at work (Grant & Ashford, 2008).

Proactive behavior is defined as “self-directed and future-focused action in an organization in which the individual aims to bring about change, including change to the situation…and/or change within oneself” (Bindl & Parker, 2010, p. 3-4). The self-directed nature of proactivity is about an action to anticipate or initiate change at work for both organizational and personal effectiveness (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2009). The future focus refers to anticipating future events and the change focus refers to taking control of one’s environment (Bindl & Parker, 2010). This behaviour is influenced both by the employee proactivity as a trait as well as by the organizational factors.

Parker and Collins (2010) divided proactive behaviors in three categories based on the target of such behaviors: the internal organization is the focus of proactive work behavior category, the organization’s fit with the external environment is the focus of proactive strategic
behavior, and the individual’s fit with the organizational environment is the focus of proactive person-environment [P-E] fit behavior. Proactive work behavior includes taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), voice (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Morrison, 2011), individual innovation, and problem prevention (Parker & Collins, 2010). These proactive behaviors focus on taking control and bringing about change within the organization, for example by speaking up about problems or with suggestions (i.e., voice). The proactive strategic behavior category includes specific proactive behaviors such as issue selling (Dutton et al., 2001) and strategic scanning (Parker & Collins, 2010). Such proactive strategic behaviors are wider in scope and have a more external focus (Parker & Collins, 2010). An example is an employee suggesting the development of a new product based on monitoring trends in the industry. Proactive P-E fit behavior consists of behaviors such as feedback-seeking (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003), socialization (Crant, 2000), job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and career initiative (Seibert et al., 2001). These types of proactive behaviors are focused on a proactive person-environment fit. An example is approaching one’s supervisor to discuss getting more responsibility.

Many studies of proactive behavior originate from “Western” countries such as the US, UK, the Netherlands, and Germany. Chapter 2 investigates the expression of proactive behaviors in the Ukraine in a qualitative study, focusing on the national context and its influence on the perceptions of proactivity. This chapter also contains a more elaborate discussion on proactivity. The themes of challenge and threat as well as leader reactions shown in this study are picked up in the following chapters.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I focus on one of the most researched and challenging proactive behaviors, namely voice behavior. Voice behavior is defined as “discretionary verbal communication of ideas, suggestions, or opinions with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning” (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011, p. 183). Voice has a
constructive intent, that is, its objective is to bring about change and voice thus goes further than simple complaining (Morisson, 2011). It allows employees to channel their dissatisfaction about the status quo by focusing on correcting mistakes, improving processes and formulating solutions to organizational problems (Fuller et al., 2007). For the employee, the benefits of voice are the opportunity to signal competence and hence receive higher performance evaluations (Fuller et al., 2007), using one’s expertise, having an impact, and making a difference in the organization. Yet, while voice is critical to organizational functioning and performance, voice can also be a risky behavior for the voiceer as it might be perceived as complaining or personal criticism, which can harm interpersonal relationships or create negative impressions (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Detert & Burris, 2007). For instance, Seibert et al. (2001) found a negative link between voice and career success. Voice can thus potentially come with both positive and negative consequences. Positive outcomes include the identification and correction of organizational inefficiencies, error detection, improving the organizational ability to adapt to change, and positive leader evaluations of employee performance (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012). Negative outcomes of employee voice may include negative effects on one’s career and personal relationships within the organization, damage to employee cooperation, higher level of job stress, role overload, and work-family conflict (Bolino, Valcea, & Harvey, 2010; Hung et al., 2012; Morrison, 2011). Moreover, voice does not always agree with supervisor perceptions and thus is not always listened to and taken on board by supervisors (Detert & Burris, 2007; Burris, Detert, & Romney, 2013; Morrison, 2014).

Different categorizations of voice have been suggested in the literature. One of these builds on the distinction between different voice targets thus differentiating between speaking up (voicing to the leader) and speaking out (voicing to the group, to colleagues/peers) (Liu et al., 2010). Another way to categorize voice is to distinguish between promotive and prohibitive
voice. Promotive voice is defined as speaking up with new ideas for improving overall organizational functioning (Wang, Huang, Chu, & Wang, 2010). It is challenging in nature, but it is also constructive as it entails providing innovative solutions and positive suggestions and has a future ideal state orientation (Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012). Prohibitive voice is about speaking up about the dysfunctional aspects of work practices (Wang et al., 2010) and has an alarming function about things that are potentially harmful for the organization (Wang et al., 2010; Liang et al., 2012). Chapters 3 and 4 draw on these categorizations of voice.

**Voice Antecedents and Overarching Research Theme**

The voice literature has identified several antecedents that influence employee voice. More generally, one can distinguish between individual (e.g., Crant, Kim, & Wang, 2011) and contextual characteristics (e.g., Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010). Previous research on voice antecedents showed that voice behavior is significantly related to individual characteristics such as extraversion and conscientiousness (Tornau & Frese, 2013), proactive personality (Fuler & Marler, 2009; Parker & Collins, 2010), personal and social identification (Liu et al., 2010), as well as contextual factors such as leader-member exchange (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009), transformational leadership (Liu et al., 2010), leader openness (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton, Ashford, O’Neill, & Lawrence, 2001; Milliken & Morrison, 2003), psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Morrison, 2014), voice climate (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011), and national culture (Nikolaou & Bourantas, 2008; Botero & Van Dyne, 2009, Brockner, Ackerman, Greenberg, Gelfand, Francesco, & Shapiro, 2001). For example, there is a positive relationship between leader openness and voice (Morrison, 2014). In other words, the more open is the voice target to employee voice behavior, the more likely is the employee to feel that his/her input is welcome and therefore, is more likely to voice. There is also a positive relationship between psychological safety and voice
(Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). The safer the employee feels in his/her team, the more likely is he/she to voice.

The general theme of this dissertation is the role of the context in proactive and voice behavior. The context where these behaviors occur has a big influence on when, why, how and whether those behaviors occur (e.g., Morrison, 2011; Dutton, Ashford, O’Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). “Situations provide direct stimuli as well as the context for interpreting other stimuli” (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; p. 857). In this dissertation the context is studied by looking at the role of the national culture (Chapter 2), voice target openness (Chapter 3) and the leader attributions and reactions (Study 4). Below is the overview of the context themes (Figure 1.1).

![Figure 1.1. Overview of the context themes.](image-url)
1) Chapter 2: National Culture

National culture has been suggested to play a role in the preference for and expression of proactive behaviors (Nikolaou & Bourantas, 2008; Botero & Van Dyne, 2009, Brockner, Ackerman, Greenberg, Gelfand, Francesco, & Shapiro, 2001). At the broadest and most distal level, the societal culture provides the context which affects the behavior of its members (e.g., Hofstede, 1984; 2001). The values and beliefs of a national culture influence the legitimacy and acceptance of certain behaviors, and in this case, of proactive behavior (Kreiser et al., 2010). Institutional theory suggests that culture motivates certain types of behavior directly (through values of a specific society) and indirectly (via institutions that give meaning to the attributes of that specific culture) (Kreiser et al., 2010). Not many studies have directly focused on culture and proactivity. Claes and Ruiz-Quintilla (1998) did a study on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and their influence on proactive behavior across 6 countries for three years. In their research, culture showed a significant relationship with the investigated proactive behaviors. Specifically, uncertainty avoidance had a negative relationship with skills development and networking, while individuals from collectivist countries were less engaged in career planning than employees from individualistic countries. In line with this, Claes et al. (2005) suggest that low power distance might foster proactivity as it enhances personal responsibility and innovation. Further, individualism emphasizes personal initiative and self-starting behavior. The authors also note that low uncertainty avoidance can possibly encourage proactivity and help to tolerate innovation due to higher bearing of risk, while long-term orientation, which is by definition future-focused, goes in line with perseverance and dynamism component of proactivity (Claes et al., 2005).

Botero and van Dyne (2009) looked at the interactive effects of leader-member exchange and power distance on employee voice in Colombia and the US. They found that in the US, LMX had a positive and power distance had a negative effect on voice and the effect
of power distance was stronger when LMX was high, while in Colombia both LMX and power
distance were related to voice but did not interact, which illustrates a clear cultural difference
regarding the perceptions and acceptance of voice behaviors across countries. The above-
mentioned studies thus show that the cultural context influences employee proactivity. Chapter
2 will focus on this contextual factor and investigate in depth the expression and evaluation of
proactive behavior in one specific societal cultural context (the Ukraine as a former communist
country).

2) Chapter 3: Target Openness

Having investigated the effect of a very broad and more distal context variable in
Chapter 2, societal culture, I turn to a more proximal contextual variable in Chapter 3, the target
of a specific proactive behavior, namely voice. Voice is an instance of social proactive behavior
and a safe environment is important for voice to occur. Employees conduct a cost-benefit
analysis before voicing and while doing so they assess the context signals of how favorable the
environment is to voice (Chiaburu, Marinova, & Van Dyne, 2008). Favorable contexts refer to
contexts in which the target of a voice message (mostly the supervisor or manager) is perceived
to listen, and there is little uncertainty about or fear of negative consequences (Milliken &
Morrison, 2003). In this dissertation the focus is on the voice target’s openness (the leader for
leader-directed voice behavior or speaking up; the team for voicing to colleagues or speaking
out). Leaders strongly influence employee voice behavior (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton,
Ashford, O’Neill, & Lawrence, 2001; Milliken & Morrison, 2003). They are often the direct
target of voice, signal whether this behavior is welcome, and have the formal authority to
reward or punish employees (Mowbray et al., 2015). When they are perceived as open,
empathetic and tolerant, this increases the likelihood and frequency of leader-directed voice
(Troster & van Knippenberg, 2012). When the leader is perceived as listening, supportive,
encouraging and facilitating, while involving employees in discussions and decision-making,
employees will feel encouraged to speak up and engage in voice behaviors (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005).

Next to the leader, employees turn to their “immediate interpersonal network” (their colleagues) to voice (speaking out) and thus also evaluate how favorable it is for them to voice in their team (Liang et al., 2012). Such team favorableness to voice is captured by the employee’s perceptions of psychological safety in the team, which are high when an individual feels able to show him/herself without fear of negative consequences from colleagues, for instance, feeling free to point out problems or make suggestions without being criticized by colleagues (Roberge & Van Dick, 2010). Psychological safety thus reflects the belief that engaging in risky behaviors like voice will not cause personal harm (Detert & Burris, 2007), and that fellow team members will not embarrass or reject an employee for sharing ideas or information (Troster & Knippenberg, 2012). People are more likely to engage in voice when they feel psychologically safe in a team and when they believe their position is supported by others. Chapter 3 focuses on the voice target and the impact of the target openness on the employee decision to voice, switch target or stay silent.

3) Chapter 4: Leader Attributions and Reactions

As mentioned above, leaders are often the target of voice behavior (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2015) and they have a strong impact on whether voicers decide to speak up and often decide whether suggestions are followed up on (Morrison, 2011). In Chapter 4 I investigate the role of leaders in more detail. Voice behavior is challenging to the status quo and can be threatening to the leader as s/he identifies with and has ownership of the status quo (Morrison, 2011). Frese and Fay (2001) argue that employee initiative can ‘rock the boat’ and is therefore not always appreciated by the leader. For employee voice to be an effective and reoccurring phenomenon, a constructive reaction by the leader is essential though as leaders
are the ones who evaluate voice behavior and need to do something with the information voiced. Leader reactions can range from open negative reactions to full voice endorsement. Chapter 4 zooms in on such leader reactions by looking at the attributions that leaders make when employees engage in promotive or prohibitive voice. I distinguish between promotive and prohibitive voice as leader reactions to those have been shown to differ (Burris, 2012; Liang et al., 2012). Next, the way the voice message is framed will also impact its effectiveness (Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012), in particular the emotional framing is important when delivering a promotive or prohibitive voice message (Burris, 2012, Morrison, 2014). If a voice message is paired up with a congruent (fitting) emotional framing, it is more likely to be perceived as more authentic and clear by causing a ‘feeling of rightness’ (Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003), and thus less to be seen as manipulative, resulting in more positive supervisor reactions. I propose that promotive voice is focused on the future ideal state and has a positive improvement nature, which should be accompanied with fitting positive emotions such as enthusiasm; prohibitive voice, on the other hand, is focused on preventing harm (“process losses”) (Liang et al., 2012) and, due to its alarming nature, should be accompanied with negative emotions such as anxiety or worry in order to generate more positive supervisor reactions to employee voice.

Next, I investigate two mechanisms how employee voice translates into supervisor reactions, leader perceptions of employee confidence, and leader perceptions of being threatened by employee voice. The attribution of confidence to the source of a message has been discussed in the advice taking literature and was found to be an important determinant of positive leader reactions (see Bonnacio & Dalal, 2006; Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012). As stated above, employee initiatives can ‘rock the boat’, and leaders thus might feel threatened by voice as it challenges the status quo (Whiting et al., 2012; Burris, 2012; Morrison, 2014; Jung, 2014). Burris (2012) found that leader perceptions of threat mediated the relationship between the
voice type and voice endorsement. In Chapter 4, I investigate whether perceptions of employee confidence and voice threat level mediate the relationship between voice type and supervisor reaction, and whether the emotional framing of the voice message affects this relationship.

**Thesis Outline**

This dissertation looks at the factors outlined above under the umbrella of the context of proactive behavior in the workplace and more specifically employee voice behavior. Each chapter is a separate single-study article (Chapters 2 and 3) or a multi-study article (Chapter 4) and can be read independently from the rest.

Chapter 2 is a qualitative study conducted on the meaning and expression of proactive behavior in the Ukraine and focuses on the role of the national context in proactivity at work. This study was conducted among 20 employees by means of in-depth interviews. One of the main findings of the first study is that the degree of challenge and threat of a proactive behavior for the supervisor is the main driver of both employees’ expression of voice behavior and supervisors’ reactions to voice. The later studies (Chapters 3 and 4) focus further on voice behavior, to investigate the challenge and threat aspect of proactivity and leader reactions more closely.

Chapter 3 is a multi-source study with a sample of 157 triads (employee-colleague-leader) collected at a higher educational establishment in the Netherlands. It focuses on the role of the degree of threat of a voice behavior for its target (leader or team) and, more specifically, on the perceived threat’s impact on an employee’s decision whether to speak up, speak out or stay silent. The study also assumes that this relationship is moderated by the leader’s and team’s openness to voice. Results show that leader openness moderates an employee’s decision to switch the target of his/her voice behavior and either speak out or stay silent when the content of voice is threatening to the leader.
Chapter 4 is a multi-study article consisting of two scenario studies of 159 and 117 employees in the Netherlands and the US respectively complemented by exploratory qualitative interviews among five Dutch employees in leadership positions. This chapter looks at the concept of fit between the voice type (promotive versus prohibitive) and the emotional framing used to communicate such voice (either enthusiasm or anxiety/worry). Such congruence influences supervisor reactions to voice behavior through the mediators of perceived confidence of the voicer and perceived threat of the voice message to leader decision-making. The congruence between voice type and emotional framing is indeed found to play an important role as did the investigated mediators perceived confidence of voicer and perceived threat of voice message.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the content of all the three chapters including suggestions for future research, followed by Chapter 6 where a reflection and discussion of the methodological choices and study limitations are provided.

**Contribution to the Field**

This dissertation adds to the literature in several respects. Firstly, the role of national or societal culture in the expression and evaluation of employee proactivity is still under-researched. In particular, most studies focus on Western countries or the Chinese context to date, but there are hardly any studies available conducted in the context of Eastern Europe and former Communist countries. Chapter 2 contributes to the scarce studies in these regions. Chapter 2 has been presented at the 7th International Research Meeting in Business and Management (IRMBAM-2016) in July 2016 in Nice, France and is in the review & resubmit stage at the International Journal of Human Resource Management. Secondly, more recent studies on voice distinguish between various targets of voice behavior (speaking up and speaking out) which was adopted in Chapter 3 and combined with silence, and even fewer
studies to date examined voice behavior and silence together in one study. Thirdly, the content of voice behavior has been identified as an understudied antecedent (Burris, 2012; Liu et al., 2010; Liang et al., 2012; Detert & Burris, 2007), and Chapter 3 contributes to this stream of literature by introducing the concept of the degree of threat of the voiced message, which to my knowledge, has been repeatedly mentioned in the literature but not been explicitly investigated so far. Fourthly, Chapter 4 adopts the categorization of promotive and prohibitive voice that was introduced in the more recent literature on voice behavior (Burris, 2012) and explores how emotional framing of the voice message can strengthen either of those voice types messages. Chapter 4 introduces influence techniques for the employee on how to make their voice message more effective and result in more positive reactions from the leader by using specific emotions. The study hereby contributes to the voice literature and provides practical advice to employees on how to voice their message.
The importance of employee proactivity for organizations is widely acknowledged by scholars and practitioners. Yet, the literature has almost exclusively assumed a ‘Western perspective’, and what proactivity means and implies in different societal cultures has not yet received much attention. Even less is known about employee proactivity in the context of formerly communist countries that are undergoing the transformation towards a market economy. The goal of this study is to explore the perception and acceptance of proactive behavior in one such country, the Ukraine. We compare ‘Western’ research and theorizing on proactivity to the Russian literature and present the results of a qualitative study among 20 employees and managers in the Ukraine. Our findings suggest that some forms of proactivity exist both in the ‘Western’ context and the Ukraine. However, the Western findings on proactivity only seem applicable in the Ukraine to a certain extent. In the Ukraine, particularly pro-self-oriented proactivity with the goal of working around the system or sustaining one’s job is socially accepted. More challenging forms of proactivity such as speaking up are far less common as these are seen as supervisor-threatening, and employees report a strong fear of negative consequences of showing such forms of proactivity.

Keywords: proactivity; proactive behavior; challenging behavior; culture; Ukraine
Introduction

The importance of employee proactivity for the management of individual and organizational performance has been widely acknowledged by scholars and practitioners in both the HRM (e.g., Shepherd & Matthews, 2000; Ruona & Gibson, 2004) and organizational behavior literatures (e.g., Belschak, Den Hartog, & Fay, 2010; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Proactivity is seen as important within many core HR topics such as career management (Veldhoven & Dorenbosch, 2008), on-the-job innovation (Dorenbosch, van Engen, & Verhagen, 2005; Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2008), job design (Jong, Parker, Wennekers & Wu, 2015), and performance appraisals (Kampkotter, 2017). Also, in organizational practice, job descriptions and vacancies nowadays often list proactivity as one of the desired features of the ideal job candidate.

An increasing stream of research shows the benefits of proactive behavior for both the proactive employee and the organization (e.g., Thomas et al., 2010). For example, in HR related areas proactivity has been linked to individual job performance (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010), newcomer socialization and adjustment (Ashforth et al., 2007), skill development and career success (Thomas et al., 2010), and error detection (Burris, 2012). However, these positive outcomes do not always occur as managers can also see proactive behavior of their employees such as speaking up with suggestions for change as “rocking the boat” and challenging the valued status quo. Managers might thus react with skepticism and proactivity may then even backfire for employees (Campbell, 2000; Frese & Fay, 2001). This makes proactivity a complex yet important topic for HR scholars to investigate. In this study, we explore the role of societal culture (more specifically that of the Ukraine, a formerly communist Eastern European country) on the expression and social acceptance of proactivity at work, which adds to earlier work on the cross-cultural stability and transferability of HRM concepts and practices (e.g., Easterby-Smith, Malina, & Yuan, 1995; Tayeb, 1998).
Proactive behavior is defined as “anticipatory action that employees take to impact themselves and/or their environments” (Grant & Ashford, 2008, p. 4). As mentioned above, in the literature about proactivity in Western cultures employee proactivity is typically seen as important for companies and usually portrayed as desirable behavior (e.g., Grant & Ashford, 2008; Bindl & Parker, 2010). Yet, employees may also engage in self-starting, anticipatory actions which benefit themselves, but not the company (Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010; Bolino et al., 2010). Also, as noted proactive behavior can upset personal relationships due to its challenging nature (Grant, Gino, & Hofmann, 2011). Thus, the literature also recognizes that proactive behavior may have (social) costs and is not always appreciated by leaders (e.g., Bateman & Crant, 1993; Belschak et al., 2010; Burris, 2012). Negative leader reactions to proactive behavior might be even stronger in Eastern Europe than in ‘the West’ due to high power distance and the lack of employee rights and involvement related to the remnants of the Soviet Union era system of a centrally planned economy and bureaucracy, where an employee’s main task was to follow orders, and where challenging the status quo was not appreciated (e.g., Frese et al., 1996). Such a context contrasts with the challenging and agentic nature of proactivity. In sum, while in modern market economies organizations may increasingly embrace proactive employees, in formerly communist countries organizations and their managers might still struggle with past habits which favored reactive or even passive rather than proactive employee behavior.

Current proactivity literature has almost exclusively assumed a ‘Western perspective’, that is, the majority of studies was conducted in Western countries with Western participants (mainly in the Western European and Anglo-Saxon contexts). The few studies that have focused on the influence of culture, suggest that societal culture affects the amount of proactive

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1 By Western perspective we refer to academic publications in the English language on proactivity in Western cultures
behavior employees show at work (e.g., Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Claes et al., 2005). Here, we aim to explore the impact of societal culture on employee proactivity and investigate the meaning as well as the social acceptance of proactivity in an Eastern European (formerly communist) context, namely the Ukraine, which is currently in transition towards becoming a market economy. To inform our research, we examine the literature about proactivity in Western cultures, address how culture may play a role, and compare the Russian\(^2\) to the “Western” perspective. Next, we explore the meaning, social acceptance, and desirability of proactivity in a qualitative study in the Ukraine.

The ‘Western’ Perspective on Employee Proactivity

Proactive employee behavior is future-focused and change-oriented behavior which challenges the status quo (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Belschak et al., 2010). By engaging in such behavior “an individual aims to bring about change, including change to the situation… and/or change within oneself” (Bindl & Parker, 2010, p. 3-4). Proactive behavior is self-starting and improvement-oriented and represents a deviation from assigned tasks and prescribed roles, accepted practices, and existing routines (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Proactive work behaviors are similar to organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) in the sense that both are discretionary. Yet, proactivity is different from OCB as the latter is not always self-starting or future-oriented and includes reactive behaviors (e.g., compliance, loyalty) (see Grant & Ashford, 2008).

Many different proactive behaviors have been identified and to categorize these, Parker and Collins (2010) created higher-order categories of proactive behavior based on the target of the intended change. They distinguished three targets: the internal organization (proactive work

\(^2\) The Russian literature refers to academic articles published in the Russian language about (formerly) communist countries
behavior), the organization’s fit with the external environment (proactive strategic behavior), and the individual’s fit with the organizational environment (proactive person-environment [P-E] fit behavior).

Proactive work behavior includes taking charge (Morrison & Phelps, 1999), voice (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998; Morrison, 2011), individual innovation, and problem prevention (Parker & Collins, 2010). These behaviors focus on taking control and bringing about change within the organization, for example, influencing colleagues to improve work methods (Parker & Collins, 2010). Proactive strategic behavior consists of issue selling (Dutton et al., 2001) and strategic scanning (Parker & Collins, 2010). Unlike proactive work behavior, proactive strategic behavior is wider in scope and has a more external focus (Parker & Collins, 2010). An example is an employee suggesting the development of a new product based on monitoring trends in the industry. Proactive P-E fit behavior focuses on changing the individual’s fit with the organizational environment and includes feedback-seeking (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003), proactive socialization (Crant, 2000), job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and career initiative (Seibert et al., 2001). An example is approaching one’s supervisor to discuss getting more responsibility.

Supervisor Reactions to Employee Proactivity

In the organizational context, supervisors often play a central role in determining whether proactivity is valued or not, thus many proactive behaviors can be risky for the employee. Supervisors might view employees who engage in challenging proactive behavior as disruptive, which may negatively affect their perception of the employee (Burris, 2012). Supervisors usually also have the authority to administer rewards and punishments (Detert & Burris, 2007; Takeuchi et al., 2012). Thus, employees who show initiative, suggest ideas, and proactively build social networks may be evaluated more favorably and be rewarded by
supervisors as long as they appreciate such proactivity (Grant & Ashford, 2008). They might be punished however, if their supervisors do not appreciate proactivity.

Supervisors signal to employees whether proactive behavior is welcome in the organization (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2011). If a supervisor shows the employee that proactive behavior is not welcome (e.g., by ignoring an employee’s voice efforts), an employee is likely to become less proactive. For example, Bindl and Parker (2010) suggest that supervisors often do not appreciate inappropriately expressed voice or voice that takes the form of complaining about a problem instead of addressing it. Seibert et al. (2001) found that US employees who spoke up more received fewer promotions. Despite these few more critical notes, the current (Western) literature on proactivity generally emphasizes the benefits and desirability of employee proactivity (e.g., Grant & Ashford, 2008).

**Culture and Employee Proactive Behavior**

Several scholars have acknowledged that the cultural context is likely to be influential in relation to proactive behavior (e.g., Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Claes et al., 2005; Nikolaou et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2011). Kreiser et al. (2010) note that the values and beliefs relating to a national culture influence the degree of legitimacy and acceptance of different behaviors. This includes proactive ones. Societal values and beliefs are likely to affect the types of proactive behavior typically shown by employees as well as supervisors’ appreciation of and reactions to proactive behaviors. Despite criticism (e.g., McSweeney, 2002), Hofstede’s model (2001) has been frequently used in comparative cultural studies. Hofstede distinguished five cultural dimensions: collectivism/individualism, power distance, femininity/masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term orientation. The existing scarce work on culture and proactive behavior shows that three of those dimensions seem particularly relevant.
to the expression of proactivity at work: collectivism/individualism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Claes et al., 2005).

People in countries high on **collectivism** focus more on group harmony, well-being, and collective goals, compared to those in individualistic societies who tend to be more self-driven and focused on their own goals and career (Keenan, 2007). Autonomy, personal achievement, individual rights and opinions are important in individualistic societies. Based on a study among 1022 employees in Belgium, Finland and Spain, Claes et al. (2005) suggest that individualism emphasizes personal initiative and self-starting behavior. In individualistic cultures, therefore, supervisors are more likely to expect proactive behavior from employees and are more likely to facilitate and support such behavior.

**Power distance** focuses on how a society deals with inequality. In organizations, it relates to the degree of centralization of authority and autocratic leadership (Hofstede, 2001). In countries with high power distance, typically there is more hierarchy within organizations, supervisors tend to be less accessible to subordinates, and there tends to be less trust between them. In egalitarian cultures, decision-making power is typically more decentralized, with more support for individual thinking and more cooperation between supervisor and employee (Škerlavaj et al., 2013). Proactive behavior that involves challenging the status quo might ‘rock the boat’ and is likely not appreciated by supervisors in such high power distance cultures. Supervisors in a high power distance culture may be more inclined to perceive employee initiative as challenging and inappropriate. Claes et al. (2005) conclude from their study in three Western European countries that a low power distance might foster proactivity through enhancing personal responsibility.

When **uncertainty avoidance** is high, there tend to be more formal rules, stability, and an avoidance of deviant ideas and behaviors. People tend to be more risk-averse and use rules
and regulations to minimize risk. In countries with low uncertainty avoidance people tend to be more flexible, actively seek information, and have a higher propensity to change attitudes and behaviors (Black, 2005; Škerlavaj et al., 2013). The Ukraine scores high on uncertainty avoidance (Woldan, 2009). Since proactive behavior is change- and future-oriented and involves risk taking (Bindl & Parker, 2010; Belschak et al., 2010), societies high on uncertainty avoidance are less likely to accept and facilitate proactive behavior. In line with this, Claes and colleagues (2005) found that collectivism along with a strong uncertainty avoidance inhibited proactive career behavior. In contrast, low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance facilitated proactive skill development, consultation, and networking behavior in a cross-cultural study conducted in Flanders, England, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain; Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998).

As noted, most proactivity research to date has been done in the USA, Canada, Australia, and several Western European countries (in the GLOBE study these countries were mostly in the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon culture clusters; House et al., 2004), many of these are characterized by a relatively low power distance, relatively high individualism and moderate uncertainty avoidance. While studies on proactive behavior have also been conducted in other cultural settings (e.g., Nikolaou et al., 2008 in Greece; Zhang et al., 2011 in China), these studies have not focused on the role of that cultural context. Research mostly starts from the implicit premise that proactivity is a universal behavioral tendency which is experienced similarly and has similar meaning across cultures. To our knowledge, no study to date has investigated the influence of an Eastern European cultural context on the meaning and social acceptance of proactivity. Yet, the Eastern European context differs from most Western (e.g., Anglo-Saxon) cultures in the sense that these cultures tend to score higher on power distance,

3 GLOBE is a cross-cultural research project among 62 societies and stands for Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness.
collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. Such a cultural setting seems less conducive to proactivity as explained above. Earlier HR studies on, for instance, talent management have also shown substantial differences between a ‘Western perspective’ and Eastern European practices at the workplace (e.g., Skuza, Scullion, & McDonnell, 2013, in their study in Poland).

**Proactivity in an Eastern European Context**

The Eastern European context is not well-known in the existing HRM and OB literature, which is dominated by studies conducted in Western cultures (with a growing focus on Asia). One of the few exceptions is the study by Skuza et al. (2013) who found that HR functions were largely underdeveloped in Polish companies, and managers did not assume the (pro)active HRM role that is usually advocated in the Western literature. Another example is the study by Koopman et al. (1999) who compared the Western to the Eastern European context within the GLOBE project. They found that leaders in organizations from Central and Eastern Europe tend to have less negative attitudes towards autocratic leadership and value diplomacy more than those from Western Europe.

Also, within the GLOBE framework, Den Hartog et al. (1997) compared preferred leadership characteristics in the Netherlands and Poland. They note that although Poland at the time of the data collection was going through reforms to facilitate a change toward democracy and a market economy, the pace of change in mentality did not keep up with the system reforms, and such a fundamental change in mentality requires a lot of time. The formerly centralized planning resulted in a lack of felt personal responsibility in work behavior and decision-making for both managers and subordinates (Den Hartog et al., 1997). Frese and colleagues (1996) addressed the role of personal initiative in East and West Germany in the early 1990s. They found that employee initiative was lower in Eastern Germany than in Western Germany. Frese and colleagues (1996) noted that supervisors in Eastern Germany often failed to support
employee initiatives and would even punish these as in the short-term, employees who put new ideas forward might be a nuisance for them. This less positive stance of leaders towards employee proactivity might be especially true in Eastern European countries due to their relatively high power distance, where as an employee it is more common to execute decisions made by the supervisor than to come up with ideas or to participate in decision-making. In line with this, we suggest that employees’ and managers’ views on proactivity may differ in Western and Eastern European countries.

**The Ukrainian Cultural Context**

The Ukraine is the largest country of Europe. It is characterized by a Soviet past, close links to Russia, and for many Europeans it is psychologically still a country outside Europe (Kuzio, 2003). The Ukraine is an example of a formerly planned economy currently in the process of developing into a market economy (Brice & Richardson, 2009). The Ukraine is a collectivistic culture, low on individualism, is characterized by extensive hierarchical structures and scores high on power distance (Woldan, 2009).

Managerial hierarchy (as during the Soviet times) is extensive in the Ukraine and is reflected in formal authority systems and a large number of management layers making little effort to generate employee involvement (Croucher, 2010). During the Soviet Union era, workers, and lower and middle management had little input on work processes. Because of the lack of competition, little incentive existed to develop high-level goals in such a context (Frese et al., 1996). Managers in Eastern Europe were more risk-avoidant than in the West and showed little independent thinking or achievement orientation, they had also little interest in employee initiatives and even punished these (Frese et al., 1996).

Before 1989, the workplace situation in the Ukraine was regarded as “workers’ negative control”, meaning workers had no decision-making power in what was produced, but had to
determine how to achieve planned targets (Croucher, 2010; Croucher & Morrison, 2012). Meeting performance targets was expected regardless of whether necessary resources were available (Yamkovenko et al., 2007). The work environment during the Soviet Union emphasized performance and deemphasized rewards. While exceptional performance would be rewarded, rewards would usually not be material (e.g., a letter of gratification, a medal, etc.). After the collapse of the Soviet Union these non-material rewards were discontinued, while the new, more material reward system usually inherent in a market economy was not (yet) implemented (Yamkovenko et al., 2007).

To date, the level of employee autonomy and employee involvement in the Ukraine is still low (Croucher, 2010). Also, Human Resources, as a management or support function, is not yet fully developed (Yamkovenko et al., 2007). For example, supervisors rarely meet with employees to discuss training interventions or work progress. During the Soviet era, performance evaluation in general was ignored and avoided. Nowadays many companies still apply the old Soviet business model, although the business environment in the Ukraine is slowly changing towards the Western approach (Yamkovenko et al., 2007).

**Employee Proactivity in the Russian Literature**

As noted, employee proactive behavior has been a topic of interest in the Western literature for several decades. Many proactivity constructs date back to the 1990s, some even earlier, including voice (e.g., Hirschman, 1970; Spencer, 1986). In contrast, the few existing articles on proactivity in the Russian literature only date back to 2012. The concept of proactivity and initiative in the Russian literature shows some fundamental commonalities with the conceptualization in the Western literature. In both literatures, proactivity is conceptualized as both a trait and a behavior, and proactive behavior is seen as being affected by both
individual and contextual factors (e.g., Bindl & Parker, 2010; Erzin, 2014a; 2014b). However, there are also differences.

The Russian psychologist Erzin (2014c) notes a strong focus of Western scholars on challenging proactive workplace behavior, while he emphasizes the importance of proactivity in different psychological areas such as health psychology. The literal translation of proactive behavior into Russian (проактивное поведение) is very recent and not yet often mentioned in the literature. The concept of “initiative” in the Russian literature gets closest to the meaning of proactivity in the Western literature, and the Russian terms are used interchangeably. While the Western definition of personal initiative only refers to pro-organizational behaviors (Frese & Fay, 2001) the definition of initiative in the Russian literature also encompasses pro-self behaviors.

There are two words in Russian for initiative: “инициатива” and “инициативность”, while the first can mean either the behavior or the personality trait, the latter refers only to the trait (Pakhno, 2014). Initiative (инициатива) is going beyond the limits of one’s work conditions, searching for new ways of solving current work issues, and doing one’s task in a self-starting manner, without external stimuli (Pakhno, 2014). Initiative can take the form of proactive goal setting, but also undertaking proactive behaviors to achieve those goals (Holodljajeva, 2011). The word “initiative” generally has a positive connotation, although the popular media suggests it should be applied carefully in the workplace. For example, initiative would not be appropriate in companies with strict rules and regulations, and initiatives taken should not be too far outside the scope of one’s job function (SuperJob, 2015).

The scarce, more recent Russian academic literature also addresses the desirability of proactive behavior, for example by distinguishing between constructive and destructive proactive behavior (Erzin, 2014a). Constructive proactivity is aimed at networking and
managing productive contact with people while maintaining harmony in interpersonal relationships. Proactivity here thus focuses more on stability and harmony and less on challenge and change than in the literature on proactivity in Western cultures. Destructive proactive behavior is a conscious choice of an individual to violate interpersonal harmony and relationships as it goes against other people or society (Erzin, 2014a). In this view, if employee proactive behavior is potentially damaging to interpersonal relationships (e.g., voice), it is destructive. The Russian academic literature only describes the more self-focused proactive behaviors in positive ways; more challenging types of proactive behaviors tend to be characterized as undesirable or counterproductive. Thus, the academic Russian literature focuses mainly on proactively managing oneself rather than influencing the organization. More specifically, proactive socialization (‘productive contact with people’, Erzin 2014a), proactive coping (Starchenkova, 2012), and proactive career management (Sedyh, 2012) are emphasized in this literature. From the categorization of Parker and Collins (2010) presented earlier, this comes closest to proactive P-E fit behavior.

To conclude, the concept of proactivity in the Russian literature is more narrowly characterized than in the literature on proactivity in Western cultures, limiting it to less risky and challenging forms. Behavior that focuses on speaking up and changing the organization is seen as potentially destructive and thus usually depicted as undesirable. Below, in our study we explore whether the ideas and focus of the Russian literature are also found among employees and managers in the Ukraine.

Method

We conducted a qualitative exploratory study with the goal of investigating the meaning and the expression of proactive behavior in the Ukraine. In-depth interviews were used to collect the data because these allowed to reconstruct proactive behavior encounters from the
past and related them to the current situation (Dutton et al., 1997; Dutton et al., 2001). We used semi-structured interviews to keep the focus of the interviews on the themes of interest, yet allow for some flexibility (Brymer, 2008). Also, Frese et al. (1996) suggest that probing helps minimize the risk of social desirability bias when studying initiative.

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol included questions about a typical working day of the interviewee, definitions and examples of the term anticipation (to reflect the anticipatory nature of proactive behavior) and personal initiative (retrospective initiative, so reported examples of initiative demonstrated at work in the past similar to Frese et al., 1996), motives, supervisor reactions to proactivity, and consequences of those behaviors. We also asked interviewees questions on whether they felt initiative was welcome in their organization and in the Ukraine in general. The interview protocol was designed in English and translated into Russian. One of the authors who is a native speaker, first translated the protocol, then two more native Russian speakers, who were fluent in English, studied the translation, compared it to the English version, and made small adjustments. Afterwards, back-translation was performed to ensure accuracy (Brice & Richardson, 2009).

Before data collection, the interview protocol was pre-tested on two Ukrainian employees. These Ukrainians did not understand a literal translation of the term ‘proactive behavior’ as ‘проактивное поведение’. Temple and Edwards (2008) argue that conveying meaning is more important than literally translating, thus as the terms initiative and proactive behavior are used interchangeably in the academic Russian literature, we used the terms anticipatory organizational behavior (предусмотрительность) and initiative (иnициатива, инициативность) during the interviews.

**Sample**
The interviewees were recruited through a personal network of one of the authors using a snowball sampling method (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Guided by Green & Thorogood (2009) as well as Dworkin (2009) we reached a saturation point as interesting insights on proactivity in the Ukraine were generated and repeated. The sample consisted of 20 respondents (12 female and 8 male, average age of 41 years; see Table 2.1); 17 respondents had a higher education, 13 worked for for-profit organizations, and 12 held supervisory roles. Participants’ job tenure ranged from 1.5 months to 40 years (average tenure 8.6 years). To collect a broad range of perspectives, we talked to employees from various organizations and sectors (profit and non-profit) and in supervisory as well as non-supervisory roles. Examples of the industries covered in our study are government agencies, banking, construction, education, tobacco industry, and healthcare.

Table 2.1

*Information about the Respondents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Profit/Non-Profit</th>
<th>Supervisor/Number of Subordinates</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wheel Plant Manager</td>
<td>Profit Yes/266</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>Profit Yes/11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Warehouse Manager</td>
<td>Profit Yes/37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Branch Chief</td>
<td>Profit Yes/2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vice Branch Chief</td>
<td>Profit Yes/40</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>Yes/10</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Political Activist</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Head of the Regional</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Yes/18</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>Yes/6</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>Yes/6</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1 month/4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Yes/3</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Paramedic</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Construction Worker</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>Yes/3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Paramedic/Massage Therapist</td>
<td>Profit</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Head of Physical</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Yes/8</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Data Collection

The two interviews conducted as a pre-test were not included in the sample. Out of 25 people approached after this pre-test, 20 agreed to participate in the interview; no material incentive was offered for participation. The interviews were conducted in July 2014 in the Ukraine. All interviews were conducted face-to-face to achieve the richest context information (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The interviews lasted about three-quarters of an hour on average and were conducted in Russian. Only after themes were identified during the data analysis, we translated relevant quotes into English. Despite the unstable political situation and the armed conflict taking place in the East of the country, there were no interruptions or issues with collecting the data. The interviews were collected in the two towns Kremenchug and Khorol, in the Poltava region, located far (433km) from the zone of conflict and with a relatively stable political situation.

The interview protocol was used in every interview to ensure that all themes were covered, yet the interview process was flexible (e.g., order of the questions, amount of probing, and follow up questions). At the beginning of each interview, the respondent was asked for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education/Teacher</th>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Profit</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>42</th>
<th>8 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services Worker</td>
<td>Pension Funds</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

4 People interviewed spoke predominantly Russian with an occasional use of Ukrainian words.
permission to record the interview, the interviewer explained the purpose of the study and offered the opportunity to receive a written report of the research findings. All interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. During the interview, after providing some general background information on themselves, interviewees were first asked to talk about their typical working day and their responsibilities at work to make them feel at ease and collect information about the nature of their jobs, then the other themes followed.

**Data Analysis**

We used an abductive approach to the analysis (Locke, 2011). Abduction allows to move back and forth between data and theory iteratively, which is helpful when looking for possible explanations of a phenomenon (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). We used the following sequence in the data analysis: familiarizing ourselves with the data, finding patterns and themes based on initial and emerging codes, searching for various relationships between data, and between data and theory, visual display of the information, and writing up findings (Kawulich, 2004).

**Coding**

Based on the interview protocol as well as existing work on proactivity (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Parker & Bindl, 2010), we created an initial list of themes and codes with the purpose of broadly examining the concept of proactivity in the Ukraine. We read all transcripts and coded them by hand based on whether parts seemed to have potential theoretical significance (Bryman, 2008). Then the transcripts were entered into the Nvivo 10 software and were coded and analyzed according to these themes. Coding was done in several steps. Initial coding was driven both by the existing theory (see above) as well as based on the collected data (Kawulich, 2004), which resulted in a detailed list of 37 codes. Next, focused coding was done by combining several initial codes (e.g., ‘reaction to anticipation’ was combined with
‘reactions of the supervisor’, ‘projects to support initiative’ with ‘initiative in your organization’) while dropping others as they were outside the scope of this research (e.g., ‘working overtime’). Appendix 1 shows an overview of the initial deductive codes from existing theories as well as the final list of abductive codes generated through the analysis.

The data was re-evaluated using the selected codes which resulted in a list of theoretically meaningful themes or concepts. Next, we created collections of quotations per concept to recognize patterns in the data. This resulted in 33 pages of quotations. Next, we reread those concepts and compared them to the definitions of proactive behavior in the Western literature. We iterated multiple times between empirical data and interpretation based on the existing theories on proactivity.

Results

Figure 2.1 illustrates the main themes of the findings combined in a framework of proactivity in the Ukraine. At the broadest level, the themes reflect the system perspective. The second level is around social acceptance of proactivity. The third set of themes focuses on the functions of proactive behavior, which is influenced by the first two levels. Below, we further elaborate on each of these.
Context

The Ukrainian context is characterized by a **discouraging institutional system**, which interviewees see as a barrier for proactivity. In Eastern Europe, such a system was historically strong and ‘came first’ (it had priority) (Den Hartog et al., 1997). This strong system relates to the need for social stability and order and reflects the country’s high uncertainty avoidance (Sarros & Santora, 2002). The Soviet era has left its legacy in the Ukraine, and the institutional system is still largely unchanged, which is reflected in lower levels of expected proactivity, as illustrated by quotes such as:

“...I can say in our ministry there is still an influence of the Soviet system, a bunch of instructions, forms, papers. Bureaucracy is a big barrier. People of retirement age work at the Ministry of Education, and they are, by definition, without initiative. **We need another 10 years for the young people with initiative and new thinking to come...**”  
**Respondent # 18 (see Table 1)**
“For some reason, in our country everyone is used to work according to a template.” Respondent # 19

Some interviews show that the phrase from the Soviet era ‘Initiative is punished’ is still alive in the minds of Ukrainians, and that societal ordering and placement are seen as important. For example:

“In our country initiative is always punished. There are various circles of people: management, subordinates...Every person has his/her own intellectual level. A person who is lower in the ranking, can show him/herself and consider it to be a good thing, but this person broke some rules and did not do the right thing. I do not mean to say that initiative is bad, but basically initiative in our country is always punished...[Why?] Because the person tries to put himself higher than another person” Respondent # 13

“It was 2008 financial crisis in Ukraine. I was working as a department manager in a bank. And when people could not keep making payments for their loans, I wrote a letter to the top-management with a suggestion of how to solve this issue, so that the bank would be fine and the client would be fine. For this I was told off, and I was told that it was not my responsibility to make such decisions...”

Respondent # 8

“Of course, initiators get in trouble.” Respondent # 19

Social Acceptance of Proactivity

The specific context of the Ukraine as introduced by the institutional system of the country affects people’s views of and reactions to proactivity at work. The data show that in the Ukraine showing proactivity is often and quickly seen as supervisor threatening behavior (conflict inducing, undesirable). This is even more the case when supervisors have achieved
their managerial position through networks and being someone’s protégé (still commonly seen in the Ukraine), which often leads to people holding positions for which they lack competencies. Interviewees mention these managers feel threatened by subordinate proactivity, which might reveal their lack of skills:

“On paper they do, but at the same time it ends with managers... In practice, a lot of jobs are taken up by management. These people are in-laws, brother, acquaintance, someone was friends with someone, studied somewhere with someone, worked somewhere with someone. And that people do not always correspond to the position... and most of them are afraid to accept a strong employee...they feel competition. Since the person is not fit for the job, he/she always fears that s/he, God forbid, would be removed. That is the problem.”

Respondent # 8

“... This (initiative) would create additional difficulties for management - having to come to an agreement, additional work. And they do not want it...It is an absence of any type of reaction from the manager on any suggestion that is worth attention. Initiative is blocked right away. No one hears us” Respondent # 5

Supervisors fear that their employees threaten their position and status and cause extra work with their change-oriented ideas and initiatives, so they often see initiative as negative. The quotes above illustrate proactivity is often not appreciated by Ukrainian supervisors.

The interviews also show that proactive behavior in the Ukraine is sometimes perceived as disruptive by proactive employees themselves as well as it results in extra efforts for them and costs extra energy thereby negatively affecting their core work tasks and meeting of work targets. So even the proactive employee often appears to see proactivity as an unwelcome way to improve effectiveness because it is likely to involve extra work:
... You do not need it, and it is not part of your tasks. Someone from another department comes to you, you talk to him, your boss hears you, hears that you are sharing an idea, and in order to get some star (reward) for it, he tells you: “Do it!”, while it is not your task, but then you have to do it, to show it to the management the next day” Respondent # 8

“Because if you show initiative, you need to go till the end. It is extra work, extra worry…” Respondent # 1

“If you showed once that you can do something, and that becomes part of your tasks, it will make your work more difficult. So you keep some of your skills to yourself. You will not tell you cannot do it, but you will not shout out “Yes, I am able to, I can.” Else I would always have to do it” Respondent # 16

Due to the expectation of negative supervisor reactions, employees also tend to fear negative consequences of proactive behavior. Employees are often afraid to have to implement ideas, which comes with extra tasks and responsibilities (relating to role-overload as discussed by Bolino et al., 2010). They can also be told off by the supervisor. Some examples from our interviews of what Detert and Edmondson (2011) call abusive supervisory behaviors were rude responses by supervisors, such as “do not bug me” and “shut your mouth and keep quiet” (Respondent # 20), “who gave you the right to do it?”, and “do not butt in anywhere” (Respondent # 8). Nevertheless, this does not mean that employees in the Ukraine never take initiative or speak up, they do if they feel there are no negative consequences for being proactive:

“I go and say: this needs to be done. He says: well done that you remembered. My initiative here is that I say that occupational safety and health requirements are not met, etc. So, he clearly understands that he will “get his a** kicked.” Respondent # 2
And, proactive people are on rare occasions even willing to face those negative consequences, which is long remembered in the below quote:

“You remember when there were delays in paying salaries in 1990s, our chief doctor called the mayor and said: “Please pay our 6 months’ salary. We will not service any emergency calls in 24 hours till we get paid.” He was told “You do not get it that you will lose your job”. “Yes, I know”. In half a day the salaries were paid, he gave the keys to his office and resigned. He sacrificed his job for the employees.” Respondent #17

Functions of Proactivity

The view of initiative at work as supervisor threatening or disruptive is reflected in the types of proactive behaviors displayed at work. The interviews show that employees’ motives to behave proactively in the Ukraine mainly relate to pro-self rather than to pro-other or pro-organizational motives, thus resulting in the expression of mainly pro-self oriented proactive behaviors. For example, some answers of the interviews on the motives of being proactive include “it is beneficial for me” (Respondent #17, Respondent #13), “initiative is always selfish” (Respondent #16), “to work less physically and more using my brain” (Respondent #16), and “because a person tries to create the most comfortable conditions on their job in order to be useful and effective” (Respondent #6). Another example of this is:

“People who show initiative want to get something for it, “ranks”: become a specialist, senior specialist… and so on.” Respondent #8

Initiative entails improving current circumstances or creating new ones (Crant, 2000). In the Ukraine, most of the time one’s goal to show initiative is about improving your working conditions so you can do your job. Thus, proactive behaviors seem to be more about P-E fit (Parker & Collins, 2010) or job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) than about voice. For
example, when a client did not have the money to pay for the services, Respondent # 19 suggested an exchange of services instead of the payment which became a solution. The consequences are not always positive though. Below a worker describes how the organization did not respond to workers’ initiative to improve their work conditions and materials:

“*We work with old computers, old faxes, printers, even furniture. We show initiative to perhaps pitch in [with money] for the new equipment, but no-one wants that. There is no intention from the organization to improve something or ask whether we miss something in our work. We were never asked.*” Respondent # 20

Proactive behavior in the Ukraine often is aimed at working through or around the existing system:

“So anything can happen in life, you see. Usually, initiative is when you break the rules of the process, refuse to do something. You have to do a certain task, but you can be creative, twist it somehow, and do it differently. The technological process is not followed... A customer comes and says, ‘I need a wheel like this.’ So we try to do it.” Respondent # 1

Sometimes, proactivity is even seen as a *survival mechanism*:

“*This is how our life is: you won’t survive without initiative.*” Respondent # 19

“Our organisation expects employees to show initiative in acquiring new clients... if people do not manage, they get replaced. Why would you keep them?” Respondent # 4

While in the “Western” perspective, feedback is a positive mechanism of improvement of employee performance that is often even proactively sought up by employees (e.g., Ashford et al., 2003), employees expect their supervisors in the Ukraine to react negatively to
proactivity. Employees therefore not only avoid voicing, but also tend to **not seek feedback** from the supervisors. When asked about supervisor reactions to employee proactive behavior, the respondents noted that the absence of a reaction or feedback from the supervisor is considered to be a good sign, and as long as there was no “call from above”, the employee was performing well:

“A person [the supervisor] does not have questions, then all is good.’ **Respondent # 2**

‘I think he [the supervisor] reacts positively because there were never complaints about my work.” **Respondent # 6**

“For us it is most important that we did our work, and we did not get punished [by the supervisor].” **Respondent # 11**

These examples demonstrate a “no news is good news” attitude and show that explicit proactive feedback seeking does not seem to occur.

**Discussion**

The findings show that the Soviet era legacy still has a profound impact on organizations and work in the Ukraine, and that this legacy is also reflected in the views and behaviors of managers as well as subordinates when it comes to proactivity. ‘Whatever anyone thinks today, the Soviet Union is certain to have a long historical, and therefore political, afterlife’ (Cohen, 2011, para. 3). The results of the interviews are generally in line with the academic Russian literature on proactivity, which has a more narrow scope than the the literature on proactivity in Western cultures and does not include or value challenging, risky behaviors such as voice. This might be a possible explanation of why those types of proactivity are also rarely shown on the work floor as challenging the supervisor and disrupting the current system seems to be viewed as undesirable in the Ukrainian context. Our study fits with existing studies in HRM that show considerable cross-cultural variation on HR-related behaviors and
practices (e.g., expression and desirability of talent management activities or HR practices; Easterby-Smith et al., 1995; Tayeb, 1998) and adds particularly to our scarce knowledge on work behaviors in formerly communist Eastern European countries (see also Skuza et al., 2013).

**Theoretical Implications**

Our study revealed a number of interesting, substantial differences in the meaning, expression, and evaluation of proactivity at work between the literature on proactivity in Western cultures on the one hand and the Russian literature as well as the Ukrainian practice on the other hand. These differences are summarized in Table 2.2

Table 2.2

*Summary of Differences in Characteristics of Proactive Behavior in the Western Perspective and in the Ukraine*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Western Perspective</th>
<th>Ukrainian Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desirability</td>
<td>Generally desirable</td>
<td>Desirable if does not threaten status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Constructive, can be undesirable</td>
<td>System-serving, socially accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging target</td>
<td>Challenging the organization</td>
<td>Threatening the supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement target/ end goal</td>
<td>Improvement of the organization, the system, oneself</td>
<td>One’s work conditions, oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative type (Campbell, 2000)</td>
<td>Job- and involvement focused</td>
<td>Job-focused</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the predominant ‘Western’ view on proactivity is that it is a desirable and constructive behavior that can change an organization in positive ways (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Bindl & Parker, 2010), in the Ukraine proactivity is only socially acceptable when not threatening the status quo and the system. The interviews show that employees do not tend to engage in behaviors challenging their supervisor because they perceive such behaviors as too risky. They also often fear negative consequences in terms of an increased workload. The fear of negative reactions from their supervisors and a discouraging system thus inhibit employee actual engagement in many organization focused proactive behaviors. This may relate to the high power distance and hierarchical culture in the Ukraine. Supervisors are more distant from their subordinates and approaching supervisors with ideas for change that formally fall under their responsibilities is socially not accepted and can provoke negative reactions (Škerlavaj et al., 2013). This is in line with Botero and van Dyne (2009) who found substantially higher (self-reported) voice behavior in the USA (low on power distance) than in Columbia (high on power distance), and who suggest that power distance may explain the difference.

As noted by Western scholars (e.g., Campbell, 2000), managers do also inhibit employee speaking up at least to some extent in many firms in the West, but this negative reaction to many forms of proactivity seems even more common and pervasive in former communist countries. Koopman et al. (1999) found that high power distance and uncertainty avoidance (which are both characteristic of the Ukrainian culture) came with low participative leadership, which might be another reason why speaking up is not common in the Ukraine. Relatedly, in most Western countries supervisors regularly provide feedback and active feedback-seeking by employees is common (see e.g., Ashford & Northcraft, 1992; Vandewalle et al., 2000; Ashford et al., 2003). In the Ukraine, employees do not seek direct feedback and rather take a lack of supervisory reactions as positive feedback (‘no news is good news’).
Ukraine’s high score on uncertainty avoidance implies an avoidance of deviant behaviors and ideas and a low cultural propensity to change (Black, 2005; Škerlavaj et al., 2013). Indeed, interviewees indicate they are careful to engage in proactive behaviors that are targeted at changing established regulations and rules or common practices. They do show initiative when it relates to their own job or personal goals. The Ukraine is low on individualism (Woldan, 2009), which somewhat contradicts the predominantly pro-selfish motives of behaving proactively reported by interviewees as collective motives might have prevailed in a collectivistic culture. However, this low score on individualism might also explain why proactivity is not expected or appreciated to the same extent by supervisors. Individualistic cultures expect more initiative and proactivity from individual members of society (Claes et al., 2005).

As mentioned, the Russian literature on proactive behavior focuses on changing the self rather than the organization/system and as noted interviewees’ proactive behaviors were indeed predominantly linked to changing the self, their job, or their immediate workplace, and employees primarily engage in proactive behaviors that are pro-self. While the Western literature also notes proactive behaviors related to a pro-self focus (e.g., Campbell, 2000; Parker & Collins, 2010; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010), much of the literature focuses on behaviors focusing at improving the organization and changing the system (e.g., voice, taking charge). By contrast, in our interviews in the Ukraine, an employee’s dominant goal is about keeping one’s job, not being demoted, and improving one’s working conditions or job. The predominantly pro-self motives for proactivity may be explained by the difficult economic times and the strong institutional system in the Ukraine, where employees are still expected to perform regardless of whether they have the necessary resources to perform (e.g., Yamkovenko et al., 2007, see also the quote from Respondent #1 above as illustration). As Detert and Edmondson (2005) note, employee economic capture (‘I need that job to support my family’).
or a difficult employment situation on the labor market (e.g., employee immobility due to the lack of adequately paid jobs) discourage challenging proactive behavior such as voice, and this clearly applies to many Ukrainian workers.

**Practical Implications**

This study contributes to the scarce literature on the role of the cultural context in the meaning and expression of proactive behavior by studying proactivity in the Ukraine. Our findings show that proactivity has a more narrow scope and takes a somewhat different form for employees in the Ukraine than for most Western employees. This study suggests that several organizational practices common in the West on which organizations might rely for performance improvement (e.g., employee voice or feedback seeking) are not (yet) common or appreciated much in the Ukraine. If managers in the Ukraine want more employee proactivity and initiative to occur, they should actively encourage it, showing that they are open for suggestions and employee initiatives, and taking away employees’ fears of being punished for setting wrong priorities. HR could help here, for instance, by providing feedback and listening skill trainings for supervisors as supervisor reactions are important cues for employees that their ideas and initiatives are valued, and that sharing their ideas is not too risky. Furthermore, supervisors should be more mindful of employees’ workload and performance pressure if they want employees to show more initiative. The fear of extra work and tasks which might make reaching core performance targets difficult can discourage employees to be proactive.

**Limitations**

This research also has several limitations. Our results are based on 20 interviews from a single country, the Ukraine. Regional variations exist in Eastern Europe, thus the results presented above mostly provide an indication of the meaning of proactive behavior for workers
in the Ukraine and might only partially generalize to other Eastern European countries/regions. Despite sharing a communist system in the past, other Eastern European countries might show cultural specifics that affect the meaning and expression of proactivity (see Brewster & Bennett, 2010). Relatedly, even though Russian represented the dominant language in the academic literature in the whole of Eastern Europe we did not investigate the academic literature in other Eastern European languages (e.g., Bulgarian, Polish, Hungarian). In this sense, our findings form a first step and further research could enrich our understanding of proactivity in the wider cultural context of Eastern Europe.
Chapter 3

The Degree of Challenge of Employee Voice for the Voice Target and its Influence on the Decision to Speak up, Speak out or Stay Silent.

Abstract

While voice is critical to organizational functioning and performance, employees are often afraid to speak up and rather remain silent. The decision of whether to voice or not is influenced by employees’ anticipation of voice targets’ (leader, team) reactions to their suggestions. Such reactions depend on the voice content (degree of challenge or threat for others) and the openness of the voice target (openness to suggestions for change). We look at two targets of voice, leaders and colleagues, in a sample of 157 triads (employee-colleague-leader). We found that the nature of the voice content is less crucial for the decision whether to speak up, when leader openness is high than when it is low. In the latter case, employees are more likely to speak out or stay silent. For team openness (psychological safety), we found that when psychological safety was high, people were more silent about the voice content with low degree of challenge than with high degree of challenge. This was also the case for low psychological safety, which was surprising.

Keywords: employee voice, silence, voice content, leader openness, psychological safety
Introduction

Research suggests that organizations become more efficient and perform better when taking the input (‘voice’) they receive from their employees on board (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Voice behavior is defined as the “discretionary verbal communication of ideas, suggestions, or opinions with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning” (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011, p. 183). Voice can provide insights that leaders often lack as they are too far removed from the work floor (e.g., Grant, 2013; Morrison, 2011). Leaders, therefore, often make decisions after consulting with their subordinates (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006). Yet, employees’ willingness to voice their ideas depends on their leaders’ behaviors, and leaders who believe and signal that they don’t need to consult their employees or get their input might instill fear and reluctance to ‘speak up’ in employees (Morrison, 2014). Similarly, in a group context, team performance and decision making might suffer if team members feel discouraged and thus do not bring their input to the team (‘speaking out’) (Morrison, 2011). While voice is critical to organizational functioning and performance, employees might often see more risks than benefits in voicing their ideas and opinions and rather stay silent (Detert & Burris, 2007).

As mentioned above, voice may imply risks for the voicing person as the voice target (e.g., the leader) might see voice as criticism or complaining and react negatively to it, which is why an employee may be reluctant to speak up because of these perceived risks and costs (Schreurs, Guenter, Jawahar, & De Cuyper, 2015). Such employee is likely to choose defensive silence (i.e., not voicing despite of having something to say) with negative consequences for the organization such as less effective decision making and poor error detection but also negative consequences for the employee, such as increased stress (see Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Thus, it is important to explore factors that are detrimental to employee voice and
conducive to employee silence, both at the leader level (speaking up) and at the team level (speaking out).

The proactivity literature emphasizes the challenging nature of voice (e.g., LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Detert & Burris, 2007; Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010), yet, the topic of challenge of the voice content has not received much attention to date. Voice content has not been investigated as an antecedent of employees’ choice about the target of voice, that is, to whom to voice (for exceptions see e.g., Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012, and Burris, 2012, on promotive versus prohibitive voice, or Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012, on message framing and solution). Here, we explore the idea that if the voice content is challenging for a certain target (e.g., implying more work or being disruptive), employees may choose to voice to a different target or remain silent. Specifically, we investigate how the content of voice (the degree of challenge or threat of the voice content) affects employees’ decision to voice or not. Burris (2012) introduced the concepts of challenging versus supportive voice as voice behaviors vary in the degree of challenge for the voice target. While supporting voice is in favor of changes that are already taking place or is about incremental suggestions, challenging voice is about explicit disagreement and even a confrontation with a manager. Supportive voice has a more stabilizing nature, while challenging voice has a more critical and personal nature (Burris, 2012). We take this idea of different types of voice content and argue that there are different degrees of challenge in voice, and that the extent of challenge of the voice behavior for the corresponding target might determine to whom to voice or not to voice at all. In line with Liu et al. (2010), we investigate particularly the leader (speaking up) and the work group or team (speaking out) as targets of an employee’s voice.

We further propose that the relationship between voice content and voice/silence is contingent on the voice target. More specifically, we argue that voice is a social behavior for which a welcoming environment is important, and employees might be more willing to voice
even challenging content if they feel safe to bring up new ideas and if others are open to their input. We therefore investigate the openness of the social environment to voice as another important input for employees’ decision whether and to whom to voice. That is, at the leader level we study leader openness to employee input and participation (operationalized as advice taking, Morrison, Rothman, & Soll, 2011) and at the team level team openness to team member input (operationalized as psychological safety, Edmondson, 1999). We argue that employees will voice less to a specific target to the extent that the voice content is challenging to this specific voice target. This relationship will be weaker, however, if the target is generally open to new ideas than if the voice target is not open to new ideas. In the latter case where the target is not open to ideas, employees are more likely to either change the voice target or remain silent. In sum, we propose a moderation model, in which the openness of the voice target moderates the relationship between the degree of challenge of the voice message and the voicer’s decision to speak up, speak out, or stay silent.

This study adds to the literature in several respects. First, we investigate the contingencies of employees’ decision to speak up, speak out, or stay silent. Second, we look at voice and silence in one study simultaneously. Reviews on voice and silence by Morrison (2014) or Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) note that silence can differ substantially from voice based on the topics, actors, and targets, so the results found for either voice or silence cannot easily be transferred to the other. Research including both variables is needed to further explore the communalities and differences between these two constructs. Finally, we add a new voice content variable, the degree of challenge of the voice content, to the still scarce literature investigating the content of voice and argue that the concrete expression of voice behavior (speaking up, speaking out, silence) is related to the content of the voice message and that this relationship is moderated by the voice targets’ openness.
Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Voice and Silence

Van Dyne and LePine (1998, p. 326) define voice as a form of organizational behavior that involves “constructive change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation”, even when others disagree. Voice serves as a “seed corn for continuous improvement” (Fuller, Barnett, Hester, Relyea, & Frey, 2007, p. 135) and allows employees to channel their dissatisfaction with the status quo. Voice behavior is focused on correcting mistakes, improving processes, and formulating solutions to organizational problems (Fuller et al., 2007). In 2000, Morrison and Milliken presented a conceptual paper on organizational silence, which they defined as employees “withholding opinions and concerns about organizational problems” (p.706), thus introducing a new stream of research to the voice literature. Employees may not exercise voice and decide to deliberately withhold these ideas (silence but presence of voice), yet, at other times, employees may simply have no ideas and hence have nothing to suggest (silence but absence of voice) (Van Dyne et al., 2003). The latter is outside the scope of this research. Therefore, voice and silence should be treated as separate constructs, and we included both voice and silence in this study (Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Two key assumptions in the work on voice and silence as defined by Morrison and Milliken (2003) are that 1) employees do not necessarily share their ideas and concerns and the tendency to be silent dominates voice as a default strategy, and 2) voice is important for organizations, while silence is usually harmful (Morrison, 2014). Voice generally gives employees a feeling of control and being valued, while silence is often a result of frustration and a feeling of a loss of control and therefore comes with stress and skepticism (Morrison, 2014).

Voice has attracted the interest of academics for several decades (see Hirschman, 1970, LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Chiaburu, Marinova, & Van Dyne, 2008) and, based on the voice
target, can be divided into two categories: speaking up and speaking out (Liu et al., 2010). Communicating suggestions upwards (i.e., to one’s leader) is called upward voice or speaking up (Liu et al., 2010; Burris, 2012). Speaking up, however, is not an automatic process and entails a weighing of costs and benefits. Even when the content of a voice message is not threatening, in general, speaking up to someone with authority may be understood as challenging his/her authority. For instance, Frese and Fay (2001) note that leaders may see proactive employee behaviors such as voice as ‘rocking the boat’ and thus do not always appreciate it. Employees may choose to avoid voicing ideas when they expect a negative reaction, even when they have important information to share (Li & Sun, 2015). Speaking out is voicing issues, ideas, and concerns to someone of the same hierarchical level, usually in one’s work group or team. Groups have shared responsibility and interdependence and their effectiveness depends on sharing knowledge, suggestions and opinions between group members (Morrison et al., 2011). Yet, just like speaking up, speaking out can be risky, as it can upset interpersonal relationships or cause additional work for other team members (Morrison, 2011). Consequently, an employee might refrain from voicing ideas, problems or suggestions to colleagues in order not to damage his/her social capital if s/he expects that the colleagues will react negatively to their voice behavior.

There is relatively little academic research on organizational silence (Van Dyne et al., 2003), which emerged as a subject relatively recently (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Withholding information is at the core of the concept of silence. Silence refers to the intentional and conscious efforts of employees to withhold information from others and is a signal of neglect and inaction. Employees tend to stay silent in order to not cause conflict (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). While this helps maintain good social relationships and uphold cultural norms about appropriate versus inappropriate conversation, for the organization it can have detrimental effects if people choose not to speak up while they have something to say (Van
Dyne et al., 2003). In their interview study, Milliken and Morrison (2003) found that 51% of the interviewees usually felt comfortable speaking up, while at the same time 85% indicated that they had felt unable to raise an issue with their leader at least once and hence had decided to stay silent.

Although voice and silence are distinct constructs, they still share some antecedents (see Morrison, 2014). Individual factors that affect the decision to voice as well as to remain silent include employees’ individual dispositions (e.g., extraversion, proactive personality, or achievement orientation), job and organizational attitudes and perceptions (e.g., organizational identification and attachment, job satisfaction), emotions, beliefs, and schemes (e.g., psychological safety or fear) and situational factors. The situational factors include 1) leader characteristics and leader behavior (e.g., leader openness, leader-member exchange, transformational leadership, abusive leadership), and 2) other contextual factors (e.g., group voice climate, formal voice mechanisms, climate of fear or silence, change-resistance culture). In this study, we add another group of antecedents, not currently included in the review of Morrison (2014) that may play a role in the decision to speak up, out, or stay silent, namely the characteristics of the voice message, more specifically, the content of voice in terms of the extent to which it threatens the voice target. Even though the challenging character of voice is emphasized in both the voice and the silence literature it has not been systematically investigated as an antecedent of voice or silence (see Morrison, 2014). Given our focus on leaders and colleagues as voice targets, we focus specifically on voice content that challenges the leader or team to varying degrees here.

**Voice Content**

Scholars have developed different categorizations of voice based on the content of the voice message, which can vary from providing suggestions about improvements to alarming
others regarding problems, which have been labelled as promotive versus prohibitive or problem-focused voice, respectively (Liang et al., 2012; Morrison, 2011). Yet, voice does not always need to be challenging and can also be more affiliative (behaviors to preserve relationships, supportive voice) (Graham & Van Dyne, 2006). Challenge is a quantitative characteristic as behaviors can differ in their degree of challenge. Voice can refer to suggesting extensive changes that imply a strong challenge to the status quo (challenging voice), however, voice can also refer to minor changes or even aim at stabilizing or preserving existing organizational practices, thus being low on challenge (supportive voice) (Burris, 2012).

Also, we further extend the idea of challenge by focusing on the voicer expectation of the reaction of the target to challenging voice. What the one target may see as challenging (or perceive that his/her leader will see it as challenging), another might not perceive as such. For instance, proposing a small improvement to an existing process could be perceived as attentiveness and supportive of the existing change and be welcomed by one’s leader while proposing a completely new process could be seen as beyond one’s responsibilities and even criticizing one’s leader for having installed wrong procedures, hence seen more challenging. We hereby build on and further develop the idea by Van Dyne and colleagues (2003) and by Burris (2012) that the content of the message to be conveyed is important for the decision to express or withhold one’s opinions and suggestions. While Burris (2012) focuses on leaders’ reactions to supportive and challenging voice, we investigate how employees anticipate such leader reactions and adapt their voice behavior to it.

We propose that employees carefully weigh the degree to which they feel the voice message challenges their social environment when deciding whether to voice or rather stay silent. As mentioned above, voice involves personal risk as many employees are comfortable with the status quo and how things are currently done within the organization, especially the ones with power (leader), and voice might thus be met with scepticism or resistance (Van Dyne
et al., 2003). We therefore investigate to what extent the perceived degree of challenge of the voice content holds for a specific voice target is related to a switch in voice target by the voicing employee. Employees are likely to avoid voicing ideas that might challenge the voice target due to the fear of rejection and negative consequences. If the voice message is of high importance and urgency in the opinion of the voicer, they are likely to voice it anyway, but switch the target, given that the issue is relevant for the switched target and is of interest. If not, the voicer will remain silent.

Therefore, if the voice message is of high importance and urgency, we expect for voice content which is challenging the leader:

*Hypothesis 1a: The voice content challenging the leader is negatively related to employee speaking up.*

*Hypothesis 1b: The voice content challenging the leader is positively related to employee speaking out.*

*Hypothesis 1c: The voice content challenging the leader is positively related to employee silence.*

Similarly, we expect that employees will refrain from speaking out and rather speak up or remain silent to the extent that the voice content threatens team members. If the voice content is challenging for the team, we expect that the voicer is more likely to switch the target and voice to the leader, if the issue is important and urgent according to the voicer, especially given that the leader has a formal authority over the team. However, the voicer is more likely to stay silent if the issue is of no interest to the leader or if the he/she will perceive such switch of the target as complaining about the team or even “going behind the team’s back”.
Therefore, for voice content challenging the team, if the voice message is of high importance and urgency, we expect for voice content which is challenging the team:

**Hypothesis 2a:** The voice content challenging the team is negatively related to employee speaking out.

**Hypothesis 2b:** The voice content challenging the team is positively related to employee speaking up.

**Hypothesis 2c:** The voice content challenging the team is positively related to employee silence.

**Context Openness**

The context in which voice occurs has been shown to influence voice behavior (e.g., Whiting et al., 2012; Burris, 2012). Indeed, voice is more likely to occur in a welcoming environment as even the most proactive employees will contemplate whether it is safe or worthwhile to speak out in a certain context (Wang, Huang, & Chu, 2010). Employees “read” the context for signals concerning “context favorability” for raising issues. Favorable contexts refer to contexts where management is perceived to listen, culture is seen as supportive, and there is little uncertainty about or fear of negative consequences (Milliken & Morrison, 2003). Favorability thus expresses a general idea of openness and support that facilitates voicing to leaders or colleagues. Individuals engage less easily in voice when they are unsure whether they will receive support for their ideas and suggestions (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). Milliken and Morrison (2003) found that direct supervisors who were not open (unapproachable or not supportive), formed a reason why employees felt unable to speak up. Applying the concept of openness to the two targets of voice (leaders and colleagues), we thus argue that employees’
perceptions of leader openness and work team openness form important information for employees in their decision whether and to whom to voice.

**Leader Openness**

Leaders strongly influence employee voice behavior (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton, Ashford, O’Neill, & Lawrence, 2001; Milliken & Morrison, 2003). In this respect, leader openness has been introduced as an important leader characteristic that strongly affects employees’ voice behavior (Detert & Burris, 2007). Leader openness describes the extent to which leaders engage with the ideas and suggestions of their employees (Milliken et al., 2003). When they are perceived as open, empathetic and tolerant, this contributes to leader-directed voice (Troster & van Knippenberg, 2012). The more supportive and open a leader-employee relationship is, the more positive employee perceptions of voice effectiveness and safety are, leading to employees voicing more (Li & Sun, 2015; Morrison et al., 2011). The leader openness therefore is a cue for the employee that voicing is good in the context in general and it is safe to voice (Edmondson, 2003; Nemhhard & Edmondson, 2006; Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, & Ziv, 2010).

Team leaders shape the beliefs of the team members about voice. They also can mitigate power imbalances when coaching and emphasize the need for teamwork (Edmondson, 2003). This means that leaders can stimulate both speaking up and speaking out. When leaders are perceived as not open, empathetic or intolerant, or when leader-employee relationship is not supportive or open, we expect employees to be more likely to stay silent (Troster & van Knippenberg, 2012; Li & Sun, 2015; Morrison et al., 2011).

Therefore, we expect that:

*Hypothesis 3a: Leader openness is positively related to employee speaking up.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Leader openness is positively related to employee speaking out.*
Hypothesis 3c: Leader openness is negatively related to employee silence.

Next to this main effect of leader openness on employees’ tendency to speak up, speak out or remain silent, we argue that leader openness is particularly important in situations, in which the leader might get challenged by the voice content. We propose that leader openness will play a moderating role in the relationship between voice content and voicing or remaining silent because it will strengthen or weaken the relationship between the challenging voice content and the act of speaking up, speaking out or remaining silent. We expect that when leader openness is high, the degree of challenge of the voice content has a weaker impact on an individual’s decision to speak up, that is, the negative link between challenging voice content and speaking up will be weaker when leader openness is high rather than low.

Open leaders are not likely to feel easily challenged by suggestions of their employees, and employees are likely to perceive an open leader as less likely to react negatively to their suggestions in general. The influence of leader openness is likely to play an even greater role to the extent that the content of an idea or suggestion is potentially challenging. If a message to the leader is not challenging, probably both leaders high and leaders low on openness are likely to not react negatively. However, when the message is challenging, open leaders less easily react negatively than leaders low on openness, who are likely to experience already relatively low degrees of challenge as negative and inappropriate. The weakening effect will also be the case for speaking out and silence. If leader openness is high rather than low, the positive effect of the challenge of the voice content on employee speaking out (Hypothesis 1b) and employee silence (Hypothesis 1c) will be weaker. If the employee feels that the leader is open, the employee is more likely to speak up even when the voice content is challenging for the leader, then to speak out or remain silent. Even though above we assume that leader openness can be a cue for the employee in general that voicing is welcome, when we look at the moderating role of the leader openness and the content of voice with a high degree of
challenge for the leader, when the leader is open, we expect the employee to be more likely to speak up about it, rather than, speak out or remain silent. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 4a:** Leader openness will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and speaking up. More specifically, the negative relationship between the degree of challenge of the voice content and employee speaking up is weaker when leader openness is high rather than low.

**Hypothesis 4b:** Leader openness will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and speaking out. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and employee speaking out is weaker when leader openness is high rather than low.

**Hypothesis 4c:** Leader openness will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and silence. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and employee silence is weaker when leader openness is high rather than low.

*Figure 3.1. Conceptual model of the role of voice content challenging for the leader in the decision to speak up, speak out or remain silent.*
Team Openness

Employees turn to their “immediate interpersonal network” (their colleagues) to determine how favorable it is for them to voice at work (Liang et al., 2012). As mentioned above, employees consider the possible reactions of their social environment and the environments’ openness to new, change-oriented ideas when deciding whether to voice their ideas. In a team setting, such openness is captured by the concept of psychological safety. Perceptions of psychological safety are high when an individual feels able to show him/herself without fear of negative consequences from colleagues, for instance, feeling free to point out problems or make suggestions without being criticized (Carmeli & Gitell, 2009; Roberge & Van Dick, 2010). Psychological safety thus reflects the belief that engaging in risky behaviors like voice will not cause personal harm (Detert & Burris, 2007), and that fellow team members will not embarrass or reject an employee for sharing ideas or information (Troster & Knippenberg, 2012).

People are more likely to engage in voice with team members (colleagues) when they feel psychologically safe in a team and when they believe their position is supported by others (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Carmeli et al., 2010). In contrast, they are more likely to stay silent if they perceive the psychological safety in the team to be low because they might fear rejection or negative reactions of their team (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). A leader is part of the team and is one of the main cues of whether the team environment is psychologically safe. He/she is usually in the unique position of seeing the big picture and is able to understand how different expertise fits together in a team. Also, a leader helps create a shared meaning about the situation (Edmonson, 2003). Team members look at leader actions for information on what is expected and acceptable in a team (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). This is why we expect a positive effect of psychological safety on both speaking out and up as employees would feel
welcome to share their ideas and concerns, while it would have a negative effect on employee silence.

Therefore, we propose that:

*Hypothesis 5a: Psychological safety is positively related to employee speaking out.*

*Hypothesis 5b: Psychological safety is positively related to employee speaking up.*

*Hypothesis 5c: Psychological safety is negatively related to employee silence.*

Similar to the arguments put forward for the role of leader openness for employee voice, we argue that when the content of a voice message is challenging or threatening to team members, psychological safety is highly important in the process of voicing. When an employee perceives what he/she has to say as “disruptive to the status quo in the team”, s/he is more likely to weigh in the personal costs of speaking up, out, or remaining silent. In a psychologically safe team, team members are not likely to feel easily challenged by and react negatively to suggestions of employees. The influence of psychological safety is likely to play an even greater role to the extent that the content of an idea or suggestion is potentially challenging. If a message to the team is not challenging, probably both teams with high and low psychological safety are likely not to react negatively.

However, when the message is challenging, teams with high psychological safety less easily react negatively than teams with low psychological safety. We therefore propose that when psychological safety in the team is high as opposed to low, the negative effect of the degree of challenge of the voice content on employee speaking out will be less strong. The same should be the case for speaking up and silence. If psychological safety is high as opposed to low, the effect of the challenging voice content on speaking up and employee silence is likely to be less strong too. If the employee feels that the team is psychologically safe, the employee does not feel he/she must be guarded but instead encouraged to question the status quo, thus is more likely to speak out even when the voice content is challenging for the team, rather than
to speak up (switch target) or remain silent (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 6a: Psychological safety will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking out. More specifically, the negative relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking out is weaker when perceived psychological team safety is high rather than low.

Hypothesis 6b: Psychological safety will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking up. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking up is weaker when perceived psychological team safety is high rather than low.

Hypothesis 6c: Psychological safety will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and silence. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the team and silence is weaker when perceived psychological team safety is high rather than low.

Figure 3.2. Conceptual model of the role of voice content challenging for the team in the decision to speak out, speak up or remain silent.
Method

Participants and Procedure

A big educational institution in the Netherlands agreed to participate in a study about employee voice and silence and provide multi-source data (employee-colleague-leader triads) of their employees. 261 email invites were sent out to the employees. Only matching triads that were completely filled out were used in the analyses. The final sample therefore consisted of 157 triads of matched employee-colleague-leader ratings (17 leaders and 157 employees who also were colleague-raters) which corresponds to a response rate of 60.1%. The surveys were conducted in English.

Participating leaders were approached personally; due to the larger number of participating employees and colleagues, they were approached by email. A presentation was held for the participants explaining the purpose of the study and assuring the confidentiality of the responses. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants received nothing back in return for participating in the study. A reminder email was sent out to individuals three weeks after the original email.

Of the leaders, 47% were female, 53% were male; 76.4% were Dutch, 23.6% were non-Dutch. Leaders’ age ranged from 29 to 64 (SD=11.01). Of the participating employees and colleagues, 45% were male, 55% were female. 75.8% were Dutch, 3.8% people had a dual nationality, the rest of the sample had a non-Dutch nationality. Employees’ age ranged from 21 to 66 years (SD=10.67). 3.18% had vocational training, 12.10% had a bachelor’s degree, 84.7% had a master’s degree or higher. Their job tenure ranged from 1 month to 33 years (SD=7.39 years).

Measures

The measures of voice content challenging the leader and the team, silence, and psychological safety were included in the employee survey. The measures of speaking up and
out were collected from leaders and colleagues, respectively. Leader openness was included in the leader survey. Silence as observed by others can be both due to deliberately withholding information and due to a lack of ideas (Van Dyne et al., 2003), we therefore used employee self-ratings for measuring employee silence to capture the intentional withholding of information. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1- “Strongly disagree” to 7- “Strongly agree” for variables voice content challenging the leader, voice content challenging the team, speaking up, speaking out and psychological safety among colleagues and from 1=not at all to 7=fully for variables silence and leader openness.

**Voice content challenging the leader** (employee rated) was measured using 4 items created for the purpose of this study as there was no existing scale available to measure voice content challenging the leader. We used the conceptualization of voice as challenging the status quo (e.g., Fuller et al., 2007) and threatening the voice target (Morrison, 2014) and hence included items about how disruptive, going beyond current activities or conflicting with how things are normally done in the organization employees perceived their suggestions to be. We introduced this set of questions by asking the respondents to think of a recent example when they made a suggestion to their manager and then to answer questions about the content of this suggestion. An example of an item is “My suggestion conflicted with how things are done in the organization.” Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .62 (N=157)

**Voice content challenging the team** (employee rated) was similarly measured using 4 items created for the purpose of this study. More specifically, we used the same items as for voice content challenging the leader and adjusted these to threatening other team members instead of the leader. We introduced the set of questions by asking the respondents to think of a recent example when they made a suggestion to the team and then to answer questions about the content of this suggestion. A sample item reads “My suggestion conflicted with how things are done in the team.” Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .73 (N=157).
**Speaking up** (leader rated) was measured using 6 items from Liu et al. (2010). Examples of items are “This employee makes recommendations to me concerning issues that affect the organization” and “This employee speaks to me about new ideas for projects or changes in procedures.” Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .95 (N=17).

**Speaking out** (colleague rated) was measured using 6 items from Liu et al. (2010). Examples of items are “This employee makes recommendations to colleagues concerning issues that affect the organization” and “This employee speaks to colleagues about new ideas for projects or changes in procedures.” Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .88 (N=157).

**Silence** (employee rated) was measured using 5 items from Van Dyne et al. (2003). The respondents were asked to what extent they purposefully withheld ideas, concerns, questions or information. Examples of items are “You chose to remain silent when you had concerns about…”, “Although you had ideas about improving… you did not speak up”. Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .86 (N=157).

**Leader openness** (leader rated) was measured using 2 items from See, Morrison, Rothman, & Soll (2011). The items are “To what extent are you open to reconsidering your decisions based on the input of this employee?” and “To what extent do you factor in the opinions of this employee into your decision-making process?” Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .95 (N=17).

**Psychological safety among colleagues** (colleague rated) was measured using 4 items developed by Edmondson (1999). Examples of items include “If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.” or “It is safe to take a risk on this team”. The negatively worded item was reverse-coded. Cronbach’s alpha of the measure was .82 (N=157).

**Results**

Before testing our hypotheses, we investigated the measurement model of our variables. We performed confirmatory factor analyses with Amos SPSS statistical software comparing
three factor models in our data. First, we had all indicators of all variables load on one factor. Then, we tested a 7-factor model in which our presumed variables presented latent factors for their indicators. Lastly, we assessed a 6-factor model in which our presumed variables presented latent factors for their indicators, but where speaking up and speaking out were one variable “voice”. The results of the factor analyses are presented in Table 3.1 and show that the 7-factor model fits the data better than both the one-factor model ($\Delta \chi^2 = 540.76; \Delta \text{df}= 18; p<.00$) and the 6-factor model ($\Delta \chi^2 = 445.71; \Delta \text{df}= 6; p<.00$). We therefore moved on with the analyses for our hypotheses, as described below.

Table 3.1

*Confirmatory Factor Analyses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-factor model</th>
<th>7-factor model</th>
<th>6-factor model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of freedom</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
<td>1185**</td>
<td>644.24**</td>
<td>1089.95**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p<.01

Factor loadings ranged from .46 to .65 (voice content challenging the leader), .53 to .71 (voice content challenging the team), .84 to .92 (speaking up), .55 to .83 (speaking out), .57 to .88 (silence), .94 to .96 (leader openness), .64 to .78 (psychological safety). Interfactor correlations ranged from -.22 (speaking up and silence) to .75 (speaking up and leader openness).

The means and standard deviations and the intercorrelations of all variables included in the study are reported in Table 3.2. Speaking up was positively significantly correlated only
with leader openness \((r = .71, p = .01)\). We thus reject Hypothesis 1a, 2b, and 3b and we found support for Hypothesis 3a. Speaking out was only significantly positively correlated to speaking up \((r = .19, p < .05)\). We thus reject both Hypothesis 1b and 2a. Finally, silence was only significantly (negatively) correlated with speaking up \((r = -.18, p < .05)\) and psychological safety among colleagues \((r = -.29, p = .00)\). Therefore, we reject Hypothesis 1c, 2c, 5a and 5b and find support for Hypothesis 5c.

Table 3.2

*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables (N = 157, 157 employees/colleagues, 17 leaders)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>(M (SD))</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Voice content challenging the leader (E, N=157)</td>
<td>3.89 (1.03)</td>
<td>(.62)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Voice content challenging the team (E, N=157)</td>
<td>3.77 (1.04)</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Leader Openness (L, N=17)</td>
<td>5.43 (0.96)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Psychological Safety (C, N=157)</td>
<td>5.28 (1.03)</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>(.82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Speaking Up (L, N=157)</td>
<td>4.97 (1.05)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.71**</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Speaking Out (C, N=157)</td>
<td>5.45 (0.85)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Voice Content Challenging the Leader

In order to investigate the interaction effects and to test Hypotheses 4a-c and 6a-c we ran a moderation analysis using the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). The results of this regression are reported in Table 3 for voice content challenging the leader and in Table 4 for voice content challenging the team.

As we had 17 managers in 157 triads, we performed a mixed model analysis, allowing for difference between managers who rated employee speaking up at the individual in order to check for rater effects. Only speaking up, as a dependent variable, was rated by the same raters (leaders). The residual variance was .42 and manager variance was .09. Although this variance is low, it might be due to various factors, such as difference in leader age, style, team atmosphere attached to the particular manager, personality which were not observed in this study.

Table 3.3 shows the results of the moderation analysis at the individual level.

Table 3.3

Results of moderation analysis for voice content challenging the leader using PROCESS (standardized coefficients, N = 157)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaking up</th>
<th>R²=.52</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>s.e.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the leader</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p<.05. **p<.01.

E=employee-rated, L=leader-rated, C=colleague rated
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader Openness</th>
<th>.80</th>
<th>.06</th>
<th>12.79</th>
<th>.00</th>
<th>.67</th>
<th>.92</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the leader x Leader Openness</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Residual Variance .42  
Manager Variance .09  

**Speaking out**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>s.e.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the leader</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Openness</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the leader x Leader Openness</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-2.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Silence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>s.e.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the leader</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Openness</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the leader x Leader Openness</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-2.92</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For speaking up as dependent variable, we found a significant positive main effect of leader openness on speaking up ($b=.80, t=12.79, p<.01$), confirming Hypothesis 3a. However, we did not find a significant interaction effect between leader openness and voice content challenging the leader ($b=-.02, t=-.26, n.s.$). Therefore, leader openness does not moderate the
relationship between voice content challenging the leader and speaking up, and Hypothesis 4a is thus rejected.

For speaking out, we found no significant main effect of leader openness on speaking out ($b=0.15$, $t=1.88$, n.s.) (rejecting Hypothesis 3b), but we did find a negative interaction effect between leader openness and voice content challenging the leader ($b=-0.18$, $t=-2.09$, $p<0.05$) on speaking out. Therefore, leader openness moderates the relationship between challenging content of speaking up and speaking out, supporting Hypothesis 4b. In line with suggestions by Aiken and West (1991), we plotted the interaction effect for high and low values of the moderator (plus/minus 1SD) to facilitate interpretation (Figure 3.3).

![Figure 3.3. Interaction effect of voice content challenging the leader and leader openness on speaking out.](image)

Speaking out is higher with high leader openness and in case of low leader openness speaking out increases with challenging voice content, which is in line with Hypothesis 4b. The simple slopes of the interaction effect were found to be significant only for low leader openness ($t=2.34; p<.05$)
For employee silence, we found no significant main effect of leader openness on silence ($b=-.12, t=-1.58, \text{n.s.}$) (rejecting Hypothesis 3c), but we did find a significant negative interaction effect between the voice content challenging the leader and leader openness ($b=-.24, t=-2.92, p<0.01$) on silence. There is a positive significant relationship between degree of challenge and silence for low leader openness ($t=3.25; p<0.01$). This finding supports Hypothesis 4c.

![Figure 3.4. Interaction effect of voice content challenging the leader and leader openness on silence.](image)

As Figure 3.4 shows, in case of low leader openness employees keep more silent when content becomes more challenging. When leader openness is high, silence decreases with challenging content.

**Voice Content Challenging the Team**

We performed a mixed model analysis, allowing for difference between managers who rated employee speaking up in order to check for rater effects at the team level (the only dependent variable rated by the same leaders). The residual variance was .89 and manager
variance was .12. Such variance might be due to various factors mentioned above (difference in leader age, style, team atmosphere attached to the particular manager, personality) which were not observed in this study.

Table 3.4

*Results of moderation analysis for voice content challenging the team using PROCESS (standardized coefficients, N = 157)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Speaking out</th>
<th>Speaking up</th>
<th>Silence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( R^2 = .03 )</td>
<td>( R^2 = .01 )</td>
<td>( R^2 = .12 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( b )</td>
<td>s.e.</td>
<td>( t )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the team</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Safety</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice content challenging the team x Leader Openness</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Residual Variance .89
Manager Variance .12
For speaking out, we did not find a significant interaction effect between psychological safety and the voice content challenging the team ($b=-0.09$, $t=-1.20$, n.s.). Therefore, psychological safety does not moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking out; Hypothesis 6a is rejected.

For speaking up, the interaction effect between psychological safety and the voice content challenging the team was not significant ($b=0.03$, $t=0.38$, n.s.). Therefore, psychological safety does not moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking out. Hypothesis 6b is rejected.

For employee silence, we only found a negative main effect of psychological safety ($b=-0.29$, $t=-3.67$, $p<.01$) which was qualified by a positive interaction effect between voice content challenging the team and psychological safety ($b=0.19$, $t=2.55$, $p<0.05$). This confirms Hypothesis 5c while we reject Hypothesis 5a and 5b.
As Figure 3.5 shows, in case of low psychological safety employees keep more silent than when psychological safety is high. When psychological safety is high, silence increases with challenging content, whereas in case of low psychological safety silence decreases with challenging content. The simple slopes of the interaction effect were found to be non-significant for both low and high psychological safety. This is not in line with Hypothesis 6c, which we reject.

Table 3.5 Overview of Hypothesis Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Formulation</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1a</td>
<td>The voice content challenging the leader is negatively related to employee speaking up.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b</td>
<td>The voice content challenging the leader is positively related to employee speaking out.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1c</td>
<td>The voice content challenging the leader is positively related to employee silence.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a</td>
<td>The voice content challenging the team is negatively related to employee speaking out.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b</td>
<td>The voice content challenging the team is positively related to employee speaking up.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2c</td>
<td>The voice content challenging the team is positively related to employee silence.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3a</td>
<td>Leader openness is positively related to employee speaking up.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b</td>
<td>Leader openness is positively related to employee speaking out.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3c</td>
<td>Leader openness is negatively related to employee silence.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4a</td>
<td>Leader openness will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and speaking up. More specifically, the negative relationship between the degree of challenge of the voice content and employee speaking up is weaker when leader openness is high rather than low.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4b</td>
<td>Leader openness will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and speaking out. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and employee speaking out is weaker when leader openness is high rather than low.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4c</td>
<td>Leader openness will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and silence. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the leader and employee silence is weaker when leader openness is high rather than low.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5a</td>
<td>Psychological safety is positively related to employee speaking out.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5b</td>
<td>Psychological safety is positively related to employee speaking up.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5c</td>
<td>Psychological safety is negatively related to employee silence.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6a</td>
<td>Psychological safety will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking out. More specifically, the negative relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking out is weaker when perceived psychological team safety is high rather than low.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6b</td>
<td>Psychological safety will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking up. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the team and speaking up is weaker when perceived psychological team safety is high rather than low.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6c</td>
<td>Psychological safety will moderate the relationship between the voice content challenging the team and silence. More specifically, the positive relationship between the voice content challenging the team and silence is weaker when perceived psychological team safety is high rather than low.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

In this study we argued how a voice message challenging for a specific target is linked to employees’ choice of whether to voice and to whom to voice. We suggested that employees are more likely to switch the voice target or to remain silent to the extent that they perceive the content of what they have to share to be challenging for the initial target.

First, we found that leader openness strongly affected voice as well as silence. For speaking up, leader openness was related to employee speaking up. This is in line with previous research on leader openness (Detert & Burris, 2007; Troster & van Knippenberg, 2012; Li & Sun, 2015). This indicates that leader openness is an important moderator for high-challenge suggestions but more generally for all voice behaviors. So even for low-challenge voice behavior, low leader openness is problematic. For both speaking out and silence we found leader openness to act as a moderator of the relationship between voice challenge and speaking out/silence. Here, voice messages with a challenging character for the leader were more communicated to the team or held back than messages less challenging for the leader, when leader openness was low.

For the team, although we did not find a significant correlation between psychological safety, speaking up or speaking out, we found that psychological safety was significantly correlated to silence. This is in line with previous research (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 1999; Nemhhard & Edmondson, 2006). Employees are less silent when psychological safety is high and they feel more safe and comfortable to share their opinion with their colleagues or their leader (Van Dyne, 2003; Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2014). This indicates that employees not only consider psychological safety for high-challenge suggestions but more generally for all voice behaviors. So even for low-challenge voice behavior low psychological safety is problematic. For silence, we found psychological safety to act as a moderator of the relationship between voice challenge and silence.
Surprisingly, in particular voice messages with a low challenging character were held back under conditions of low psychological safety. Voicing in unsafe circumstances when the message is not urgent may be seen as a waste of time by employees. It might be that employees dare only to voice when there is high urgency and the message is important (so high challenging nature of the voice content). The importance of the message to be voiced seems to overcome the fear of negative reactions from colleagues. Our findings indicate that silence is positively linked to challenging content when psychological safety is high and negatively when safety is low.

This is the opposite to the interaction effect of challenging voice content and leader openness, when challenge of voice content was positively linked to silence under low safety (low leader openness). It could be that the hierarchical position and the related power to reward and punish of leaders as compared to teams plays a role in this difference. Such an explanation is in line with Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009), who note that while a psychologically safe environment “should make employees more comfortable in expressing a wide range of info about the work unit”, employees of, for instance, ethical leaders, may report transgressions anyway, as not doing so might have consequences for their positions. Liang et al. (2012) found that felt obligation for constructive change strengthened the positive relationship between psychological safety and voice. It therefore might be that the felt obligation for constructive change when the voice content is more challenging for the team is one of the reasons why employees are less silent. Siemsen, Roth, Balasubramanian and Anand (2009) found that the greater the employee confidence, the less is the influence of psychological safety on knowledge sharing. Also, it is possible that an employee might have better insights about issues concerning the team than issues concerning the leader and thus feel more confident about the voice content challenging the team. This confidence, thus, might result in her/him staying less silent about the matter that s/he feels confident about.
As noted, this pattern was not found for voice content challenging the leader. Here, the pattern of the interaction effect was as hypothesized: more threatening voice content came with more silence when leader openness was low. The difference between voice content that threatens the leader versus team members may lie in the fact that leaders have more power to reward and punish employees than colleagues (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Detert and Burris, 2007). Moreover, social relationships with colleagues generally are more informal than with leaders. Therefore, employees might fear potential negative reactions to voice of their colleagues less than those of their leaders and might perceive more potential negative consequences of not voicing challenging content when staying silent to their colleagues than to their leaders.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Our study has some limitations which future research should take into account. Firstly, even though we gathered data from three different sources (trias of employee, leader and colleague), which allowed us to reduce the threat of single-source bias, social desirability bias might have influenced participants’ answers as proactivity and voice behavior are generally seen as desirable and positive. Moreover, some constructs were measured by the same rater. This ‘same source’ phenomenon (e.g. leader openness and speaking up both rated by the leader, psychological safety and silence both rated by the employee (who also acted as a colleague in a different triad). This could have influenced our results in the sense that correlations could have been inflated. In addition, as the sample set up required that people knew each other, potential leniency bias (rating someone in a more positive light) is another limitation of our method. Fourthly, our study was performed in only one organization, and the majority of the participants had a higher education degree. It is possible that in other industries or in a sample of respondents with a lower level of education, proactivity and voice behavior are less appreciated. Also, proactivity and voice behavior are very context dependent (Morrison, 2014).
Future research should therefore strive to replicate our findings in other organizational settings. Fifthly, we focused on the individual level of analysis by looking at employees’ perceptions of the team’s openness to voice in terms of psychological safety. Further research might look into the aggregated level when conducting research on the team level (e.g., Edmondson, 1999; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). Finally, we used a cross-sectional design making it impossible to draw conclusions about the direction of causality. Future research should therefore aim to replicate our findings with experimental or longitudinal designs.

In this study, we aimed to integrate research on speaking up, speaking out, and silence. We call for more studies that will combine all three variables in order to further explore the notion of the target switch. Also, as previously note by several scholars (Liang et al., 2012; Burris, 2012; Whiting et al., 2012), more studies are needed focused on examining the content of the voice message to increase our understanding of what exactly is voiced and how challenging such message is for the voice target. We add to the existing research on leader openness and psychological safety, where those contextual variables also have a moderating role in the relationship between challenging voice content and voice or silence. Previous work suggests that employees fear personal losses from speaking up and are more likely to remain silent (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). We argued that this would play an even stronger role if the content of the voice message is challenging for the target. Our findings of the main effect of leader openness on speaking up confirms existing research of the influence of this contextual variable (Vakola & Boudaras, 2005; Detert & Burris, 2007; Morisson et al., 2011; Li & Sun, 2015). Further, when leader openness is low, the more challenging the nature of the voice content for the leader, the more likely the employee is to speak out. This finding suggests that change of the voice target may be a viable alternative for employees whose leader is not open for ideas and suggestions. Yet, we also found low leader openness to come with increased employee silence to the extent that the voice content was challenging for the leader. So, while
some employees might speak out their ideas to their colleagues when their leader is not open, others might remain silent, hence damaging the organization. Future research should investigate contingency variables that influence when employees decide to speak out versus to stay silent under these conditions.

As we found psychological safety to act as a moderator of the relationship between voice challenge and silence, but not for speaking up or speaking out, we encourage more studies examining psychological safety as a moderator of those two voice constructs. Also, more studies are needed to explore whether our surprising finding of voice messages with a low challenging character to be held back under the circumstances of low psychological safety will be replicated and indeed whether silence, as we found in our data, will be positively linked to challenging content when psychological safety is high and negatively when safety is low.

Lastly, as stated above, it might be that one’s felt obligation for constructive change and confidence weaken the influence of psychological safety on the decision to voice or remain silent given the challenging voice content. Hence, future research on employee felt obligation for constructive change and confidence is needed in order to understand why or why not employees voice to a specific target when voice content challenges the target (Siemsen et al., 2009).

**Practical Implications**

Employee voice covers important information for organizations, and organizations should therefore aim to stimulate and receive voice from their employees. Our results show that team members can form an alternative voice target for employees if they fear that the message they want to convey might be too threatening for their leader, and the leader might not be open to such a message. Apart from other advantages, team work thus also offers the possibility to open up a new outlet for employee voice from which organizations can profit,
and organizations should therefore consider this additional advantage when deciding whether to increase team work.

Leader openness is an important factor for both employee voice and silence. It encourages speaking up and reduces silence, even when the content might be threatening to the leader. Providing an open environment for employee voice is not an easy task for a leader though. While leader openness can result in more voice and thus more solutions to organizational problems, it might not always be easy for leaders to acknowledge and accept suggestions and feedback from employees, especially when it is not in line with their plans and wishes (Campbell, 2000). So, leaders need to be able to tolerate such dissent despite its complications, be more open themselves, and stimulate a psychologically safe environment and a group climate that welcomes ideas (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). One of the ways to assist leaders in creating a more welcoming environment for employee voice would be to educate leaders about ethical leadership and voice behavior (Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). The context openness (voice target openness) to voice, even if a voice message challenges and conflicts with the status quo and the way things are done in the organization, is crucial for the employee in the decision to share his/her input with the leader and his/her colleagues. Both leaders and colleagues should be aware and mindful of this in order to create a work environment conducive to employee voice.
Chapter 4

Leader Reactions to Employee Voice. The Role of the Emotional Framing, Perceived Confidence and Perceived Threat to Decision-Making

Abstract

This article investigates under which conditions leaders react positively to employee voice. We propose a fit idea and argue that positive leader reactions occur only if the voice type (promotive versus prohibitive) fits with the emotional framing of the voice message (conveying positive versus negative emotions). In Study 1 we focus on the fit between voice type and emotional framing in a scenario experiment. We supplement the scenario experiment with a number of qualitative interviews with leaders to support the external validity of our findings and explore possible mechanisms that influence leader reactions to employee voice. Based on the results of the interviews, we conduct a second scenario experiment (Study 2) replicating our first, while adding perceived confidence of the voicer and perceived threat to decision-making as potential mechanisms how the voice type x emotional framing interaction impacts leader reactions to voice. Our results support the idea of the proposed mediated moderation model for leader reactions to voice.

Keywords: promotive and prohibitive voice, emotional framing, perceived confidence, perceived threat to decision-making
Introduction

In order to take a high-quality decision, leaders need information from both outside (e.g., market information) and inside their organization (e.g., employee voice, defined as “constructive challenge to the status quo with the intent of improving the situation rather than merely criticizing”; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, p. 853). In line with this, employee voice has received a lot of attention over the last two decades (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Detert & Burris, 2007; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Burris, 2012). Employee voice has been linked to several positive outcomes including the identification and correction of organizational inefficiencies, error detection, or improving the organizational ability to adapt to change (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Morrison, 2011). Leaders have a key role here as they are immediate voice targets and have formal authority (Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2015). Voice is indeed positively associated with leader evaluations of employee performance (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Whiting, Maynes, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2012). Yet, sometimes leaders can also react negatively to employee voice (e.g., Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001) as it ‘rocks the boat’ (Frese & Fay, 2001, p. 141). While companies can profit from voice implementation, voice is not always listened to and taken on board by leaders (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2014). In this paper, we investigate what employees can do to increase the chance of their voice being positively evaluated and reacted to by their leader.

Detert and Burris (2007) note that most research on voice behavior focusses on the employee characteristics and while there are some studies available on leader reactions to voice (e.g., Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009; Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Liu et al., 2010), there is still a need for research on what makes leaders more or less receptive to voice. In Study 1a, we build on more recent research showing that the emotional framing of a message is important for the effectiveness of the communicated message (Venus, Stam, & van Knippenberg, 2013). In line with this stream of research, we propose that a fit
between the content of the voice message and the emotion type used to communicate the voice message positively affects leaders’ reactions to employee voice. Examples of positive leader reactions are a request for more information, thinking together with the employee, a request to take ownership and develop the idea further, approval, endorsement and implementation. We expect that promotive voice, which is the sharing of ideas about improvements, solutions and possibilities (by nature a positive message), will lead to more positive reactions when the positive, constructive message is reinforced through communication with a positive emotional framing (enthusiasm). Prohibitive voice, on the other hand, expresses concern about factors that potentially can harm the organization (by nature alarming and negative). We propose that for such an alarming message to be taken seriously, a more negative emotional framing expressing anxiety/worry will be more effective as such a framing emphasizes the urgency and harming effects of ignoring the voice message and maintaining the status quo. We suggest that with such fit between message content and emotional framing, voice messages are more likely to be perceived as authentic and less likely to be seen as manipulative due to a feeling of “rightness” (logical fit or consistency between verbal and non-verbal cues), therefore, resulting in more positive leader reactions (see e.g., Higgins 2000; Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003; Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004, on the feeling of “rightness”).

We tested the idea above in a scenario experiment among Dutch employees (Study 1a). Next, we supplemented the findings with data from several qualitative interviews amongst Dutch leaders (Study 1b) aiming to further explore how a voice message – emotional framing fit might influence leaders’ reactions to employee voice. It emerged from the interviews that attributions of perceived employee confidence and perceived threat to decision-making play a role in leader reactions to employee voice. This served as input for the development of a second scenario experiment (Study 2) in which we investigated two potential mediators of the relationship between the voice message, namely emotional framing and supervisor reactions.
Grant and colleagues (2009) found that the emotions employees express at work influence leaders’ attributions regarding voice behavior, we propose that a fit between message and emotional framing similarly stimulates certain attributions of the voice target (attributions of employee confidence and voice threat) and that these attributions act as mediating mechanisms.

In the persuasion as well as the advice taking literature, perceived confidence of the source is mentioned as an essential element that influences whether the message recipient takes advice on board (e.g., Bonnacio & Dalal, 2006; Cramer, Brodsky, & DeCoster 2009; Cramer, DeCoster, Harris, Fletcher, & Brodsky 2011; Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012). Whether the voicer is perceived as confident likely depends on the combination of the voice type and the emotional framing used when voicing. As argued above on consistency between the verbal and non-verbal cues when voicing, suggestions for improvement are not expected to be voiced with anxiety, as a suggestion for improvement conveys a positive and constructive message which fits better with a positive emotion like enthusiasm (Venus et al., 2013), whereas messages about current or potential harm convey an alarming message which fits better with a negative emotion such as anxiety and worry. Therefore, if someone is consistent with the verbal and non-verbal cues, they are more likely to be perceived as confident in what they are conveying.

The second mediator investigated here is the leader feeling being threatened by voice. Promotive voice is less threatening as it is about improvements of the status quo while prohibitive voice is more challenging as it is alarming about current or potential harm, for instance, when an employee suggests that the leader has overlooked or ignored problems and will be held responsible for this mistake. In such a case, leaders are likely to feel threatened by and react negatively to employee voice (e.g., see Burris (2012) on the mediating effect of perceived threat to the leader on voice type and supervisor endorsement). Here we argue that if a promotive or prohibitive voice is framed with the fitting type of emotion, the supervisor will be more convinced by the suggested message due to the absence of the mixed signals from
the voicer. (S)he is more likely to feel less confused by the conflicting message and emotions used to convey the message and thus feel less threatened and is more likely to react more positively to promotive and prohibitive voice.

In sum, we argue for a moderated mediation model in which the combination of voice type and emotional framing affects the voice recipient’s perception of the voicer’s confidence and degree of threat to the leader, which, in turn, are both linked to the leader’s reaction to voice. Figure 8 presents our research model.

![Research model](image)

*Figure 4.1. Research model*

This study contributes to the voice literature in several ways. First, we add to the stream of voice research distinguishing between different types of voice, promotive and prohibitive voice (Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012). Second, we contribute to the still limited academic work on reactions of the social environment (the leader) to voice and specifically the role of leader attributions (e.g., Whiting et al., 2012; Burris, 2012). Finally, we contribute to the literature on voice effectiveness by advancing the understanding of the mechanisms how employees can facilitate positive reactions to voice (e.g., Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995; Whiting et al., 2012).
Voice in Organizations

As leaders are often far away from the work floor, they might not possess all relevant information on work processes if employees do not speak up or voice (Detert & Edmondson, 2005; Morrison, 2011). Tröster and van Knippenberg (2012) refer to employee voice as any act of speaking up with constructive criticism to the leader, even when unsolicited. The existing literature on voice distinguishes various categories/types of voice behavior. Here we focus on the distinction proposed by Liang et al. (2012) who identify promotive versus prohibitive voice. These two types of voice are also sometimes labeled suggestion-focused versus problem-focused voice (Morrison, 2011). Both promotive and prohibitive voice are proactive in nature, constructive and change-oriented. Promotive voice is defined as speaking up with new ideas for improving overall organizational functioning (Wang, Huang, Chu, & Wang, 2010). While promotive voice is challenging in nature as it aims to change the status quo, this type of voice behavior is about providing innovative solutions and positive suggestions and has a future ideal state orientation (Liang et al., 2012). Prohibitive voice is about speaking up on the dysfunctional aspects of work practices (Wang et al., 2010). Prohibitive voice has an alarming function and entails speaking up or out about things that are potentially harmful for the organization, so its main purpose is to prevent the negative effects of “process losses in a timely manner” (Liang et al., 2012, p. 12).

Conceptually, the two forms of voice differ as promotive voice focuses on the realization of new ideas and suggestions, while prohibitive voice aims to stop or prevent harm. Also, while promotive voice has a future orientation focused on how things can be improved, prohibitive voice can focus on both the present and the future by drawing attention to factors that harm the status quo as well as factors that potentially can cause harm. Finally, promotive voice contains solutions, while prohibitive voice does not necessarily provide these (Liang et al., 2012). Moreover, promotive voice might be interpreted by the leader as less suggestive that
the leader is overlooking a problem as the status quo is not be problematic per se, while prohibitive voice may suggest so as it points out a (potential) problem of the status quo.

**Study 1. Leader Reactions to Voice**

As voice behavior is challenging to the status quo in nature, it might be threatening to the leader as s/he might identify with and have ownership of the status quo (Morrison, 2011). Yet, employee voice only helps the organization to the extent that the leader does something with the voiced information. In this sense, constructive leader reactions to voice are usually as important as employee voice behavior itself.

Promotive voice has supportive but also a challenging to the status quo nature, however, as it is improvement focused, it may be the voice type more appreciated by leaders than voice that has a more alarming nature. Burris (2012) found that when voice is seen as supportive of the status quo rather than challenging, leaders are more likely to see employees as loyal and less threatening and are more likely to endorse the suggested voice (Morrison, 2014). Prohibitive voice, on the other hand, is an expression of concern that calls attention to harmful factors affecting or challenging the status quo. It may not necessarily contain a solution and has more of an alarming function of a potential or existing harm. Prohibitive voice is more likely to be interpreted by the leader as challenging as prohibitive voice can entail opposing of the current practices or implemented changes, even when those are necessary or can contain overly critical comments. Such voice is more likely to be seen as an employee suggesting that the leader has overlooked a problem as it is more personal (even when it is entirely problem-focused) and can be seen as criticism of the leader (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Burris (2012) found that challenging voice resulted in more negative reactions of the recipients (less endorsement and less favorable performance appraisal), while supportive voice generated more
positive reactions. We therefore expect that leaders will react less positively to prohibitive voice than to promotive voice.

*Hypothesis 1: Promotive voice will come with more positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice.*

The way in which voice is framed will influence its effectiveness (Whiting et al., 2012). One of the ways to frame a message is emotion (e.g., Burris, 2012, Morrison, 2014). Our inspiration for linking emotion to framing of the voice message came from Brockner and Higgins (2001), who looked at regulatory focus and emotion fit. Regulatory focus theory states that people align themselves with appropriate goals and standards. In this theory there are two types of regulatory focus (promotion versus prevention). Promotion focus directs people to their ideals, hopes and wishes and has them focus on achieving positive outcomes, while prevention focus puts attention on duties and obligations and has people focus on avoiding negative outcomes (Leonardelli, Lakin, & Arkin, 2007). Prevention focus leads to individuals being less creative, use less abstract language, initiate action earlier and experience less success when negotiating than promotion focus (Leonardelli et al., 2007). Brockner and Higgins (2001) suggest that one’s regulatory focus influences nature of their emotional experience so that promotion-focused people have an emotional spectrum of cheerful-dejected dimension, while prevention-focused people have an emotional spectrum of quiescent-agitated dimension. The authors found that promotion focused mothers were more likely to report feeling cheerful (dejected) in response to their children’s positive (negative) behaviors, while this was not the case for prevention focused mothers who were more likely to feel quiescent (agitated) in response to their children’s positive (negative) behaviors. Promotion focus is, thus, associated with positive emotions, while prevention focus more with negative emotions. This study gave us an idea of fit between the voice type and emotion type. Promotive voice is focused on the future ideal state. Prohibitive voice, on the other hand, is focused on preventing harm (‘process
losses”) (Liang et al., 2012). Such distinction can also be traced between the promotion and prevention focus, where promotion focus is about the ideal future state, involvement in the attainment of rewards, having maximal goals concern of development and change, while prevention focus is about safety and security, avoidance of punishment, minimal goals, goals of maintenance, conservation and keeping the status quo (Van Dijk & Kluger, 2004). Therefore, we suggest that the receiver of the voice message will have a “feeling of rightness” if promotive voice will be framed with positive emotions, while prohibitive voice with negative emotions.

From Camacho et al. (2003) we use the feeling of rightness from the regulatory fit, who studied value from fit between the regulatory fit and goal pursuit. They found that this regulatory fit influenced moral evaluation of an object, as well as explained why people have different evaluative judgments of past errors. Cesario et al. (2004) took this concept and applied it to persuasion context, where they suggest this “feeling right” about the strategic framing and the recipient’s regulatory state serves as information for evaluations of the message persuasiveness affecting one’s opinion on the topic. We propose that a certain voice content/type should be accompanied by an emotion more fitting the message content (based on the fit suggested by Brockner and Higgins (2001) above) in order to be more persuasive and generate a more positive leader reaction.

For employee voice, we expect that an employee voice x emotion type fit will result in more positive leader reactions. Promotive voice is focused on the future ideal state, thus providing a positive message of improvement and should therefore be accompanied with positive emotions such as enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is an expression of positive affect (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Prohibitive voice, on the other hand, is focused on preventing harm (“process losses”) (Liang et al., 2012) and, as an alarming message, is more focused on a negative event (threat, danger), and it should thus be accompanied with ‘fitting’ negative emotions such as anxiety/worry. Anxiety is “a common emotion that signals the presence of a potential threat,
promotes pessimistic appraisals of future events” (Gino, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2012; p.5). As mentioned above, we expect that promotive voice will lead to more positive reactions when the positive, constructive message is reinforced through communication with a positive emotional framing (here we focus on enthusiasm), and prohibitive voice will invoke more positive reaction from leaders when the more negative, alerting message is communicated with a fitting negative emotional framing (here we focus on anxiety/worry) to stress the urgency and harming effects of the voice message. This feeling of “rightness” (see Higgins 2000; Camacho et al., 2003; Cesario et al., 2004) from the voice messages paired with the appropriate emotional framing is more likely to be perceived as clear and authentic, more convincing and less likely to be seen as manipulative and, therefore, is more likely to result in positive supervisor reactions. Figure 4.2 reflects our conceptual model. We hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2a: Promotive voice with enthusiasm will result in more positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety/worry.*

*Hypothesis 2b: Prohibitive voice with anxiety will result in more positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm.*

*Figure 4.2. Study 1a conceptual model*
Method Study 1a

Design

We conducted a scenario experiment using a 2 x 2 factorial design in which we manipulated employee voice type (promotive vs prohibitive) and emotional framing of the voice message (enthusiasm vs anxiety). More specifically, we asked participants to imagine that they were the leader of a team, and one of their employees was speaking up to them with either a promotive (providing a suggestion for an improvement) or a prohibitive voice message (alarming about a potential harm for the organization). We then measured participants’ reactions to voice using a survey that participants had to fill in after having read the scenario. The full text of the scenarios can be found in Appendix 6.

Participants and Procedure

The experiment was conducted among 202 employees following a part-time academic program of a Dutch University of Applied Sciences. Participants were asked to fill in printed copies of the survey, participation was voluntary and anonymous. No incentive was offered to the participants. The scenarios and manipulations were pretested on 10 Dutch full-time employees before being distributed to participants of the study. The respondents were randomly presented one of the four scenarios: combinations of promotive voice/enthusiasm, promotive voice/anxiety, prohibitive voice/enthusiasm and prohibitive voice/anxiety. We included a manipulation check to test whether participants understood the voice type manipulation correctly (promotive voice: “Mark is proposing a new system (Yes/No)”); prohibitive voice: “Mark is warning the leader about the disadvantages of the current system (Yes/No)”)) as well as the emotional framing correctly (“Mark seems happy and enthusiastic (Yes/No)”; “Mark seems worried and anxious (Yes/No”)”). Respondents that did not pass the manipulation check were excluded from the analyses, resulting in the final sample size of 159. Out of these 159, 5 respondents (2.9%) did not indicate their age, gender or leader role. Out of the ones that did,
46.8 % were male. 38% held a leader role. The age ranged from 20 to 51 years old ($M=30.6; SD = 7.46)$.

**Measures**

**Voice type** was manipulated in two scenarios: 0=promotive voice, in the scenario worded as “new idea for improving the expenses approval process” and 1=prohibitive voice, in the scenario worded as “concern about the newly implemented enterprise software program used for all HR processes”.

**Emotional framing** was also manipulated in the scenarios: 0=enthusiasm, in the scenario worded as “cheerful and happy, upbeat tone of voice, smiles regularly and seems enthusiastic” and 1=anxiety/worry, in the scenario worded as “anxious, nervous and tense, an agitated tone of voice, frowns regularly and seems worried”.

**The leader reactions** were measured with 8 items ($\alpha=.76$). Four items were about positive reactions. Examples of the items are “I will do something with the suggestion/concern”, “I will probably pick it up and discuss it with my supervisor”. However, as endorsement is not the only reaction a leader can have to employee voice, we complemented those items with four other items which included less positive reactions based on the stream of voice literature which discusses the negative reactions of the leader (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al., 2001; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison, 2014). Examples of the items are “I will tell him I do not immediately agree, and he needs better arguments.”, “I will tell him he is wasting his time as the decision has been made”. Four of the items were reverse-coded in the analysis as they were negatively worded.
Results Study 1a

**Manipulation check.** As mentioned above, we used only data from the respondents who passed the manipulation checks both for voice type and for emotional framing type. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the results of the manipulation check.

Table 4.1

*Manipulation Check Study 1a*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios (voice type/ emotional framing)</th>
<th>Before Manipulation Check</th>
<th>Failed Manipulation Check</th>
<th>After Manipulation Check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 3</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 4</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2

*Correlations Among and Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables (Cronbach’s alphas on diagonal)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Voice type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0=promotive, 1=prohibitive)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotion type</td>
<td></td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(0=enthusiasm, 1=worry, anxiety)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Leader Reactions</th>
<th>5.38 (.75)</th>
<th>.15</th>
<th>-.06</th>
<th>(.76)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

\( N = 159. \) * \( p < .05 \)

**Correlations and descriptives.** The means and standard deviations of all of the outcome variables and the intercorrelations of all the variables included in the study are reported in Table 8. The data in table one shows a small positive correlation between voice type and leader reactions which approaches significance \( (r = .15, p = .055) \).

**Test of hypotheses.** In order to test Hypotheses 1, 2a and 2b, we ran the SPSS Process macro by Hayes (Model 1). We found that prohibitive voice came with more positive leader reactions \( (b = .16, t = 1.97, p = .05) \), but there was no significant main effect of emotional framing on leader reactions \( (b = -.07, t = -.85, \text{n.s.}) \) and also no significant interaction effect of emotion and voice type. \( (b = .03, t = .44, \text{n.s.}) \). Therefore Hypotheses 1, 2a and 2b are rejected.

**Discussion Study 1a**

Somewhat surprisingly, we found that leaders reacted more positively to prohibitive voice rather than to promotive voice. Next to this unexpected finding, we also noted that up to 21.2 percent of the participants in the different scenarios did not pass the manipulation checks despite the fact that we pre-tested the scenarios, which indicates that our scenarios might not have been sufficiently clear to the respondents or might not have worked as intended. In particular, participants seemed to have problems in correctly judging whether the voice behavior was promotive or prohibitive, which also means that our scenarios might have lacked validity, which might also explain our counterintuitive findings regarding the effect of voice type on leader reactions. We therefore decided to conduct additional qualitative interviews
regarding leaders’ experience of promotive and prohibitive voice to explore reasons for the dropout and the unexpected pattern in leaders’ reactions to voice.

**Method Study 1b**

In order to gain more insights in leaders’ experience of and reactions to employee voice and its emotional framing, we conducted in-depth interviews with five Dutch employees holding a leader position in their company with the goal to reconstruct employee voice behavior and leader reactions from the past. Using the guideline of Dworkin (2012) on adequacy of the sample size between 5 and 50, we aimed for reaching a saturation point in the data collection. We used semi-structured interviews to keep the focus on the themes of interest of leader reactions to employee promotive and prohibitive voice, but also to allow for some flexibility (Bryman, 2008).

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol included questions about voicing employees, including the perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses, giving feedback to these employees, and the employees’ expression and management of their emotions, in particular in relation to their voice behaviors. The leaders also had to think of two specific situations when an employee approached them with a suggestion for an improvement (promotive voice) or expressing concerns about existing or potential harm for the organization (prohibitive voice). Before the data collection, the interview protocol was pre-tested on three Dutch employees. After pre-testing, the order of some questions was altered in the protocol, and the formulation of some questions was clarified to ensure a better understanding.

**Sample**

The respondents were recruited through the personal network of one of the authors. The sample consisted of 5 respondents (3 male and 2 female); 4 respondents had at least a bachelor’s
degree, all with leader roles. The interviewees were: an HR manager (advertising agency), an account manager (advertising agency), a bar manager (restaurant), a lead document controller (document control company), and a regional operations manager (railway company). In choosing the interviewees, we purposefully looked for respondents from different work contexts to capture different views on employee voice behavior.

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews were conducted in English in July and August 2017 in the Netherlands. All respondents were informed that this would be the case and all five felt comfortable doing so in English. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in order to achieve the richest context information (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours. Each respondent was asked for permission to record the interview, was explained the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality.

We started the analysis with a deductive approach based on the theoretical rationale we used in Study 1a and asked our respondents to give examples of an employee conveying a promotive and prohibitive voice message (critical incidents). We then focused further on what the voice message in the incident was about, how the message was brought up, what the leader thought of it and how (s)he reacted toward the employee. We coded the interviews and later grouped them into themes.

Results Study 1b.

The themes that were mentioned in the interviews are shown below (see Figure 4.3), followed by an elaboration for each theme.
Employee Voice

Examples of employee promotive and prohibitive voice provided by the interviewees can be found in Appendix 6. Leaders indicate they want employees to present facts, scenarios and arguments when they engage in voice behavior. They mention in the interviews that the voice message the employees convey should be clear and should contain a solution (which contrasts with our findings in Study 1a in which supervisors reacted more positively to the prohibitive voice scenario which did not have a solution). A few interviewees further elaborated that they wanted employees to show that they thought the voice message through, so that the leader does not have to ask if they thought of alternative options. Offering a concrete suggestion for an issue is much appreciated by all the leaders:

“Change of process... from our client we had status updates and they always went on and on...he came up with a template to use.” Account Executive

“One of the employees said we could change something...Instead of grabbing 5 ingredients and use 4 techniques, you combine. 2-3 are mixed together, efficiency, saves a lot of time”

Bar Manager
To the question of examples of employee prohibitive voice show, the following quotes indicate that those voice behaviors are less favored by the leaders:

“It became a really vague thing and for me the thing is, there was no solution, so I had a telcon with them, she was also there [the employee]” Lead Document Controller

“She came up to me and said I do not know what to do, how can I get this money. It was quite a stressful situation” Account Executive

The lack of a solution can cause frustration or make the leader feel that the issue was “just thrown at them” or that the employee expects to be told what to do.

“I did not like that it was more like you need to tell me what to do, you need to decide...Just because I am a leader, does not mean I need to know about everything.” HR Manager

**Emotional Framing and its Fit with the Voice Type**

The framing of the voice message seemed to be very important for the interviewed leaders. The interviewees note that the emotions used should transmit confidence, so no mixed messages of an alarming issue combined with happy emotions, and the message should also transmit a sense of responsibility and taking ownership for the issue/concern (in case of prohibitive voice). For promotive voice, more enthusiasm and positvity show the confidence of the employee in the message communicated and leads to more positive leader reactions instead of anxiousness when suggesting an improvement.

“It helps if you feel someone himself is very enthusiastic and positive about his suggestion. It is the energy and that you know they thought about it” HR Manager

“Eagerness and excitement to do it and get it done [template to use for the update process] and see if it would make a difference” Account Executive
“Anxiousness transmits lack of confidence. You can feel or see if someone is anxious [on the suggesting of ideas during the shift briefing]” Regional Operations Manager

For prohibitive voice, if it is presented with a laugh or a joke or showing indifference, leaders interpret such behavior as a lack of seriousness of the issue or perceive that the employee does not care about the issue at hand.

“There is a laugh and sarcasm, I cannot make anything out of it, it might as well be: I am going to have an ice-cream...She should have been more serious... Cause now I hear a problem, but if I look at her I do not sense it is a problem, so her emotion does not indicate the weight of the problem. Cause now you still have to decode yourself if it is a big problem or not” Lead Document Controller

By contrast, leaders report feeling pressure to get involved when prohibitive voice is conveyed as serious, for instance, when it is a legal issue (HR Leader) or a burglary (co-founder and director), so negative emotion of anxiety and worry aids to communicate the alarming/serious nature of prohibitive voice:

“The legislation around freelancers changed and someone raised a concern that we have to be compliant with the new law, we have to change the way we look or process them...

I felt the worry and concern, definitely.” HR Manager

These quotes clearly suggest that the voice type-emotional framing fit seems to reinforce the effect of the voice message.

**Leader Reactions to Voice**

The interviewees provided more examples of positive than negative reactions to employee voice:
“I love the idea, work on it and then I take it to my management. Then I endorsed it further”

*HR Leader*

“Set it up, inform the group, go for it” *Account Executive*

“It is important to show your staff, to give credit, it motivates people” *Bar Manager*

Other positive reactions include immediate feedback of approval, asking the employee to further develop the idea, whether by empowering the employee to take ownership and make the idea happen (e.g. HR Manager) or by thinking along with the employee how to proceed (Lead Document Controller, Account Executive). This was the case for both promotive voice and even more for prohibitive voice. In some cases, these reactions were followed by endorsement to higher management and implementation. All interviewees did show that they took ownership and responsibility for the issues raised in prohibitive voice by their employees, regardless whether it was the employee’s fault or not, and were willing to work together to solve the (potential) problem. Their preferred option, as mentioned above, is when an employee also has a solution so that the leader does not have to take the lead in solving the issue. In case of negative reactions (e.g., disapproval of the idea or no endorsement), the leaders try to use a constructive approach and do not flat out say that something is not a good idea or is an issue. They state that it is important to give employees credit for their ideas and to provide feedback after the idea has been implemented. These reactions were particularly depending on two topics that consistently came back in the interviews, confidence and pressure to decision-making.

**Perceived Confidence of the Voicer**

Employee confidence seems to be an important variable that was mentioned by interviewees when giving reasons for their reactions to employee voice. The interviewees mention that the fit (or misfit) between voice type and emotional framing leads to perceiving their employee as more (or vice versa less) confident. The person voicing is consistent in the
message as well as in the emotional framing they use to convey it, which will influence the perceived confidence of the voicer:

“She was not giving confidence...When the message gets blurred... that was not ok for me. My trust in her in regard to the subject was gone” Lead Document Controller

“Mix, [of the message and the emotion used], I guess, probably not [did it convey confidence], cause none of it made sense” Account Executive

Pressure/Threat to Decision-Making

In all interviews the leaders indicated that they had to do something about the issue raised for prohibitive voice, due to the fact that there was no solution provided by the employee. Prohibitive voice seemed to be perceived as yielding more pressure on the leader to decide and act on the issue raised. Examples of the answers on whether they felt pressured to decide what to do about the voiced issue are: “Yes, because it was a legal issue” (HR Manager), “Absolutely, both from making sure that she did feel responsible. That was my biggest concern” (Account Executive), “One of the biggest responsibilities is to always act on these signals. Because if you do not, people will not take management seriously” (Regional Operations Manager)

There was only one example of such experienced pressure for promotive voice:

“Yes, because that is my responsibility as a leader, because you have to be facilitating...I have to answer to every question or every idea they come up with” Regional Operations Manager

As a leadership role per definition implies making decisions, when an employee conveys a voice message, all leaders we interviewed felt obligated to do something with the voiced message, which they would not have had to do, if the issue was not communicated.
Such pressure/threat to decision-making was a second important driver of leader reactions to voice mentioned by the interviewees.

**Discussion Study 1**

The scenario experiment (Study 1a) yielded some unexpected findings as prohibitive voice resulted in more positive leader reactions than promotive voice. This was not in line with our theoretical ideas and also was not found in our interviews in Study 1b, where leaders reported more positive reactions to promotive voice of their employees. Moreover, as our manipulation checks resulted in 21.3 percent of the respondents being eliminated from the final sample, we were worried about the validity of the manipulations in the first scenario study. It might be that our description of the voice types did not allow participants in the first scenario study to clearly distinguish between promotive and prohibitive voice, potentially because a constructive solution for the voiced problem was relatively straightforward (drop the new system and reinstall the old system). This might have even been reinforced when combining prohibitive voice with a positive emotional framing (Scenario 3: 36.5 percent of the participants failed the manipulation check); here, the emotional framing might have led to the participants to assume a constructive orientation and see a solution component incorporated in the prohibitive voice manipulation). We therefore decided to conduct another scenario study with a clearer voice manipulation to test the stability of the findings of Study 1a. Our interviews (Study 1b) also brought up new variables that were consistently mentioned by interviewees as being highly relevant for their reactions to voice, namely, employee confidence and perceived pressure/threat to decision-making. As a consequence, we decided to extend our theoretical model by including these two variables as mediators in the voice – leader reaction relationship and conduct a second refined scenario study.
Study 2. Mediated Moderation Model (see Figure 4.1)

Our refined theoretical model proposes that the interaction of voice type and emotional framing affects leaders’ reaction to voice via perceived confidence and perceived threat/pressure to decision-making. In support of this model, Jung (2014) found similarly that tentative voice is perceived as less threatening by the leader while assertive voice is perceived as more threatening to the leader and affects both endorsement and performance evaluation in positive and negative ways respectively. Whiting et al. (2012) found that variables such as liking, prosocial motives and perception of voice constructiveness and perceived threat to the leader affected voice endorsement and performance evaluations. Below, we develop our hypotheses for both mechanisms in more detail.

Perceived Confidence

The advice taking literature has looked at confidence expressed by the advisor and the decider (e.g., Harvey & Fisher, 1997; See, Morrison, Rothman, & Soll 2011; Bonnacio & Dalal, 2006). There is evidence that recommendations given by more confident employees are followed more often than those by less confident individuals, which means that employees can strategically use expressed confidence to influence others (here, the leader) into following their advice and suggestions (Bonnacio & Dalal, 2006). Current research on advice taking and confidence suggests that when advisors show greater confidence in the quality of their advice, the advice is weighted more heavily (Tost et al., 2012). People may regard confidence as signifying expertise and are thus more likely to take advice from confident individuals (Harvey & Fisher, 1997). In the context of our study of employee voice, based on these aforementioned studies on advice taking and confidence, we expect that perceived employee confidence will positively influence the leader’s reactions to voice:
**Hypothesis 3: Perceived confidence of the voicer is positively related to positive leader reactions.**

We argue further that this perceived confidence of the voicer will be influenced by the fit between the type of the voice message conveyed and the emotional framing used to communicate the message. First, we assume that as prohibitive voice is alarming, the leader will attribute more confidence to the voicer than when voicer is conveying a promotive voice message as the former takes more courage for the voicer. Second, See et al. (2011) suggested to consider specific emotions and how they affect advice taking through confidence which we used to investigate employee voice. In general, positive emotions signal that a person is in good spirits and is positive about the message he/she is bringing across; as a consequence, the person is perceived as more confident by others who, in turn, react more positively to the communicated message (See et al., 2011). If such positive emotions accompany a suggestion of improvement (promotive voice), the voice target might attribute the emotions to the voicer’s suggestion and experience the fit between the message and its emotional framing as authentic, thus resulting in even more perceived confidence of the voicer.

However, if the message that is delivered is not very positive (such as prohibitive voice when an employee is alarming the leader about potentially harmful organizational practices) and provided with a non-fitting positive emotional framing such as enthusiasm, mixed signals are sent to the recipient (‘the situation cannot be that bad if the employee is still positive’). Similarly, negative emotions signal that an employee is concerned or unsure about the message that is conveyed, so the recipient might misperceive this as the voicer being not confident in his/her ideas when making suggestions on how to improve work procedures (promotive voice). By contrast, if such negative emotions accompany an alarming message (prohibitive voice), the voice target might attribute the emotions to the voicer’s worry aiding to transmit the seriousness about the presented problem and experience the fit between the message and its
emotional framing as authentic, thus resulting in more perceived confidence of the voicer. Therefore, we suggest that perceived (by the leader) confidence of the voicer will be influenced by the combination of the voice type and emotional framing. Promotive voice framed with enthusiasm (fit) will lead to higher perceived confidence than promotive voice framed with anxiety/worry (misfit). Similarly, prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry (fit) will lead to higher perceived confidence than prohibitive voice communicated with enthusiasm (misfit).

Hypothesis 4a: Promotive voice with enthusiasm will result in higher perceived confidence of the voicer than promotive voice with anxiety/worry.

Hypothesis 4b: Prohibitive voice with anxiety will result in higher perceived confidence of the voicer than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm.

Combining Hypothesis 3, 4a and 4b, we expect a moderated mediation effect such that the indirect effect of voice type on leader reactions, via perceived employee confidence, is moderated by emotional framing.

Hypothesis 5a: Promotive voice with enthusiasm (fit) will have a more positive relationship with leader reactions through its effect on perceived confidence than promotive voice with anxiety/worry (misfit).

Hypothesis 5b: Prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry (fit) will have a more positive relationship with leader reactions through its effect on perceived confidence than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm (misfit).

Perceived Threat to Decision-Making

As argued above, voice targets (the leaders) can feel threatened by employee voice as it challenges the status quo, so perceived threat to the leader is an important factor to consider when studying supervisor leader reactions to voice (Whiting et al., 2012; Burris, 2012;
Morrison, 2014; Jung, 2014). Individuals with a high subjective sense of power might react with feelings of competitiveness when encountering unsolicited advice from others. Under certain circumstances, such advice can be perceived as a threat to the decision maker’s independence and autonomy (Tost et al., 2012). Jung (2014) defines (perceived) personal threat as “the voice recipient’s appraisal of potential harms and damages that the voice event may cause to his or her personal well-being at the relationship level of the voiced communication.” (p. 44). Such perceived threat is important to consider as voice recipients have something to lose such as formal or informal status, self-worth or a decision-making authority (Jung, 2014). Burris (2012) found that perceived threat to the leader mediated the relationship between the challenging voice and voice endorsement, such that it led to less endorsement. Based on the outcomes of our interviews in Study 1, we conceptualize this threat as perceived threat to decision-making. In line with the existing literature (Tost et al., 2012; Burris, 2012; Jung, 2014), we argue that such perceived threat will negatively impact leader reactions to employee voice, namely:

**Hypothesis 6: Perceived threat to decision-making is negatively related to positive leader reactions.**

Similar to the arguments presented above for perceived confidence, we expect the perceived threat to leader decision-making to be affected by the interaction between voice type and voice emotional framing. As mentioned above, positive emotional framing signals that the person is in good spirits and is positive about the message. If the message communicated is positive (promotive voice), such an effect will be strengthened by the “right” type of emotion (positive emotion) communicated and result in less perceived threat to decision-making. By contrast, when a less positive, alarming message (prohibitive voice) is framed positively, it would result in mixed signals for the recipient. The leader will pick up both the voice message itself as well as the emotional framing, and if those two are contradictory, he/she is less likely
to be able to make a proper assessment or judgement of the situation and thus may feel less able to make a decision (‘the situation cannot be that bad if the employee is still cheerful, so the employee is confusing me, is there a problem or is not there a problem, do I need to make a decision or is there no issue’). Negative emotions, on the other hand, signal that the employee is concerned or worried about the conveyed message. So, if an employee is conveying a suggestion for improvement (promotive voice), using negative emotions, the recipient will experience a misfit between the positive message and the negative emotional framing and the leader may underestimate how good the suggestion is and be confused about whether the message is positive or negative. This may result in the leader perceiving the voice message to be ineffective or feeling that the risk of taking such advice on board is too high, thus feeling more pressure to make a decision or might even feel manipulated. If negative emotions accompany an alarming message (prohibitive voice), the voice target might experience the fit between the message and its emotional framing, thus interpreting the message as more clear, resulting in less perceived threat to decision-making as the message and the emotional framing are providing the same signal of urgency and (potential) harm. Therefore, the leader is then more likely to be able to make a proper assessment or judgement of the situation and thus may feel more able to make a decision. To sum up, we expect the leader to perceive the ‘fitting’ voice type/emotion combination as right and feel less threatened, therefore:

Hypothesis 7a: Promotive voice with enthusiasm (fit) will result in less perceived threat to decision-making than promotive voice with anxiety/worry (misfit).

Hypothesis 7b: Prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry (fit) will result in less perceived threat to decision-making than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm (misfit).

Combining Hypothesis 6, 7a and 7b, we expect a moderated mediation effect:
Hypothesis 8a: Promotive voice with enthusiasm (fit) will have a more positive relationship with positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety/worry (misfit), through its negative effect on perceived threat to decision-making.

Hypothesis 8b: Prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry (fit) will have a more positive relationship with positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm (misfit), through its negative effect on perceived threat to decision-making.

The full research model is summarized in Figure 4.1 (p. 94)

Method Study 2

Design

Similar to Study 1a, we conducted a scenario experiment using a 2 x 2 factorial design in which we manipulated employee voice type (promotive vs prohibitive) and emotional framing (enthusiasm vs anxiety). However, we adjusted the scenarios from the earlier study in order to distinguish more clearly between promotive and prohibitive voice and we highlighted the keywords of the voice types and the emotional framing. In this study we also measured participants’ perceived confidence in the voicer and perceived threat to decision-making next to their reaction to voice. Participants had to read one out of four scenarios and fill in an anonymous survey afterwards. The four scenarios were construed from the possible combinations of voice type and emotional framing: promotive voice/enthusiasm, promotive voice/anxiety, prohibitive voice/enthusiasm and prohibitive voice/anxiety. The respondents had to read a one paragraph vignette in which they had to imagine they were the leader of a work team and an employee of that team is coming to them a) with a suggestion for improvement (promotive voice) with either enthusiastic or anxious emotional framing or b) alarming about a potential or current harm in the organization (prohibitive voice) with either
enthusiasm or anxiety as an emotional framing (the scenarios can be found in Appendix 9). The scenarios were pre-tested on 5 people.

**Participants and Procedure**

The participants in this study were 117 employed people of various occupations in the USA using the MTurk platform. The participants were randomly assigned to one of the four scenarios. The vignette was followed by the questions on participants’ likely reactions to the described employee voice message, questions about the perceived confidence of the employee and questions on the perceived threat to decision-making. 61.5 % of our sample were male, 38.5% were female, 47% held a leader role. Participants’ age ranged from 22 to 61 years old ($M=35.7$, $SD=9.41$).

**Measures**

**Voice type** was manipulated in the scenarios: 0=promotive voice, in the scenario worded as “a suggestion related to reduction of the call volume of the call centre” and 1=prohibitive voice, in the scenario worded as “a serious concern of his [the employee] related to the reduction of the call volume of the call centre”. The full text of the scenarios can be found in Appendix 2.

**Emotional framing** was also manipulated in the scenarios: 0=enthusiasm, in the scenario worded as “cheerful and happy, upbeat tone of voice, smiles regularly and seems enthusiastic” and 1=anxiety/worry, in the scenario worded as “anxious, nervous and tense, an agitated tone of voice, frowns regularly and seems worried”.

**Perceived confidence of the voicer** was measured with 2 items from Ashford and Northcraft (1992). The items were: “I suspect that this person is insecure” and “I suspect that this person is unconfident” ($\alpha=.97$). Both items were reverse-coded as they were negatively formulated.
**Perceived threat to decision-making** was measured with 4 items taken from Jung (2014) (α=.90). Examples of items are: “This person threatens my freedom to choose.” “This person tried to manipulate me.”

**The leader reactions** to voice were measured with 8 items (α=.88). We refined the scale of the leader reactions of Study 1. The first item was taken from our first study (“This employee suggestion/concern is convincing”). Three items on voice endorsement were taken from Burris (2012). Those items were “I agree with this person’s comments”, “I think this person’s comments should be implemented” and “I will support this person’s comments when talking with my supervisors”. Endorsement refers to a leader who agrees with the voiced suggestion or warning. Similar to Study 1, we complemented those items with four other items which included less positive reactions which were reverse-coded in the analysis as they were negatively worded.

**Results Study 2**

**Manipulation Check.** We used only data from the respondents who passed the manipulation checks both for voice type and for emotional framing type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Before Manipulation Check</th>
<th>Failed Manipulation Check</th>
<th>After Manipulation Check</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scenario 1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Scenario 3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
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</table>
Scenario 4

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<tbody>
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Table 4.4

Descriptives and Correlations between the Variables (Cronbach’s alphas on diagonal)

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<th>Variables</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emotional Framing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Perceived Confidence of the Voicer</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.83**</td>
<td>(.97)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Perceived Threat to Decision-Making</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Leader Reactions</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>-.22*</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>-.49**</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$N=117$, * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

The means and standard deviations of all of the outcome variables and the intercorrelations of all the variables included in the study are reported in Table 4.4. The data in the table shows a high significant negative correlation between emotional framing and perceived confidence of the voicer ($r=-.83$, $p<.01$). Voice type correlated positively with the perceived threat to decision-making ($r=.23$, $p<.05$). Perceived confidence of the voicer and perceived threat to decision-making had a negative significant correlation ($r=-.26$, $p<.01$). Finally, leader reactions were significantly negatively correlated with all other variables in the
study, except for the perceived confidence of the voicer. Therefore, in line with Hypothesis 1, promotive voice comes with more positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice.

In order to test Hypothesis 2a and 2b, we ran a moderation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) with voice type as the moderator, emotional framing as the independent variable and leader reactions as the dependent variable. Voice type had a significant negative relationship ($b=-.234$, $t=-2.57$, $p<0.05$) with leader reactions, so prohibitive voice results in less positive leader reactions than promitive voice. We also found a main effect of the emotional framing ($b=-.19$, $t=-2.15$, $p<0.05$), so anxiety (high emotion) results in less positive leader reactions than enthusiasm. Further, there is a significant interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing ($b=.21$, $t=2.30$, $p<.05$). Figure 4.4 shows the plots of the interaction effect. Voice has a significant effect on leader reactions only when framing of the message was enthusiastic ($t=-3.23$, $p<.01$). When the message was framed with worry/anxiety, the effect was non-significant.

Figure 4.4. Interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing on leader reactions
Promotive voice with enthusiasm results in higher positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety, which is in line with Hypothesis 2a. However, as simple slope analysis did not show significant effect of prohibitive voice with anxiety resulting in more positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm, we reject Hypothesis 2b.

In order to test our hypotheses about our two mediators (perceived confidence and perceived threat to decision-making), we used a moderated mediation model using model 7 of the PROCESS macro (version 2.13.12; SPSS version 22) by Hayes (2013).

**Moderated mediation analysis with Perceived Confidence**

We found a direct main effect of perceived confidence on leader reactions \((b=.22, t=2.44, p<.05)\). The higher the confidence, the higher (more positive) are the leader reactions, in line with Hypothesis 3. Voice type has a significant negative relationship \((b=-.13, t=-2.78, p<0.01)\) with perceived confidence and a significant negative relationship \((b=-.18, t=-1.97, p=.05)\) with leader reactions. Therefore, we did find a main effect of voice type on both perceived confidence of the voicer and leader reactions in the sense that promotive voice leads to higher perceived confidence and leader reactions rather than prohibitive voice. Emotional framing has a significant negative relationship \((b=-.82, t=-17.12, p<.01)\) with perceived confidence. We also found a significant interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing \((b=.22, t=4.43, p<.01)\) (Figure 4.5).
Figure 4.5. Interaction effect of voice type and emotion on perceived confidence.

Consistent with the results above, promotive voice with enthusiasm leads to much higher perceived confidence than promotive voice with anxiety, in line with Hypothesis 4a. Anxiety itself, in general, results in lower perceived confidence than enthusiasm, irrespective of voice type. Prohibitive voice with anxiety, however, contrary to our expectations, resulted in lower perceived confidence than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm, thus rejecting Hypothesis 4b on congruence.

Voice has an indirect effect on leader reactions through confidence only when framing of the message was enthusiastic ($b=-.08$, s.e.$=.04$, boot 95% CI $[-.16, -.01]$). Therefore, there is an indirect effect on reactions through perceived confidence for enthusiastic framing of voice. We did not find a significant indirect effect for anxious emotional framing ($b=.02$, s.e.$=.02$, 95% CI $[-.02; .07]$). Therefore, we found support for Hypothesis 5a, suggesting promotive voice with enthusiasm leads to higher perceived confidence and thus more positive leader reactions, whereas we reject Hypothesis 5b, as prohibitive voice with enthusiasm leads to higher perceived confidence and thus more positive leader reactions.
Moderated mediation analysis with Perceived Threat to Decision-Making

We found a direct negative effect of perceived threat to decision-making on leader positive reactions ($b=-.46, t=-5.55, p<.01$). The higher the perceived threat to decision-making, the lower (less positive) are the leader reactions, supporting Hypothesis 6. Voice type has a significant positive relationship with perceived threat to decision-making ($b=.27, t=3.10, p<.01$) and a non-significant relationship with leader reactions ($b=.11, t=-1.30, p=n.s.$). Surprisingly, emotional framing has a non-significant relationship with perceived threat to decision-making ($b=.06, t=.73, p=n.s.$). We also found an interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing ($b=-3.2, t=-3.60, p<.01$) (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6. Interaction effect of voice type and emotion on perceived threat to decision-making.

In line with the interaction effects found for leader reactions and perceived confidence, Figure 4.6 shows that promotive voice with enthusiasm leads to somewhat lower perceived threat to decision-making than promotive voice with anxiety, in line with Hypothesis 7a.
Prohibitive voice with anxiety resulted in much lower perceived threat to decision-making than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm, supporting Hypothesis 7b.

Voice has an indirect effect on reactions through perceived threat to decision-making only for enthusiastic people, \((b=-.28, \text{s.e.}=.10, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.49, -.09])\). We did not find a significant indirect effect for anxious people \((b=.02, \text{s.e.}=.06, 95\% \text{ CI } [.09, .16])\). Promotive voice with enthusiasm leads to less perceived threat to decision-making and thus more positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety/worry (in line with Hypothesis 8a). Prohibitive voice with enthusiasm leads to more perceived threat to decision-making than prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry and thus less positive leader reactions (in line with Hypothesis 8b). In sum, for both perceived confidence and for perceived threat, the enthusiastic emotional framing seems to be the driver of the significant interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Formulation</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Promotive voice will come with more positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice.</td>
<td>No in Study 1a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes in Study 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a</td>
<td>Promotive voice with enthusiasm will result in more positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety/worry.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b</td>
<td>Promotive voice with enthusiasm will result in more positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety/worry.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Perceived confidence of the voicer is positively related to positive leader reactions.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4a</td>
<td>Promotive voice with enthusiasm will result in higher perceived confidence of the voicer than promotive voice with anxiety/worry.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4b</td>
<td>Prohibitive voice with anxiety will result in higher perceived confidence of the voicer than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5a</td>
<td>Promotive voice with enthusiasm (fit) will have a more positive relationship with leader reactions through its effect on perceived confidence than promotive voice with anxiety/worry (misfit).</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5b</td>
<td>Prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry (fit) will have a more positive relationship with leader reactions through its effect on perceived confidence than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm (misfit).</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>Perceived threat to decision-making is negatively related to positive leader reactions.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7a</td>
<td>Promotive voice with enthusiasm (fit) will result in less perceived threat to decision-making than promotive voice with anxiety/worry (misfit).</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7b</td>
<td>Prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry (fit) will result in less perceived threat to decision-making than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm (misfit).</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8a</td>
<td>Promotive voice with enthusiasm (fit) will have a more positive relationship with positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety/worry (misfit), through its negative effect on perceived threat to decision-making.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8b</td>
<td>Prohibitive voice with anxiety/worry (fit) will have a more positive relationship with positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm (misfit), through its negative effect on perceived threat to decision-making.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General Discussion

This study looked into the conditions under which leaders react positively to employee voice. Herewith we contribute to the limited research on the mechanisms that connect voice behaviors to more positive or negative outcomes. We proposed a fit (congruence) idea of the voice type (promotive versus prohibitive) with the emotional voice framing of the voice message (positive versus negative emotions) which should lead to more positive leader reactions. The results of the second study mostly support the idea of the proposed mediated moderation model, where perceived confidence and perceived threat to decision-making served as mediators, for leader reactions to voice. Below we discuss our findings in more detail.

We found an interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing, such that promotive voice with enthusiasm results in much more positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety. Prohibitive voice with anxiety does, however, result in more positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm (fit hypothesis partially confirmed as we found and interaction effect, but a non-significant effect during the simple slope analysis for anxiety). This is also what our interviews showed. The interviewees indicated that it makes sense to them when the employee presents a suggestion for an improvement with a positive emotional framing (enthusiasm), while an alarming message seems more fitting with showing concern and worry instead of being joyful and enthusiastic. This suggests the importance of congruence of the message (voice type) and the emotional framing used to convey it.

Affect is an important aspect of decision-making. One of the streams of research on affect states that feelings are decision-facilitators and momentary feelings have an important function of shifting attention from less-pressing goals to more urgent ones and allow people to quicker generate & select among various options (Sea & Barrett, 2007). In our study, we used emotional framing as an aid for the voiceer to draw leader’s attention to more urgent issues. In Study 1b and 2, we find that prohibitive voice results in less positive leader reactions than
promotive voice. This is in line with Burris (2012), who found that supportive voice generated more endorsement than challenging voice. In line with our expectations, we also found that anxious framing results in less positive leader reactions than enthusiastic message framing and our results overall suggest that both positive and negative emotions play a strong role in leader reactions to employee voice. This is also in line with previous research on affect and work engagement, where although work engagement is linked to the presence of positive affect, self-regulation theories state that positive affect alone is not enough for the emergence of high work engagement and that negative affect plays an important role as well (Sea & Barrett, 2007). Negative emotion facilitates an analytical mode of information processing, where people analyze things step by step and pay more attention to detail (Bledow, Schmitt, Frese, & Kühnel, 2011). This is very crucial for prohibitive voice as by definition, it is more alarming and urgent as it is about prevention of current or potential harm. Such negative affect signals that things are not going well, and action is needed (Sea & Barrett, 2007; Bledow et al., 2011). Under some conditions, negative affect can even serve as motivation to increase leader effort as people allocate more effort (Bledow et al., 2011), which is what the voicer per definition expects from the recipient when voicing.

Our findings on the mediating role of the perceived confidence in Study 2 confirm the idea that arose from the interviews in Study 1b that leaders tend to react more favorably to voice when they perceive an employee as confident, which was also found in related research on advice taking (e.g., Harvey & Fisher, 1997; Tost et al., 2012). Although our congruence theory was supported for promotive voice with positive emotion leading to more perceived confidence and therefore more favorable leader reactions, this was not the case for prohibitive voice. Here we see that negative emotion, the link between voice type and confidence and hence leader reactions become non-significant. Anxiety is a powerful emotion, characterized by high uncertainty and low control about an outcome, so an employee who is anxious when
voicing can be perceived as unsure about his own judgment (Gino et al., 2012). This anxiety seems to overshadow the voice message itself, especially when the voice message does not have a clear solution. As noted by our interviewees, they strongly preferred the voicer having thought about a solution instead of only bringing up an issue. Only alarming the leader about a current or potential harm (prohibitive voice) might signal lack of confidence of the voicer as well as increase the perceived threat to decision-making (as we found in our scenario study). In contrast providing the solution might signal confidence and concern for the organization and decrease the manager’s perceived workload (Whiting et al., 2012). Future research can compare employee voice with and without a solution and whether it influences the perceived confidence of the voicer as well as manager’s perceived workload.

Moreover, it is important that the voicer is serious when conveying the voice message in order to be taken seriously and provides good arguments when voicing. This is in line with previous research by Cesario et al. (2004) who found that when communicating a message, arguments of high-quality increase message impact and increase attitude change of the recipient. In order to be taken seriously, one should not be overly enthusiastic and in order to be seen as confident not to be overly worried. Leaders do not mind an alarming tone, but voicer should be sure about what they are saying and not overdo it with negative emotion.

As predicted, perceived threat to decision-making has a negative impact on leader reactions while prohibitive voice increases the perceived threat to decision-making due to its challenging and more threatening nature. Emotional framing on its own does not influence perceived threat to decision-making, which suggests that the message type (voice type) is more important. This is in line with the findings in our interviews and the study by Burris (2012), who found that employees who engaged in challenging voice were perceived as more threatening than the ones who expressed supportive voice. This is also in line with Liang et al. (2012) arguing that leaders might perceive voice as personal and as criticizing current practices.
in the organization which leaders are responsible for or see it as an effort to undermine one’s credibility.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

Our study has several limitations. Study 1a and Study 2 were scenario experiments. Experiments allow for internal validity but are limited in generalizability and external validity (See et al., 2011). Vignette studies are about hypothetical scenarios and ask respondents about how they would react instead of how they reacted to a situation that occurred to them (Burris, 2012). However, experimental design allowed us to test the direction of causality and support that the right combination of the voice type and emotional framing lead to higher perceived confidence of the voicer and lower perceived threat to decision-making. Also, in both scenario studies, we have not measured voice types but manipulated voice in the four scenarios. Moreover, in both experiments there was a high rate of failed manipulation checks for prohibitive voice, despite the fact that we have reworked the scenarios, highlighted keywords of both voice type and the emotional framing and pre-tested them. Even though we did complement our scenario study with qualitative interviews, future studies should be conducted in real-life settings to address these methodological limitations. Moreover, it is possible that our interview respondents were giving somewhat socially desirable answers of appreciating employee voice, so future studies might consider alternative methodological instruments, such as role-play or conducting interviews anonymously in order to minimize these biases.

Also, our measure of leader reactions to voice included a variety of different leader behaviors in one score, and we did not look at reactions such as rewarding an employee or endorsing an idea separately. Future research on promotive and prohibitive voice should examine potential differences on these different ways how leaders can react to employee voice. Leaders might, for instance, endorse employee ideas that are “threatening” to the organizational
standing and reputation, but only complement an employee on being proactive in case of less ‘critical’ suggestions (Burris, 2012).

Next, we learned during the course of our first scenario study and also during our second scenario study that great care is needed when developing scenarios for studying promotive and prohibitive voice when operationalizing independent and dependent variables in future studies. As Study 1a and Study 2 illustrated, our manipulation checks did not work as well as we hoped, especially in case of prohibitive voice, so it might be that our respondents got confused with the scenarios and about how to interpret promotive and even more so prohibitive voice. While manipulation checks are common practice in experimental research, several scholars argue that manipulation checks might work against the cumulative practices as they are uninformative regarding internal and construct validity (Sigall and Mills, 1998; Fayant et al., 2017). Manipulation checks are useful when the independent variable did not produce the intended effect on the dependent variable, which might mean that the treatment (variation in describing voice types) was not strong enough to produce variations on the dependent variable, which was the case in Study 1a (Fayant, Sigall, Lemonnier, Retsin, & Alexopoulos, 2017). We took greater care when designing scenarios for Study 2, however, the manipulations for prohibitive voice failed even more, despite a more clear description of prohibitive voice than in Study 1a. One of the possible explanations is that respondents might not see a clear difference between promotive and prohibitive voice theorized in the literature.

Additionally, during our interviews when asked for example of prohibitive voice, people seemed to provide example of more reactive behavior, which does not have an anticipatory nature (an employee coming with an issue that already happened and needs to be solved). Therefore, we wonder whether in practice, leaders and employees see prohibitive voice as a reactive rather than proactive behavior and a call to action? We call for more studies on the distinction between promotive and prohibitive voice and for more integration between
various categories of voice behavior. For instance, to what extent is promotive voice a supportive voice rather than challenging and is prohibitive voice always challenging.

Although there are a few studies on emotions and their use in proactive behaviors, more studies are needed to further look into their impact of emotional framing of the message. We encourage replication studies to see if similar findings on the right fit of the voice type and the emotional framing would be found to support our congruence idea.

In this study we have not looked at leader emotional state prior or employee voicing as well as the emotions that a leader shows when reacting to employee voice. Previous research shows that people tend to make judgments consistent with their affective state at the time of judgment (Sea & Barrett, 2007), therefore, we suggest that future research should focus on affect or feelings of the leader.

Managerial Implications

Our study has several practical implications. We hope that this study encourages managers to recognize that their reactions to voice are not only based on the content of the message but also on the emotional framing used to convey the voice message. Managers can let employees know that whenever they want to signal a problem, they should also think about a possible solution instead of always expecting the manager to take the problem on board and solve it. This can also be done by reassuring an employee that the leader is willing to think along, but that an employee should take ownership in the process too.

Training may help teach employees how to speak up for their voice to be more effective. Employees should be more aware of the emotional framing that they use when they communicate with their leader, bearing in mind not only that positive emotion generates more positive reactions, but also that when used not in sync with a communicated voice message (prohibitive voice), it can confuse the leader resulting in less favorable reactions. When employees take time and make effort to engage in constructive behaviors, they can reduce
ambiguity and misattributions of their motives by the observers by being more attentive to their non-verbal behavior as a way to self-representation. There is evidence that recommendations given by more confident employees are followed more often than those by less confident individuals which means that employees should signal confidence to influence others (here, the leader) into following their advice and suggestions (Bonnacio & Dalal, 2006). Lastly, in order to increase the chance of a more positive reaction of the leader to employee voice, employees should beware to point out or signal to their leader that their changes/suggestions are not much of an effort and thus are not threatening to the leader or the system.
Chapter 5

Discussion. Overarching Theme of Social Acceptance of Proactivity

In the following sections of this chapter, I first briefly summarize the findings of the three studies, followed by the overarching themes found across all the studies, after which I provide suggestions of future research and conclude this chapter with the implications for practice.

Summary of the Findings

The National Context

Having compared the English-language (‘Western’) to the scarce Russian (‘Eastern’) literature on proactivity, an empirical, qualitative interview study was conducted in the Ukraine. The results show that the interview outcomes are generally in line with the existing Western and Russian literature, although the Russian literature does not include risky and very challenging behaviors such as voice and such behaviors are rarely shown on the work floor as they seem to be undesirable. The predominant ‘Western’ view on proactivity is that it is a desirable and constructive behavior that can change an organization in positive ways (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Bindl & Parker, 2010). In the Ukraine proactivity is only socially acceptable when not threatening the status quo and the system. The employees fear an increased workload as a result of acting proactively. A negative reaction to employee proactivity seems to be more common and pervasive in the Eastern European context, more so than in the West (e.g. Campbell, 2000). The supervisors are more distant from their subordinates and approaching supervisors with ideas for change that formally fall under their responsibilities is socially not accepted and can provoke negative reactions (Škerlavaj et al., 2013). This is in line with Botero and van Dyne (2009) who found substantially higher (self-reported) voice behavior in the USA (low on power distance) than in Columbia (high on power distance), and who suggest that
power distance may explain the difference. The Russian literature on proactive behavior focuses on changing the self rather than the organization/system and as noted interviewees’ proactive behaviors were indeed predominantly linked to changing the self. While the Western literature also notes proactive behaviors related to a pro-self-focus (e.g., Campbell, 2000; Parker & Collins, 2010; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010), much of the literature focuses on behaviors focusing at improving the organization and changing the system (e.g., voice, taking charge) as well.

The Context Openness

Building up on the findings from the first study that focused on the national context and zooming in on the threatening and challenging nature of proactivity, especially for voice behavior, a voice message challenging for the target was linked to employees’ choice of whether or not to voice and to whom to voice due to the challenging nature of the voice content. Voice literature stresses two key judgements that underlie the employee decision of whether to speak up, out or remain silent: the belief that voicing will be effective and that it is safe (Morrison et al., 2015). The content of the voice message is important as it allows us to better understand how employee voice is exhibited (Chou & Barron, 2016). Employees fear personal losses from speaking up and are more likely to remain silent (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). This fear might even play a stronger role if the content of the voice message is challenging for the target. This is why the contextual variables of leader openness and psychological safety were chosen as moderating factors in the process of employee voicing their message to the leader, team or staying silent.

Leader openness strongly affected voice as well as employee silence which has also been shown in the existing scholarly work (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton, Ashford, O’Neill, & Lawrence, 2001; Milliken & Morrison, 2003). For speaking up, leader openness had
a direct (main) effect on employee speaking up for both low and high threat of the voice content. As suspected, both for speaking out and silence leader openness acted as a moderator of the relationship between voice challenge and speaking up/silence. Therefore, the high degree of threat of the voice content does influence the decision to switch target or stay silent taking leader openness into account. Psychological safety strongly affected voice as well as silence behaviors as found in earlier studies (e.g., Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Morrison, 2014). For speaking out, psychological safety had a direct (main) effect on employee speaking out independent of the degree of threat of the voice content. For silence, psychological safety acted as a moderator of the relationship between voice challenge and silence, however, voice messages with a low challenging character were held back more than highly challenging messages. This finding suggests that the importance of the message to be voiced seems to overcome the fear of negative reactions from these colleagues and the message urgency and importance might overshadow low psychological safety.

**Leader Attributions and Reactions**

This theme focused around the conditions under which leaders react positively to employee voice while focusing on the mechanisms that link voice behaviors to more positive or negative outcomes. Using the congruence idea (see e.g., Higgins 2000; Camacho, Higgins, & Luger, 2003; Cesario, Grant, & Higgins, 2004 on the feeling of “rightness”) of voice type (promotive versus prohibitive voice) and emotional framing (enthusiasm versus anxiety/worry), my findings suggest that prohibitive voice results in less positive leader reactions than promotive voice. This is in line with Burris (2012), who found that supportive voice generated more endorsement than challenging voice. There is an interaction effect of voice type and emotional framing, such that promotive voice with enthusiasm resulted in much more positive leader reactions than promotive voice with anxiety. Prohibitive voice with anxiety resulted in more positive leader reactions than prohibitive voice with enthusiasm, however, the simple
slopes analysis for anxiety was not-significant. So, while there is congruence of the message and the emotional framing, this seemed to be more the case for promotive voice and positive emotions.

Our findings on the mediating role of the perceived confidence confirm that leaders tend to react more favorably to voice when they perceive an employee as confident, which was also shown in previous research on advice taking (e.g., Harvey & Fisher, 1997; Tost et al., 2012). The findings of the perceived confidence as a mediator showed that the congruence idea of promotive voice with positive emotions does lead to more perceived confidence, however, this was not the case for negative emotions, which seem to overrule the prohibitive voice message. Anxiety is a powerful emotion, characterized by high uncertainty and low control about an outcome, so an employee who is anxious when voicing can be perceived as unsure about his own judgment (Gino et al., 2012).

As noted by our interviewees, they strongly preferred the voicer having thought about a solution instead of only bringing up an issue. Alarming the leader about a current or potential harm (prohibitive voice) might signal lack of confidence of the voicer as well as increase the perceived threat to decision-making. Providing the solution might signal confidence and concern for the organization and decrease the manager’s perceived workload (Whiting et al., 2012).

Perceived threat to decision-making had a negative impact on leader reactions and prohibitive voice increases the perceived threat to decision-making due to its challenging and more threatening nature. This is in line with existing research on voice which states that leaders might perceive voice as personal and as criticizing current practices in the organization which leaders are responsible for or an effort to undermine one’s credibility (Burris, 2012; Liang et al., 2012). Emotional framing on its own does not influence perceived threat to decision-
making, which suggests that the message type (voice type) is more important for the perceived threat to decision-making. This is in line with the findings in the interviews as well as of Burris (2012), who found that employees engaged in challenging voice were perceived as more threatening than the ones who expressed supportive voice. While some voice scholars argue that promotive voice is both supportive and challenging (e.g., Morrison, 2014), in our study we conceptualized promotive voice as less challenging voice than prohibitive voice.

**Overarching Themes**

This dissertation presented several studies on proactive behavior. The four social acceptance of proactivity pillars (Figure 5.1) developed in Chapter 2 (proactive behavior as supervisor threatening, speaking up being undesirable, proactive behavior as disruptive and entailing extra work, and fear of negative consequences) can all be traced in all of the three empirical studies. Below I elaborate on the overarching themes across these studies.

![Figure 5.1. Social Acceptance of Proactivity](image)

The three studies (Chapter 2, 3 and 4) build on each other and the results from one study were picked up in the other studies. Table 5.1 and Figure 5.2 illustrate this interrelation and build up. The themes in red (Figure 5.2) are from Chapter 2 are present in all three chapters but have been conceptualized further in Chapter 3 (on context openness and message content) and Chapter 4 (focused on message content, leader attributions of the voicer and leader reactions.
to employee voice). The variables of Chapter 3 are shown in blue, whereas Chapter 4 variables are presented in black.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Constructs and Overarching Themes</th>
<th>Identified in Chapter 2</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Overarching Themes in All the Studies</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>Undesirable</td>
<td>Disruptive/Extra Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context Openness</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader Openness</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological Safety</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Message Content</td>
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<td>Challenge/Threat</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Urgency/Importance</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
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<td>Voice Type</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Emotional Framing</td>
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<td>Perceived Confidence of the Voicer</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived Threat to Decision-Making</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voicing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking up</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking out</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silence</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader Reactions</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All the studies focused on the role of context, more specifically, the meaning and exploration of proactivity in an Eastern European context, the voice target openness, as well as the role of the leader. The first underlying common theme of the different chapters was the element of *challenge* and *threat* inherent in proactive behavior. Voice is defined as “constructive challenge to the status quo with the intent of improving the situation rather than merely criticizing” (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, p. 853), so voice always does challenge the current situation and sometimes the voice target. Even in situations when the voice message is not threatening, voicing to someone with authority (leader) or without it (team) might be interpreted as challenging them (Frese and Fay, 2001). Voicing can be as threatening as the voice target might interpret it as personal and as a criticism of current practices in the organization which the voice target is responsible for and might be seen as an effort to undermine one’s credibility, even when voice is entirely problem-focused (Morrison, 2011; Liang et al., 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). A very challenging voice may even contain an explicit disagreement and lead to a confrontation with a manager (Burris, 2012). This element
came strongly to the fore during the qualitative interviews in Chapter 2. Interviewees noted repeatedly that proactive behavior in the Ukraine has a threatening nature. I worked the threat element further out in Chapter 3 by focusing on the degree of threat for the context (target) and target openness being a reverse of threat (operationalized as leader openness and psychological safety) as well as content of a voice message. I found that the threat of the voice content influenced indeed employees’ choice to whom to voice or to remain silent. This link between threat of voice content and voice behavior was moderated by the context openness, more specifically the voice target’s openness. The degree of challenge was also investigated in Chapter 4, where the content of voice was operationalized as voice type (promotive versus prohibitive) used with a certain type of emotion (enthusiasm versus anxiety/worry) with the intent of more favorable leader reactions. This study showed that the urgency and importance of the message as well as a solution to the voiced problem are pivotal for more positive leader reactions (Whiting et al., 2012).

Secondly, one of the prominent arguments in proactivity literature is that speaking up or out is generally undesirable as it can “rock the boat” as per definition it aims to change the status quo. As one of the findings in Chapter 2, it was used to further work out the follow up studies (Chapter 3 and 4) focusing on the voice behavior targets. If the leader is not open, or psychological safety is low, if content is very challenging, then employees are switching the target or staying silent (Chapter 3) as voicing is perceived as undesirable. If the message is not urgent or important, if there is no solution, voicing is also less desirable (Chapter 4).

Thirdly, as proactive and even more so voice behavior can be disruptive as often it results in extra work for the employees and the leader, which was signaled in the interviews in the Ukraine in Chapter 2, the concept of disruptiveness and extra work was used when creating items to measure the threatening content of the voice message in Chapter 3. Per definition, if the voice target is not open to voice, voiced messages may be perceived as disruptive by the
voice target. Moreover, these findings came out also in the qualitative interviews conducted in the Netherlands as part of the study in Chapter 4. If the message is not urgent or important, it unnecessarily disturbs leader’s work flow and even adds to the workload if the employee does not come up with a solution but only alarms about the issue (Whiting et al., 2012). If the message is framed with the emotion that does not fit the message content (voice type), it may be perceived unnecessarily disruptive by the leader as it will not be clear due to the mixed signals of e.g. communicating about improvement suggestions with anxiety, and alarming issues with enthusiasm. Moreover, anxiety itself is a negative emotion that might be experienced by the leader as disruptive since an employee who is anxious when voicing, may be perceived as unsure about his/her own judgment (Gino et al., 2012). If the voice message is perceived as less threatening to the leader’s decision-making, it is more likely to be perceived as less disruptive to the leader thus resulting in more positive leader reactions.

Lastly, fear of negative consequences of proactivity and voice has been a point of attention of academics in the existing, mostly Western literature (e.g., Bolino et al., 2010; Belschak & Den Hartog, 2010), but turned out to also be the case in the empirical study of the Eastern European context, even to a greater extent than in the West. The fear of negative consequences served as one of the arguments for the design of the conceptual framework of Chapter 3, where the voicer can switch targets if due to the content of the voice message (challenging the voice target) as well as the openness of the context (leader or team), (s)he does feel that such consequences can affect the voice target. These fears seem to be overcome when the voice message is urgent and important as the results of silence and psychological safety show that people were less silent about high challenge messages. If the voice message is more challenging (prohibitive versus promotive voice), the voicer might have a bigger fear of negative consequences. This fear is closely related to the voice recipient, who usually is a leader, has the authority and who evaluates the employee, which is why leader reactions to employee
voice was the focus of Chapter 4. As Chapter 4 results showed, the leader reacts less positively to prohibitive voice so those fears by the employees might not be completely ungrounded. Moreover, if the voicer is perceived as more confident, (s)he may be seen as being less afraid of negative consequences and this confidence serves as a reassurance to the leader, that the employee knows what (s)he is talking about (Whiting et al., 2012). Lastly, a message that a leader perceives as less threatening to his/hers decision-making may also result in leader less fearing the negative consequences of employee voice for the leader (such as his authority being questioned, status quo which (s)he is responsible for being questioned as well as being personally criticized), which may lead to more positive reactions to employee voice (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Tröster and van Knippenberg, 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014).

**Future Research**

This dissertation attempted to close a few of the research gaps in proactivity and voice behavior topics. Firstly, it contributes to the scarce studies on the influence of the national or societal culture on the expression and evaluation of employee proactivity in Eastern Europe, as most studies focus on Western or Asian context (mainly Chinese). Given the national context differences discussed in Chapter 2, more research about the impact of the national culture on proactivity and voice behaviors is needed, which is not limited to focusing mostly on power distance. For example, in cultures with long-term time orientation future-oriented voice is more favored while in cultures with short-term orientation voice about immediate change is more effective (Chou & Barron, 2016). Future research can also look at how individualism/collectivism dimensions influences employee voice. Individualism puts high emphasis on personal responsibility and taking control, both of which are predispositions to acting proactively, and voicing, whereas collectivism looks at group membership as a central aspect of one’s identity and sacrifice for the common good, thus, for example, voicing despite the fear of negative consequences for the self for the good of the team or the organization.
Research in consumer behavior on customer complaints shows that people from an individualistic culture tend to voice their complaints to the company more than people from collectivistic culture and tend to stay with the company after voicing their dissatisfaction, while people from collectivistic culture tend to leave after voicing their complaints (Liu & McClure, 2001). It might be indeed the case that in individualistic cultures people feel more satisfied when expressing their thoughts and opinions unlike in collectivistic cultures (Li & Sun, 2015).

Secondly, more recent studies on voice distinguish between various targets of voice behavior (speaking up and speaking out) adopted in Chapter 3 and combined with silence, however, even fewer studies to date examined voice behavior and silence together in one study. Silence is a multidimensional construct with still a lot of unanswered questions of possible antecedents and its consequences (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). Silence is not only common but can lead to negative consequences of the supervisors not being aware when problems exist or not having enough information to correct those problems (Morrison et al., 2015). More studies are needed to deepen the knowledge of intentional silence. Moreover, silence can be more common in certain cultures. For example, Knoll and van Dick (2013) mention the role of shame in Latino cultures as a cause of under reporting. Also, while there are various studies on personality dispositions and voice behavior as well as proactivity, however, not on silence (Knoll & van Dick, 2013). To my knowledge, the only attempt so far has been of Knoll and Dick (2013) to look at employee authenticity in combination with prohibitive voice and employee silence. They found that employee with high levels of authenticity make proactive attempts to change the situation and thus are less likely to hold back their concerns.

Thirdly, Chapter 3 contributes to this stream of literature by introducing the concept of the degree of threat of the voiced message which has been identified as an understudied antecedent (Burris, 2012; Liu et al., 2010; Liang et al., 2012; Detert & Burris, 2007). As the
findings of the study show, the degree of threat is important in the decision to speak up, out or stay silent, however, this threat can be moderated by the contextual variables of leader openness and psychological safety. Morrison et al. (2015) call such affect compensatory which indeed may compensate for the higher degree of threat and still result in the employee voicing. One of the surprising findings of the study was that employees in the sample were less silent about the issues with high degree of threat. Future studies can investigate the degree of threat with psychological safety to see if that is indeed the case also in other contexts. Moreover, future scholars can examine whether previous voice attempts, and supervisor reactions influence the perception of the degree of threat of voice.

Fourthly, Chapter 4 adopted the categorization of promotive and prohibitive voice that was introduced in the more recent literature on voice behavior (Burris, 2012) and focused on influence techniques for the employee on how to make their voice message more effective. The main findings of the study suggest that a specific emotional framing fits better a specific voice type (promotive voice paired with positive emotion, prohibitive voice with negative emotion). However, as we did not find significant results in simple slope analysis for prohibitive voice and anxiety/worry, more studies are needed to further test the congruence idea for promotive and especially prohibitive voice.

Emotional framing is one of the underexplored areas of employee voice (Knoll & van Dick, 2013), so more research is needed to explore the non-verbal cues such as rolling of the eyes, smirking, a tone of voice) in the process of employee voice to investigate further the techniques employee use to convey their voice message (Morrison et al., 2015; Chou & Barron, 2016). Emotions influence leader perception of employee confidence, while the voice type itself influences the perceived threat to decision-making of the leader. Also, Chapter 4 did not examine the leader emotions prior employee voice or leader affective state during voice. As noted in that chapter, both positive and negative affect can in its own way influence decision-
making (Sea & Barrett, 2007; Bledow et al., 2011), therefore, further studies on leader reactions to employee voice and emotion should also focus on leader emotions and not solely employee emotions.

Confidence of an employee comes from the personal sense of power (perception of one’s ability to influence other people) (Morrison, See, & Pan, 2015). Morrison and colleagues (2015) found that employees with low personal sense of power are more likely to stay silent regarding a known performance problem. However, this effect is mitigated when the potential voice target is perceived as open to input (Morrison et al., 2015). Future scholars can look at the link between employee confidence and their personal sense of power and voice. In addition, future research can examine how the supervisor sense of personal power effects leader reactions to voice.

**Recommendations for Practice**

This research firstly contributes to the scarce literature on the role of the cultural context in the meaning and expression of proactive behavior by studying proactivity in the Ukraine with Chapter 2. Some organizational practices common in the West on which organizations might rely for performance improvement (e.g., employee voice or feedback seeking) are not (yet) common or appreciated much in the Ukraine. If managers in the Ukraine want more employee proactivity and initiative to occur, they should receive more training in giving feedback and listening skills. Providing positive and encouraging feedback and listening attentively to a person’s voice encourages proactivity by signaling that one is open for suggestions and employee initiative and allows to take away employees’ fears of being punished for setting wrong priorities. Furthermore, leaders should be more mindful of employees’ workload and performance pressure if they want employees to show more initiative. The results of this study about proactivity of Ukrainian employees can likely also be
generalized and be useful for managers with multicultural workforce who either work as expats in other Eastern European countries than the Ukraine or have Eastern European employees.

Secondly, employee voice covers important information for organizations, and organizations should therefore aim to stimulate and receive voice from their employees. Results of Chapter 3 showed that team members can form an alternative voice outlet for employees if they fear that the message they want to convey might be too threatening for their leader and their leader might not be open to such a message. Organizations should therefore consider this additional advantage when deciding whether to increase team work and facilitate more team building. Leader openness is a crucial factor for both employee voice and silence and often serves as a building block of psychological safety (Edmondson, 2003; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, & Ziv, 2010). This means that leaders can stimulate both speaking up and speaking out. Voice has been shown to be invaluable for increasing organizational functioning and effectiveness, more specifically higher levels of learning, change effectiveness, performance, enhanced employee sense of justice, motivation and satisfaction, higher levels of employee in-role performance and creativity (Burris et al., 2013; Chou & Barron, 2016). One of the ways to assist leaders in creating a more welcoming environment for employee voice would be to educate leaders about voice behavior (Walumba & Schaubroek, 2009). More specifically, despite that employee voice being a necessary tool of organizational improvement, employee voice does not always coincide with managerial perceptions (Burris et al., 2013), is challenging in nature (LePine & VanDyne, 1998) and threatening to the status quo (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Burris, 2012; Whiting et al., 2012) so more knowledge of the employee voice behavior concept can help leaders consciously manage their signals toward employees to increase the benefits of employee suggestions of constructive change and organizational improvement. Leaders should also assist in establishing the environment that strongly encourages voice (Chou & Barron,
2016). Here coaching leadership has a significant effect on employee voice (Wang & Yuan, 2017). In addition, leaders should ensure there are procedures and systems in place that facilitate employee voice (e.g. formal grievance procedures, anonymous suggestion systems) (Morrison et al., 2015).

Thirdly, Chapter 4 aimed to show leaders that they make attributions to employee voice based not only on the message itself, but also the emotional framing that an employee uses, which can sometimes even overrule the message itself. Awareness of this can hopefully help leaders reflect on how they evaluate voice behavior when facing the employees. For employees, this research shows several techniques on how to make the voice message more effective and be heard by the manager. One of the findings of chapter 4 showed that managers want to hear a solution to a potential or existing problem, so they can be more expressive and ask the employees that whenever they want to signal a problem, they should also think about a possible solution instead of always expecting the manager to take the problem on board and solve it and as a result experience an increase of the work load and extra pressure. Both Chapters 3 and 4 showed that urgency and importance of the voice conveyed increases probability of voicing as well as leader reactions. Therefore, managers should encourage their employees to show the voice urgency and importance when voicing. Lastly, employees should be more aware of the emotional framing that they use when they communicate with their leader, as it can either make their message more effective or on the contrary confuse the leader resulting in less favorable reactions, focus on explaining the urgency and importance of the matter and think of the solution instead of only signaling the problem. This will minimize leader perceptions that voiced issue means disruption to their daily activities and adds to their workload.
Conclusion

Proactivity and voice behavior (as one of the most controversial proactive behaviors due to its challenging nature) have attracted the attention of organizational behavior scholars ever since 1970s (e.g., Hirschman, 1970). Since then, the field has been fuelled by numerous studies on voice types, antecedents, and more recently a new stream of research on organisational silence has enriched this area of research. This dissertation contributes to the existing literature of proactivity and voice behavior by exploring the understudied context of national culture in the Eastern Europe, the threatening nature of content and attributions of voice behavior, the leader reactions to such behavior as well as the use of emotional framing as one of the influence techniques in order to make employee voice more effective. It focuses on the area of the context (situational antecedents of national context, context openness as well as the role of leader) in which such behaviors take place, as well as zooms into the content of the voice message, its emotional framing as influence techniques of making employee voice more effective as well as mechanisms that influence employee voice and its evaluations by the leader.

This research contributes to a more recent stream of voice research distinguishing between different types of voice, speaking up and speaking out (Liu et al., 2010), promotive and prohibitive voice (see the call for research on uncovering different outcomes of these two voice types by Liang, Farh, & Farh (2012), as well as research stream on (intentional) silence. Secondly, it focuses on the threatening nature of employee voice by looking at the content of what is voiced (voice message) answering the call of Liang et al., 2012; Burris, 2012; Whiting et al. (2012) and how it is voiced (emotional framing) by examining the role of emotions in voice process (see Grant et al., 2009). Thirdly, it contributes to the still limited academic work on reactions of the social environment (the leader) to voice and specifically the role of leader attributions (e.g., Whiting et al., 2012; Burris, 2012). Finally, it attempts to
advance the understanding of the mechanisms how employees can facilitate positive reactions to voice by looking at contingency variables and mediators of the employee voice – leader reaction relationship thus contributing to a stream of research on voice effectiveness (e.g., Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995; Whiting et al., 2012).
Chapter 6

Academic Rigor and Practical Relevance

This chapter discusses the differences and sometimes struggles between combining academic rigor and practical relevance by looking at the methodological choices that have been made during this research project. I first explain the research framework development. I then mention the methods that were chosen for each study and discuss their limitations. Lastly, I conclude with the discussion and reflection on methods chosen for each study based on the methodological rigor and practical relevance (Anderson et al., 2001).

Research Framework Development

This PhD project started with a qualitative, exploratory study of proactive behavior in the Ukraine (Chapter 2). Inspired by one of the outcomes of this study, where threatening nature of proactive behavior was one of the underlying themes, I started working out the conceptual model for Chapter 3. Related to the threatening nature of voice behavior, I have identified a gap in the voice behavior literature about the voice content and the role of the supervisor and his/her reactions. In addition, I looked into how an employee can make their voice behavior more effective. As a result, I have designed a quantitative survey study (Chapter 3) which focused on speaking up, speaking out or remaining silent when voice content is threatening for the target (employee side). The threatening nature of voice also triggered me to look into various voice behavior types, as I was interested in looking at what makes a voice message threatening. I also explored the voice literature further and looked at the persuasion and advice taking literature on effective message techniques. One of the message framing methods that caught my interest were emotions/emotional framing of the message. Several authors in the voice literature indicated a need for research on the role of emotions (e.g., Morrison, 2014, Van Dyne, 2003), which strengthened my conviction of exploring the emotional framing. As I
analyzed the first scenario study in Chapter 4, it raised doubts, which is why I conducted the exploratory interviews to get an idea what was going on. There, I also gained some insights in the mechanisms leading to the inclusion of mediator variables in the second scenario experiment. As a result of the themes that came out of the interviews, as well as having looked further in the voice literature, I ended up with a refined and extended theoretical framework which resulted in a second scenario experiment. Throughout the development of the conceptual model for Chapter 4, I focused on the congruence idea that was examined for voice type and the “right” emotion type used with the voice type that might lead to positive supervisor reactions. Looking at employee voice from the supervisor side, I looked into implicit voice theories and selected perceived lack of confidence and perceived threat to decision-making as mediators, the former based on the persuasion literature of a message being convincing and the latter based on the challenging and threatening nature of voice behavior for the target.

In the following section, I describe the methods chosen per study as well as explain why those methods and instruments were chosen over others. This section will be followed by the discussion on the suitability of the methods and will reflect on the methodological rigor and practical relevance.

Critical Evaluation of Methods Chosen for Each Study

This PhD project encompasses a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research methods, namely semi-structured interviews, multi-source surveys and experimental studies (scenario experiments). This section of the chapter discusses the goal and the research question of each study and critically evaluates the chosen research methods separately for each study.
Chapter 2. Qualitative Interview Study

The goal of the first study was to explore the meaning as well as the social acceptance of proactivity in the Eastern European context (the Ukraine). I examined the following research question: What are the perceptions and acceptance of proactive work behavior in the Ukraine?

As there is a lack of research on proactive behavior in non-Western contexts (and in particular in an East European context), a qualitative research approach which allows for identifying different and new facets not yet covered in the extant (Western) literature seems most appropriate (Creswell, 1994). To my knowledge, there was no prior research on proactive behavior in the Ukraine or any other country of the former Soviet Union. In-depth semi-structured interviews was therefore the research tool used to explore in-depth the meaning of proactive behavior in this context (Dworkin, 2012).

Sample and Data Collection Process

20 interviews were conducted in the Ukraine. When determining the sample size in the qualitative research, a concept of saturation is crucial (Mason, 2010). Saturation is “the point at which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data” (Dworkin, 2012, p. 1319). Dworkin (2012) suggests that mostly a sample size between 5 and 50 as adequate. Green & Thorogood (2009) state that little “new” insight comes out of transcripts after 20 people were interviewed. The sample was gathered using a snowball method and started in my personal network. The goal was to interview people of different ages, gender, organizations and industries in order to increase the generalizability of the results that would come from a diversified sample. The sample was very diverse in gender and age representation as well as the occupation and organizational setting criteria. The interviews were conducted face-to-face to achieve the richest context information in July 2014 in the Ukraine (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The interviews lasted about three-quarters of an hour on average and were conducted in
Russian. Researchers themselves can be a great research tool with their insights and good understanding of context (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012). This was especially the case for Chapter 2. I found my own experience and understanding of the Ukrainian context helpful in the data interpretation. I found the interviews to be very insightful as each interviewee gave me a good idea about their job and attitude towards proactive behavior on the work floor. People gladly talk themselves and also asking questions on proactivity made them think and reflect whether they were proactive, whether their work floor offered them a climate where they could show initiative and whether their supervisor was open and supportive of proactive behavior or hindered and discouraged such behaviors.

In this study I was not relying on any hypotheses but was looking for the possible heterogeneities in meaning of proactive behavior in the Eastern European context (The Ukraine) (Mason, 2010; Dworkin, 2012). Although the sample size is relatively low, the saturation point was reached as interesting insights on proactivity in the Ukraine were generated and repeated. For example, future quantitative studies are necessary to explore the perception of proactivity and specifically voice behavior and the extent to which they are threatening for the target.

**Chapter 3. Quantitative Multi-Source Survey Study**

The goal of this study was to explore the influence of the voice content challenging the leader of the team on the employee decision to speak up, and out or remain silent while moderated by leader openness and psychological safety. The research question that this study addressed was: How does the challenging nature of voice content influence speaking up, speaking out or staying silent when moderated by the context openness (leader openness and psychological safety)?

The choice was made to go for a quantitative study due to the ease of cross-sectional assessments and the possibility of the replicability of the assessment (Cooke & Rosseau, 1988).
In order to be able to increase the generalization of possible results of this study across various industries, an initial contact was made with three organizations: an international software company, an international advertising agency and a university of applied sciences in the Netherlands. After the presentation of the research set up and method, both the software company and the advertising agency were enthusiastic as employee voice topic very closely relates to employee involvement and engagement that are important HR topics. However, shortly after the software company in question was acquired by another company, so it did not have the decision-making freedom anymore to participate in the process. The advertising agency was too busy with the newcomers that were just hired and declined to participate after all. The stakeholders of the university of applied sciences agreed to participate. Therefore, the research question of this study was focused on the higher education sector, so future replication studies are needed to test the generalizability of the findings to other industries and organizations.

This chapter focused on challenging content of employee voice. It looked at the voice behaviors shared with the supervisor (speaking up) and with colleagues (speaking out) and the influence of the content of such behaviors combined with the employee perception of leader openness and psychological safety. The choice was made to conduct a quantitative study as my goal was to statistically test hypotheses deduced from the extant theorizing on voice (Morgan, 2007). A choice for a survey and not an experiment was made in order to gather data about a real setting where voice behavior took place as well as to have a comprehensive view on how employee voice takes place in the chosen organization. Moreover, I have not manipulated any of the variables. An online survey was the instrument used using Qualtrics online platform. Surveys are effective means of collecting one’s opinion and web-based surveys are an efficient, low cost and user-friendly way to collect data (Greenlaw & Brown-Welty, 2009), especially in the Netherlands where the internet penetration rate is 98%. Therefore, an input from an
employee, a colleague and a manager was collected. The choice for such data triads was made to reduce single source bias because of its social desirability, consistency motives, illusionary correlations and liniency bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). For most measures, I used employee self-reports as efficient means to get information and as they are less obtrusive to the organisation compared to an observation of the work people do or the behavior they display (Schmitt, 1994). However, next to it, I had an observer report on whether the employee in question speaks up (supervisor) or speaks out (colleague). This allowed me to minimize the social desirability bias of employees themselves reporting that they speak up and speak out due to the general notion that speaking up that such behaviors benefit the teams and the organization in its learning and improvement. Leader openness and psychological safety are sensitive subjects that are crucial for the organizational wellbeing. In this case, a choice of a survey was appropriate as employees could fill it in at their own convenience and anonymously compared, for instance, to an interview. However, as this study had a triad set up and employees had to be paired up with an observer (the colleague and the manager), this most likely limited the respondent’s confidence in the anonymity of filling in the survey. This also could have influenced their responses, especially regarding the leader openness and psychological safety items, even though they were reassured that at no point their responses would be shared with the colleague or their manager.

Sample and Data Collection Process

The sample consisted of 157 triads. All respondents were from the Faculty of Business and Economics and included both teaching and support staff from the largest university of applied sciences in the Netherlands. The teaching staff of 3 study programmes participated in the study. This included 157 employees and 17 managers. There is a total of 750 employees working for the Faculty of Economics and Business where the research took place, so the triads represented 21% of the total number of employees.
The data collection process lasted from the beginning of April till end of November 2016 (total of 7 months of data collection, not including leads and initial contacts with prospective companies). For efficiency reasons I started with the managers who were approached personally and explained the purpose of the study as well as the study design. Then together with the managers we made a list of employees for the triads. As a result, I was able to make combinations of employees for the triad set up. Also, for every manager, a customized version of the manager survey was made to ensure convenience. An employee had to fill in an employee survey which combined questions about him/herself and the manager, as well as a colleague that he or she was paired up with. The employee knew who they were paired up with. Therefore, the employee and colleague survey were combined into one for the purpose of convenience for the employee to not have to fill in two surveys. The surveys were collected in English as all employees have English language proficiency. Throughout the data collection process, a reminder email was sent out to the employees who did not finish the surveys or did not fill it in at all which was possible due to the Qualtrics email functions. The reminder was normally sent out three weeks after the original email. For every approached team, a presentation about the research topic was held by the researcher to explain the purpose of the study and also to make the respondents feel more at ease and put a face to the name of the researcher who sent them a link to the survey requesting their participation. In those presentations, the employees were ensured confidentiality and they were able to ask questions about the intent and the purpose of the study and how their data was to be treated. This created a rapport amongst employees and also managers. The email invites were sent only to the employees whose managers agreed to participate in the study. From 261 email invites sent out to the employees, 180 employees completed the survey resulting in a response rate of 68.9%. The participation was voluntary to ensure the employees, who did not feel safe to respond could choose not to participate and/or even respond. Some employees refused to take part in the study
by either not responding at all, or by informing me that they were not willing to participate due to the subject sensitivity, teams being too small or other reasons they did not wish to communicate. Therefore, a non-response can also be a possible signal that those employees felt psychologically unsafe in their teams.

Whenever a certain input was missing, for instance, a colleague evaluation for certain employees, another fellow colleague was asked to evaluate the employee. When this was not possible, the incomplete triad was eliminated from the sample, resulting in the finale sample of 157 triads. Once all the cases were matched, employee names were removed from the cases to ensure confidentiality. Once the data was collected, the employees, peer and manager responses were matched in SPSS for complete cases. The analysis of the data was done on the individual level (employee level) in SPSS.

Chapter 4. Scenario Experiments with In-Depth Interviews.

The goal of this study was to test a fit/congruence of voice type with emotional framing on supervisor reactions to employee voice, to explore which potential mediating factors contribute to those reactions and then to test a congruence model including the mediating factors. The research questions of this study were the following: Is there a congruence fit of a voice type and emotional framing used in order to make employee voice behavior more effective? and Which mediating factors contribute to supervisor reactions to employee voice?

I used a triangulation method (“a combination of methodologies to study the same phenomenon” (Denzin, 1978, p. 291). More specifically, I used theoretical (multiple perspectives and theories to interpret the results of the study of persuasion, advice taking, value congruence and voice literature) as well as methodological triangulation in order to improve judgment using different methods of data collection on the same phenomenon (Jick, 1979) of
employee voice (multiple methods: two scenario experiments with exploratory in-depth interviews) (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

Scenario Experiment 1

I started with a scenario experiment. Scenario studies are valuable because they provide rather easy test of hypotheses, before they are tried in more uncontrolled, or difficult conditions in the field (Spector, 1994). One of the big advantages of an experiment is that one can test causality by manipulating the independent variable and measuring the dependent variable. This is the design which allows for drawing conclusions about the direction of causality. The disadvantage of this method is the limited number of variables (and thus limited complexity of model) that can be investigated. As the research question was relatively simple, an experimental design seemed appropriate. Moreover, there is a lack of experimental research in the area of proactiveness in general and voice in particular.

The first experiment was based on the 2 x 2 factorial design of voice type (promotive/prohibitive) and emotional framing (enthusiasm/anxiety&worry), where the respondents had to place themselves in the position of a manager in one of the four scenarios (whose employee comes to talk to him/her about a suggestion or concern that he/she has). First, manipulation checks were performed on both the voice type as well as the emotional framing to make sure that people understood the scenarios. 21.2 % of people failed the manipulation checks, resulting in a final sample of 159 respondents from the original 202. After that the respondents were asked questions about themselves and then also about their possible reactions to the voice behavior of the employee in question. The assumption was that every respondent is able to place themselves in the position of the supervisor, however, it is also possible that for non-supervisor this could have been more difficult as they had no previous experience in their work-setting to relate to this role.
This step of data collection was done amongst part-time students of the Dutch University of Applies Sciences in May 2016. All the respondents were full-time employees. The scenarios were pre-tested by 10 people to minimize inconsistencies and unclarities and were adjusted prior to the actual data collection. Every group of students was explained the purpose of the study and instructed about the structure of the survey. All the surveys were filled in as paper-and-pencil versions during classes and collected upon completion. The advantage of this way of the data collection was a higher control and a response rate compared to the web-based surveys sent out via a link.

Exploratory Qualitative Interviews

The results of the first scenario experiment were counterintuitive and not in line with the hypotheses and the extant literature (e.g., prohibitive voice resulted in more positive supervisor reactions than promotive voice, contrary to what I expected). Therefore, I critically analyzed the scenarios, looking also at the results of the manipulation checks. I concluded that one of the possible reasons why this scenario experiment yielded unexpected results was the ambiguity of the prohibitive voice scenario as well as unclear distinction between the two voice types in the scenarios, for instance, by not explicitly pointing out of the keywords of the voice type and the emotional framing (they were not highlighted or underlined in the text, and participants might thus easily have missed them when reading through the information in the scenario). I decided to conduct some qualitative interviews that would provide more input on how to rewrite the scenarios, thus exploring promotive and prohibitive voice and leader reactions in a more open design to collect as much information as possible. Moreover, this was done to balance out the context-free limitation of the experimental design with the empirical data. Therefore, I conducted a small qualitative study of five Dutch managers, to find out what topics/themes would influence leader reactions to employee voice as those respondents are used to making decisions and have experience with employee voice. The goal of these
interviews was not to build new theory but rather provide some more input for designing a second scenario experiment and was not a standalone study which is why the sample size of 5 sufficed (Dworkin, 2012). My goal with these interviewees was to understand the phenomenon of leader reactions to promotive and prohibitive voice given the employee use of emotional framing to communicate such those voice behaviors. This also allowed me to increase practical relevance of the study of leader reactions to voice in a real setting (Anderson & Bushman, 1997). Such triangulation allowed me to capture a more complete and holistic portrayal of the supervisor reactions to employee voice (Jick, 1979) which was further used in the second scenario experiment. As a result of these interviews, I was able to pick themes where several mediators such as perceived employee confidence and pressure to decision-making came out. These themes together with the theoretical build up which I found in persuasion, advice-taking and voice literature served as a foundation for the design of a new scenario experiment, which aimed to replicate and extend the first scenario experiment.

**Scenario Experiment Study 2**

In this last study I looked again at the fit/congruence of the emotions used to communicate promotive and prohibitive voice and the role of two mediators (perceived lack of confidence and perceived threat to decision-making) on the supervisor reactions. The mediators were added based on the results of the qualitative interviews mentioned above. Similar to the first scenario experiment, the respondents had to place themselves in the position of a manager in the given scenario whose employee comes to talk to him about a suggestion or concern that he has. However, I adjusted the scenarios, and made the distinction between promotive and prohibitive voice more apparent as well as highlighted both the keywords for the voice type and the emotional framing. The respondents were asked questions about themselves and then also about their possible reactions to the voice behavior of the employee in question.
This experiment was based on the 2 x 2 factorial design of voice type (promotive/prohibitive) and emotional framing (enthusiasm/anxiety&worry) similar to the first scenario experiment described above. This study was done via Amazon Mechanical Turk platform (Mturk). In the last few years this platform has become a popular way to collect data. The study of Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling (2011) indicate that Mturk samples are more demographically diverse than standard internet samples of typical American college student samples often used in psychology research. Moreover, the workers who typically participate in the studies on Mturk are not only extrinsically motivated (by a monetary compensation) but also intrinsically motivated. In addition, Buhrmester and colleagues (2011) found that the small monetary compensation that Mturk provides does not impact the quality of the collected data.

The requested participants were all employed. The original sample size was 201. The scenarios were pretested by 5 people to minimize inconsistencies and unclarities and were adjusted prior to performing the scenario testing in the Mturk platform. Just like in Step 1a, manipulation checks were performed for both voice type and the emotional framing. Surprisingly again a lot of people failed a manipulation check for scenario 3 and 4 (both of which were about prohibitive voice type). After the manipulation checks of voice type and emotion type (41.8 % failed the manipulation check), the sample size was 117, and although it is a large enough sample for experimental design between 4 groups of the 2 x 2 factorial design (Somekh & Lewin, 2001), as most people failed the manipulation check from scenarios 3 and 4, our findings are limited due to the small sample size of the respondents of those two scenarios. This shows that even though this time I made a much more clear description of voice type (guided by the definition of Liang et al. (2012), prohibitive was still did not come across as such to our respondents.

As mentioned above in Step 1a, it could be that not all the respondents were able to play themselves in the shoes of the supervisor who has to evaluate employee voice, which can
be a possible limitation of Study 2. Moreover, even though I collected input from the respondents of various occupations, I am mindful of the generalizability of the findings as Study 1a was collected from the employed part-time students of the university of applied sciences and Study 2 from the Mturk platform. Study 1b is a good illustration of Onquegbuzie & Leech (2005) who state that quantitative research is typically motivated by researcher’s concern (Study 1a did resulting in counterintuitive findings) and our qualitative interviews were driven by the desire to capture participant’s perceptions in order to explore factors which influence supervisor reactions to voice behavior (further studied in Study 2). The vast majority of studies in organizational and applied psychology follow on from published studies (most build on, extend or qualify extant), few test theory and even less are derived from practice (Anderson et al., 2001). In Study 2 I, thus, came up with a theoretical framework drawn both from the real-setting (from the input of the practitioners) as well as supported by the existing literature and tested this framework, therefore addressing the above-mentioned concerns of Anderson et al. (2001).

In the following sections I critically reflect on the academic rigor and practical relevance of my studies.

**Academic Rigor**

This section discusses various methodological bias and how they were addressed throughout the studies.

**Method Bias across Studies**

Method bias are a problem as they are one of the main sources of measurement errors (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Below I outline various types of measurement bias based on Podsakoff et al (2003) and how those were addressed during the course of all the studies.
Bias from the same source

Social desirability, which is about the need of social approval and acceptance, means that people try to present themselves in favorable light regardless of how they really feel about the subject. The consequence of this is that it might mask the actual relationship between variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Due to the nature of the subject, all of the studies conducted during this project were subject to desirability bias as the general notion on proactivity and voice behavior is that it is a desired and positive phenomenon. However, Spector (2006) argues that social desirability bias is not as big of an issue as commonly viewed. He illustrates this with the two meta studies conducted by Moorman & Podsakoff (1992) and Ones et al (1996) which both found limited support for social desirability bias as universal bias. Therefore, social desirability effects are not a severe issue for studies with self-reports. Never the less, in order to minimize the potential impact of social desirability bias as well as common variance method, I used other people ratings (of the colleague and the supervisor) in Chapter 3.

Leniency bias is about raters rating people they know higher than those they do not (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This was a limitation in Chapter 3 as triads had to consist of people from the same team who knew each other, in order to be able to rate one’s speaking out and not just discuss any random colleague from the department. So familiarity with the rated colleague was a condition of the triad set up.

Bias from item characteristics

Despite researchers being encouraged to develop items that are concise, clear and specific (which I tried to do by pretesting all the surveys) (Podsakoff et al., 2003), item complexity or ambiguity, also due to the use of unfamiliar words is important to note. For instance, in Chapter 2, interviewees did not understand the term proactive behavior which is why the term “initiative” had to be used. In Chapter 4 Study 1a, prohibitive voice, unlike
promotive voice, seemed to be more ambiguous to the respondents, which is why in Study 2 I adapted our scenarios to make sure it was more clear, even though it still resulted in a high rate of failed manipulation checks for the two scenarios. One of the possible explanations of this is that prohibitive voice was still an unclear, ambiguous concept, despite that the keywords of prohibitive voice were highlighted in the second scenario study as well as it could be that the emotions used in the communication of the prohibitive voice message got the respondent’s focus more than then message itself.

**Bias from item context**

Context-induced mood is about the manner in which the items in the survey are worded. Those that raise suspicion about the researcher’s intent or integrity might result in the respondent completing the survey in a negative mood state (Podsakoff et al., 2003). To minimize this, in both Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 I have explained the purpose of the study to the respondents in person (whenever possible) as well as by email.

**Bias from measurement context**

The medium to obtain measurement can influence responses, such as interviewer characteristics, expectations etc. For instance, face-to-face interviewees tend to result in more socially desirable responses and lower accuracy than paper-based or computer-based surveys.

I have followed procedural remedies of minimizing/controlling common method bias suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003). Common method variance can result in the issues of false correlations between variables if the respondents aim for consistency in the self-reported data within the same survey. Moreover, perceptual data can be more worrysome from a single-source data (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, & Eden, 2010). In order to minimize the bias of speaking up and speaking out, I have used other ratings (manager and peer) for those constructs as suggested by Podsakoff et al (2003). It is becoming more and more common in managing
personnel to use ratings obtained from supervisors and peers and not only employee self-ratings (Conway & Huffcut, 1997). I have protected respondents’ anonymity by not sharing the data and any personal information as no point with any 3rd parties and the respondents were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers and it was about their perception and opinions (Podsakoff et al., 2003). As mentioned above, I have improved interview protocol during pre-testing for Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 (Study 1b) as well as pre-tested survey items for Chapter 3 and 4 in order to avoid vague concepts and define ambiguous items such as proactive behavior term in Russian (Chapter 2) and prohibitive voice (Chapter 4). I also as much as possible aimed for keeping the questions simple, specific and concise and avoided double-barreled questions (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Spector (1996) suggests that common method variance (CMV) is an urban legend and that it is time to retire the term and the idea should be replaced with a more complex conception of connection between constructs and their assessment. When some items are subject to certain bias, one should consider methods to control it such as ratings other than self-reports, which is what I did in Chapter 3. Moreover, part of the design is also a careful analysis of the objectives of the study in relation to the methods chosen. For example, when interested in people’s perception of a certain concept, mono-method of interviews (Chapter 2) or self-report surveys (Chapter 3 and 4) are appropriate. More abstract concepts such as proactive behavior and initiative in the Ukraine (Chapter 2), prohibitive voice (Chapter 4) due to their ambiguity introduce a certain level of subjectivity which leaves room for variety of bias which I am mindful of (Spector, 1996). In addition, the extent to which common source bias might pose a problem also depends on one’s research model. Mediation models tested only with self-reported data (Chapter 4) suffer most from CMV whereas moderation models (Chapter 3) suffer less from CMV as such bias would not inflate the coefficients of interaction effects but
rather make them more difficult to detect, hence working at the researcher’s disadvantage (e.g., Busemeyer & Jones, 1983; Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010).

**Practical Relevance**

The following section will discuss the practical relevance of all the studies conducted throughout the PhD project. The context of where proactive and voice behavior takes place was my focus throughout the whole PhD track.

**Context dependency**

The umbrella theme of this PhD project is the role of the context in proactive and voice behavior and it is pivotal to note that these topics in organizational psychology are very context dependent. Firstly, cultural context, as shown with the findings of Chapter 2, stresses the importance of the cultural factor. This study not only showed the perceptions and understanding of proactive behavior in the Eastern European context but also served as a food for thought to zoom in on how voice behavior is perceived in the Western context. One should not assume that just because the general notion on proactivity suggests that it is a positive behavior which is welcome and supported in organizations, it is always the case. It is possible that in some organizations and job functions, proactivity and voice behavior are less appreciated than in others (e.g., due to the narrowly defined job roles or a high power distance in the organization). Secondly, organizational context will have an influence of the interpretation and also display of proactive and voice behavior. For example, the findings from the context of a faculty of business and economics in Chapter 3 cannot be generalized to other domains of the university of applied sciences. Moreover, these findings should be taken with caution as they might not be generalizable to other industries where speaking up is not common or amongst employees that, for instance, do not have higher education. Therefore, one should be aware that proactivity and voice behavior are very context dependent.
Research questions from the field

Interest in proactivity stems from the field as more and more organizations depend on their employees to come up with ideas in order to stay competitive and evolve. Moreover, the interest in proactivity originated not only from my own proactive personality but also from observations of how the educational establishment where I work welcomes and supports such proactive behavior. Managers want to get the best out of their employee potential and knowledge about proactivity and voice behavior concepts will allow them to exploit employee talent and generate more improvement ideas that help increase organizational performance. Understanding how to cultivate proactivity and speaking up with suggestions and even alarming messages will allow managers to increase employee satisfaction, loyalty and growth. Managers should also realize what a crucial role they play in employees proactive and voice behavior, while employees should be aware of the ways to convey their suggestions in the most effective manner.

Voice behavior is highly relevant as a topic for the work field for anyone who is in employment and has a manager, despite the sector as employee-manager dyad exists in every type of employee-employer setting. Thus, my findings can be more generalizable than compared to a phenomenon not experienced by many people. Therefore, the concept has high practical relevance and the recommendations that stem from my research can be applied in various industries by people from different career levels.

General Discussion

Throughout the course of this research, different research methods were used. As noted by Anderson and Shattuck (2012) researchers use methods as they see need and design practice is an iterative process of refinement and continuous evolution, which is also what happened during the course of my PhD project. A good design is not either purely academic or purely
practical and that good science should contribute to both theoretical and practical understandings (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012).

Both practitioners and researchers have stereotypical views of each other, such as that practitioners view researchers as interested only in methodological rigor while not interested in the real world, while practitioners embrace latest trends and fads, despite theory or evidence. There is a concern between academics and practitioners about the divergence of the streams of theory and practice. This can lead to irrelevant theory or untheorized and invalid practice (Anderson et al., 2001). Anderson et al. (2001) argue that both requirements are important but are not always met.

The question of relevance is multifaceted (Anderson et al., 2001). Consideration of what a practically relevant research is is a question of negotiations between various stakeholder parties concerned and will vary depending on the involvement of those parties in the research process. This was definitely the case in my project as I was supervised by both academics and an applied researcher and the methods chosen for each study reflect their interest and their preference or viewpoint on the importance of practical relevance or methodological rigor. Finding the right balance between the two was challenging but at the same time it also forced me to link theory with practice and question both theory with practical implications as well as real settings with theoretical underpinnings. This in itself was one of the fundamental learnings for me in the PhD process.

The question of methodological rigor is also difficult. Each research method will have its assets and liabilities, so triangulation allows to exploit the assets and neutralize the liabilities (Jick, 1979). The purpose to have various research methods used in this PhD project was to consider them as different approaches to researching proactive and voice behavior instead of distinct kinds of methods and foremost as complimentary rather than competing methodologies
(Jick, 1979). Chapter 2 specifically focused on the empirical exploration of the role of context of the Ukraine and its influence on the perceptions of proactivity. Chapter 3 is about one organisation in the educational sector, whereas Chapter 4 had an experimental design, allowing to define cause-effect relations and manipulate and control the variables, however, isolated from context, even those I included a small qualitative interview study to increase external validity of the findings of the experiments I conducted.

When entering this PhD project, the goal was to be exposed to a variety of research methods rather than be a purist and using mono-method (Onquegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Even though, I agree that certain research questions are more suitable to be researched using a qualitative (Chapter 2) and quantitative approach (Chapter 3) following the situationalist school of thought on quantitative-qualitative paradigm, I chose to be pragmatic and open in Chapter 4 and integrated quantitative and qualitative methods in that study (Onquegbuzie & Leech, 2005). I followed the pragmatic approach, mindful that the actual process of moving between theory and data is never a one-way process (Morgan, 2007). The results in Chapter 2 served as a motivation for working out Chapter 3 and 4. In Chapter 2 I identified how central the threatening component of proactive behavior and especially for voice behavior is, which then contributed to the deductive goals of quantitative approach in Chapter 3 and 4. The conceptual development process throughout the course of this PhD is a good illustration of the theory initiation and building (qualitative Chapter 2 where I explored the concepts of proactive behavior in the Ukraine), theory testing and modification (quantitative Chapter 3 where I used existing theory on voice behavior and also modified existing frameworks adding voice content and the idea of switching of the voice target and two steps in Chapter 4 where I developed a framework of congruence between employee voice and emotional framing). In Study 1b of Chapter 4 I used a thematic analysis and the scenario experiments in Study 1a and 2 provided incremental validity for it (Onquegbuzie & Leech, 2005).
I approached this PhD project pragmatically, and was open to both qualitative and quantitative techniques, despite my philosophical orientation towards one of them. I find it beneficial that I was able to be exposed to the variety of investigative techniques and do agree with the holistic approach of mixed methods, especially as PhD takes a considerable amount of time (Onquegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Instead of the common argument of generalizability, I focus on, what Morgan (2007) calls transferability, focusing on what people can do with the knowledge this PhD project produced instead of arguments of possibility or impossibility of generalizability. It is about making the most appropriate use of the knowledge produced in one setting in other circumstances, so instead of focusing on the results being context-bound (qualitative) or generalizable (quantitative), it is about looking at factors that affect whether the knowledge we gain can be transferred to other settings (Morgan, 1997). I believe, that findings on employee voice behavior and leader reactions can be transferred to other settings, mindful of the peculiarities and nuances of a specific industry, complexity of the job and other factors previously indicated in the existing literature as influencing proactive and voice behavior.

Conclusion

All research on social sciences is attempting to understand human beings and the world around them (Onquegbuzie & Leech, 2005). I believe that the interplay between laboratory and real-life settings, thus, between theory and practice, using a variety of research methods is essential for the further development of the body of knowledge in the proactive behavior and voice behavior domain (Anderson & Bushman, 1997). I am confident that the variety in the research methods chosen for all three studies illustrates such interplay and results in findings meaningful both for theory as well as practice. As indicated by Onquegbuzie & Leech (2005) I did subdivide my research into exploratory and confirmatory methods instead of following a pluralistic approach and solely choosing one method over the other. I argue that the variety of methods that this PhD project contained makes it an interesting and realistic showcase for the
PhD research. This was conducted with alterations, changes and combinations of contexts and methods chosen, and approaches to the data collected.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Protocol Chapter 2 English Version

In-depth interview (around 45 minutes)

General information:
Company type:
Age:
Gender:
Education:
Job title:
Do you have any subordinates? Yes/No How many?
Job Tenure:

Guiding themes with probing questions:

Introduction of the research (5 minutes)

1. Typical workday. (5 minutes)
   ✓ Tell me about your tasks. Can you describe your typical workday?
   ✓ How much autonomy would you say you have?
   ✓ Do you often have to do extra tasks? Can you give me examples of those tasks and on which occasions did you perform those?

2. Proactive behaviour definition.
   ✓ What does proactive behaviour mean to you?

3. Examples of proactive behaviours, motivation, reactions?
   ✓ Can you give specific examples of when you were proactive? (provide a filled in survey that the interviewee completed already)
   ✓ Looking at those examples, what were your motives to engage in proactive behaviour?
   ✓ How did your supervisor react to your proactive behaviour?
   ✓ How would he/she react to your proactive behaviour?
   ✓ Can you provide examples of when you decided NOT to be proactive? Why did you decide NOT to do so? Can you tell me more about it.
   ✓ Can you give examples of when you were proactive and it was NOT welcome by your peers? By your supervisor?

For supervisors:

✓ What kind of proactive behaviours would you welcome? Please give examples.
✓ Can you give examples of behaviours or situations when you would not welcome proactive behaviour?

4. Expectations of proactive employees.
   ✓ Why do you think organizations want proactive employees?
   ✓ Why do you think your organization wants proactive employees?
5. Organisational culture.
✓ Are there any initiatives within the organisation in place to encourage proactive behaviour?
✓ Are there any limitations/barriers within the organisation to be proactive? What are those barriers?

END OF THE INTERVIEW
Appendix 2. Interview Protocol Chapter 2 Russian Version

Интервью (примерно 45 минут)

Общая информация :
Тип предприятия/организации:
Возраст:
Пол: М / Ж
Национальность/ Гражданство: (в англ. версии нет этого вопроса)
Образование:
Должность:
Есть ли у Вас подчиненные? : да / нет     Сколько?
Сколько лет Вы работаете на текущей должности?

Основные темы с уточняющими вопросами :

Введение ( 5 минут )

1 . Типичный рабочий день. ( 5 минут )

Расскажите о ваших обязанностях на работе, Опишите свой типичный рабочий день
Насколько Вы самостоятельны/ независимы в принятии решений?
Часто ли Вам приходится работать сверхурочно, исполнять задания помимо основных
должностных обязанностей? Можете ли Вы привести примеры таких заданий и
рассказать, как Вы справились с ними?

2 . Определение инициативности.

Что вы подразумеваете под проактивным поведением/инициативой? / Что значит для
вас инициатива на работе? ( на индивидуальном уровне, уровне отдела/департамента,
на уровне организации?)

3 . Примеры инициативы, мотивации и реакции.

Можете ли Вы привести примеры, когда Вы проявили инициативу?
Каковы при этом были Ваши мотивы?
Как отреагировал Ваш начальник на ваше проактивное поведение?
Хотелось ли Вам, чтобы Ваш руководитель отреагировал по-другому? Каким образом? Можете ли Вы привести примеры, когда Вы решили не проявлять
инициативу? Почему Вы решили не делать этого? Можете ли Вы рассказать об этом
поподробнее?
Можете ли Вы привести примеры, когда Вы проявили инициативу, и это не было по достоинству оценено Вашиими коллегами? Руководителем?

Можете ли Вы привести пример (ы) инициативности другого человека? Что Вы об этом думаете? Каков был результат этого поведения? (нет в англ. версии)

Вопросы для менеджеров
Можете ли Вы привести пример(ы) ситуаций, когда вы по достоинству оценили и поддержали инициативу Ваших подчиненных? Почему? Каков был результат?

Можете ли Вы привести пример(ы) ситуаций, когда Вы не оценили и не поддержали инициативу Ваших подчиненных? Почему? Каков был результат?

4 . Приветствуется ли инициатива на работе?
Как вы думаете, почему компании хотят, чтобы их сотрудники были инициативны?

Как вы думаете, почему Ваша компания хочет, чтобы ее сотрудники были инициативны?

5. Культура организации.
Есть ли в Вашей компании проекты, направленные на поощрение проявления инициативы?
Существуют ли в Вашей компании барьеры / ограничения для проявления инициативы? Какие?

КОНЕЦ ИНТЕРВЬЮ
### Appendix 3. Changes in the Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Deductive Themes</th>
<th>Final Abductive Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>Definition of proactive behavior</td>
<td>Definition of initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>Examples of proactive behavior</td>
<td>Definition of anticipation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of anticipation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of no initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Examples of no anticipation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motives</td>
<td>Motives to be proactive</td>
<td>Motives to show initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers</td>
<td>Barriers to be proactive</td>
<td>Barriers to show initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>Rewarded initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiative punished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions</td>
<td>Reaction of a supervisor</td>
<td>Reaction of a supervisor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Desirable reaction of a supervisor</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reaction as a supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Climate enabling proactive behavior</td>
<td>Initiative in your organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Projects to enable initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Initiative in Ukraine in general</td>
<td>Initiative in Ukraine in general</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4. Employee Survey Chapter 3

1 What is your age? (years)

2 What is your gender?
   ○ Male
   ○ Female

3 What is your nationality?

4 What is your education?
   ○ Vocational Training
   ○ Bachelor Degree
   ○ Master Degree and above

5 What is your job nature?
   ○ Teaching staff
   ○ Support staff

6. How long have you been working for this organization? (years)

7. How long have you been working for your current manager (years)?

For the next series of questions, please answer IN GENERAL, whether you speak up with ideas to your manager.

8. I make recommendations to my manager concerning issues that affect my organization.
   ○ Strongly disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Somewhat disagree
   ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   ○ Somewhat agree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly agree
9. I speak up and influence my manager regarding issues that affect my organization.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

10. I communicate my opinion about work issues to my manager even if my opinion is different, and my manager disagrees with me.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

11. I speak to my manager about new ideas for projects or changes in procedures.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. I give constructive suggestions to improve my manager's work.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
13. I point out to my manager to eliminate redundant or unnecessary procedures.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

We have just asked you some questions about speaking up to your manager, which, even well-intended, might seem alarming or confrontational and interpreted as criticism. Now that you understand the concept of speaking up, please think of a recent example when you made a suggestion to your manager. In the next section please answer questions about the content of this suggestion.

14. My suggestion was disruptive for my manager.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. My suggestion was beyond current activities/responsibilities of my supervisor.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
16. My suggestion implied more work for my manager.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

17. My suggestion conflicted with how things are done in the organization.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

18. Team size:
19. Team tenure in years (How long have you been part of this team?):

The next series of questions are about IN GENERAL you speaking out to your team with ideas.

20. I make recommendations to colleagues concerning issues that affect my organization.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
21. I speak out and encourage colleagues to get involved in issues that affect my organization.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

22. I communicate my opinion about work issues to colleagues even if my opinion is different, and colleagues disagree with me.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

23. I speak to colleagues with new ideas for projects or changes in procedures.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

24. I give constructive suggestions to colleagues to improve their work.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
25. If my colleagues made mistakes in their work, I would point them out and help them correct them.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

We have just asked you some questions about speaking out to your team which, even well-intended, might seem alarming or confrontational and interpreted as criticism. Now that you understand the concept of speaking out, please think of a recent suggestion you made to your team. In the next section please answer in general questions about the content of this suggestion.

26. My suggestion was disruptive for my team.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

27. My suggestion was beyond current activities/responsibilities of my team.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
28. My suggestion implied more work for the team.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

29. My suggestion conflicted with how things are done in the team.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The questions below are about psychological safety within the team.

30. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

31. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
32. It is safe to take a risk on this team.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

33. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

34. I am flexible about switching jobs with others in my team.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

The next series of questions are about a recent situation when you had an idea, but chose not to share it.
35. I chose to remain silent when I had concerns about work.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

36. Although I had ideas about improving something at work, I did not speak up.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

37. I said nothing to others (my manager or team) about potential problems I noticed in a team.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

38. I remained silent when I had information that might have helped to prevent an incident.
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Somewhat disagree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Somewhat agree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree
39. I kept quiet instead of asking questions when I wanted to get more information about a certain issue.

○ Strongly disagree
○ Disagree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Neither agree nor disagree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly agree

The next series of questions are about your colleague which was specified to you in the email.

40. How long have you worked with this employee? (years)

For the next questions, please rate to what extent...

41 ...this colleague makes recommendations to colleagues concerning issues that affect your organization.

○ Strongly disagree
○ Disagree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Neither agree nor disagree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly agree

42 ...this colleague speaks out and encourages colleagues to get involved in issues that affect your organization.

○ Strongly disagree
○ Disagree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Neither agree nor disagree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Agree
○ Strongly agree
43. ...this colleague communicates his/her opinions about work issues to colleagues even if his/her opinion is different, and colleagues disagree with him/her.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

44 ...this colleague speaks to colleagues with new ideas for projects or changes in procedures.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

45 ...this colleague gives constructive suggestions to colleagues to improve their work.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
46. If his or her colleagues made mistakes in their work, this colleague points them out and helps them correct them.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
Appendix 5. Manager Survey Chapter 3

1 What is your age? (years)
2 What is your gender?
   ○ Male
   ○ Female
3 What is your nationality?
4 How long have you been working for this organization? (years)
5 What is your education?
   ○ Vocational Training
   ○ Bachelor Degree
   ○ Master Degree and above
6 How many employees (subordinates) do you have reporting to you?
7. Please write down a name of your employee.
8. How long have you been the manager for this employee? (years)
The next series of questions are about the employee which you noted above.
9. This person makes recommendations to you concerning issues that affect your organization.
   ○ Strongly disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Somewhat disagree
   ○ Neither agree nor disagree
   ○ Somewhat agree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly agree
10. This employee speaks up and influences you regarding issues that affect your organization.
    ○ Strongly disagree
    ○ Disagree
    ○ Somewhat disagree
    ○ Neither agree nor disagree
    ○ Somewhat agree
    ○ Agree
    ○ Strongly agree
11. This employee communicates his/her opinions about work issues to you even if his/her opinion is different, and you disagree with him/her.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. This employee speaks to you with new ideas for projects or changes in procedures.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. This employee gives you constructive suggestions to improve your work.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

14. This employee points out to you to eliminate redundant or unnecessary procedures.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
15. This employee is open to reconsidering his/her decisions based on the input of his/her colleagues or you.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. I am open to reconsidering my decisions based on the input of this employee.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

17. I factor in the opinions of this employee into my decision-making process.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
Appendix 6. Study 1a Scenarios

a) Promotive Voice with enthusiasm

You are a manager of the HR department at the headquarters of a multinational electronics company. One of your employees, Mark Smith, an HR assistant (27 years old), who has been working for your company for the last 3 years, has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss his new idea for improving the expenses approval process. You agree to meet him the following morning. Mark looks cheerful and happy. He says he thinks it is possible and easy to implement the new expenses approval process in 3 months by implementing a newly developed enterprise software program for all HR processes. He indicates that this can save your company at least 30 minutes per employee for each travel expense form, which would yield significant savings for the organization as a whole. Mark uses rational cost-benefit arguments to try to convince you of his suggestion. Mark has an upbeat tone of voice, smiles regularly and seems enthusiastic.

As Mark’s manager, what would be your most likely reaction?

b) Promotive Voice with Anxiety/Worry

You are a manager of the HR department at the headquarters of a multinational electronics company. One of your employees, Mark Smith, an HR assistant (27 years old), who has been working for your company for the last 3 years, has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss his new idea for improving the expenses approval process. You agree to meet him the following morning. Mark looks anxious, nervous and tense. He thinks it is possible and easy to implement the new expenses approval process in 3 months by implementing a newly developed enterprise software program for all HR processes. He indicates that this can save your company at least 30 minutes per employee for each travel expense form, which would yield significant savings
for the organization as a whole. Mark uses rational cost-benefit arguments to try to convince you of his suggestion. Mark has an agitated tone of voice, frowns regularly and seems worried.

As Mark’s manager, what would be your most likely reaction?

c) Prohibitive Voice with Enthusiasm

You are a manager of the HR department at the headquarters of a multinational electronics company. One of your employees, Mark Smith, an HR assistant (27 years old), who has been working for your company for the last 3 years, has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss his concern about the newly implemented enterprise software program used for all HR processes. You agree to meet him the following morning. Mark looks cheerful and happy. He indicates that the new software allows for more control and error detection, however, results in many more steps in most HR processes. Mark thinks that the new system makes the process even more complicated and takes more time for every employee to fill in. He has worked out that the new system costs 30 minutes extra for every travel expense form and wants to alarm you that this would result in less productivity for the whole organization. Mark uses rational cost-benefit arguments to try to convince you that the system is a problem. Mark has an upbeat tone of voice, smiles regularly and seems enthusiastic.

As Mark’s manager, what would be your most likely reaction?

d) Prohibitive Voice with Anxiety/Worry

You are a manager of the HR department at the headquarters of a multinational electronics company. One of your employees, Mark Smith, an HR assistant (27 years old), who has been working for your company for the last 3 years, has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss his concern about the newly implemented enterprise software program used for all HR
processes. You agree to meet him the following morning. Mark looks anxious, nervous and tense. He indicates that the new software allows for more control and error detection, however, results in more steps in most HR processes. Mark thinks that the new system makes the process even more complicated and takes more time for every employee to fill. He has worked out that the new system costs 30 minutes extra for every travel expense form and wants to alarm you that this would result in less productivity for the whole organization. Mark uses rational cost-benefit arguments to try to convince you that the system is a problem. Mark has an agitated tone of voice, frowns regularly and seems worried.

As Mark’s manager, what would be your most likely reaction?
Appendix 7. Study 1b Chapter 4 Interview Protocol

Guiding themes with probing questions:

1. General question on managing people.
   ✓ What would you say is the most difficult tasks in managing people?
   ✓ What do you think is your strength as a leader? Please provide examples.
   ✓ What do you think is your weakness or area of improvement as a leader? Please elaborate.
   ✓ Do you have difficulty with giving feedback to your employees? Explain.
   ✓ What about emotions of your employees?
   ✓ How do you deal with your own emotions at work?

2. Think of an example when your employee came up to you with a suggestion for improvement (promotive voice).
   ✓ Please describe this situation: What was the idea? How did the employee bring up the idea?
   ✓ What kind of argumentation and emotions did the employee have when expressing this idea? Was this person confident? How did you conclude that?
   ✓ Did you feel the pressure to do something with this idea?
   ✓ Did you feel this person tried to manipulate you?
   ✓ How did you feel about this idea?
   ✓ How did you react? (did you like the idea? Why? Were you convinced, did you react immediately, did you say you need to think about this idea, did you say this was outside his/her job responsibilities)
   ✓ Do you think you reacted the right way?
3. Think of an example when your employee came up to you with a concern or was alarming you about a current or potential harm in the organization (prohibitive voice).

✓ Please describe this situation: What was the idea? How did the employee bring up the idea?

✓ What emotions did the employee have when expressing this idea? Was this person confident? How did you conclude that?

✓ Did you feel the pressure to do something with this idea?

✓ Did you feel this person tried to manipulate you?

✓ How did you feel about this idea?

✓ How did you react? (did you like the idea? Why? Were you convinced, did you react immediately, did you say you need to think about this idea, did you say this was outside his/her job responsibilities)

✓ Do you think you reacted the right way?
Appendix 8.

Examples of promotive and prohibitive voice in Study 1b Chapter 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Arguments</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
<th>Follow up</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Monthly department meeting which is also a platform to come up with ideas. One of the employees came up with a method to easily extract multiple attachments from email</td>
<td>It takes 1 minute to download 300 attachments instead of one by one.</td>
<td>She was excited. You could see it in her gestures and movements she was very excited.</td>
<td>Sounds good, consult with the rest. Positive feedback from the team. There was no discussion. This was going to work. Definitely.</td>
<td>She gave colleagues the makro for it and the tools necessary for it. She did it in the same week</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2) Newly hired people need to get on board. An employee came up with the idea to have an onboarding day (full day) (instead of different occasions and moments with info). She suggested to make it into one day, fun day activity. Different moments with information, different bits and pieces, but to combine it into one full fun day. Not a lot of emotions. A bit anxious, flat. We talked about it. I asked her to give me a full idea. I said I like it, I love the idea, work on it and then I take it to my management. Then I endorsed it further.
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<tr>
<td>3) An employee came up with a template to be used to update a client fully and it can be used by the end of the day. He also suggested to include creative directors in it, which was not the case before.</td>
<td>Eagerness and excitement to do it and get it done and see if it would make a difference. The way he was talking, he was excited.</td>
<td>Cool, how? Set it up, go for it!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4) During the briefing before every shift, everyone can put their ideas on the board. Most of the time it is not about the content but about the process.

At the beginning they were anxious: group pressure (what are you doing? Are you trying to connect to the leader?). Anxiousness transmits lack of confidence. You can feel if someone is anxious.

I try to look at the ideas immediately. Most of the time it works, but sometimes it does not. Normally I am very enthusiastic about ideas and I have to stimulate people to do it more often. First response can be, good idea, thanks. But then you can say, I do not know if it is going to work. Or I can say, have you thought of this.
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and then, but my first response is always positive.

|      | 5) One of the employees said we could change something in the setup of the ingredients, combine ingredients to work faster. | Instead of grabbing 5 ingredients and using 4 techniques, you combine. Efficiency saves a lot of time | I think enthusiastic, by the way it was explained, I felt someone was thinking about it a longer time, not just one minute. | I felt it was a nice idea. It is important to show your staff, to give credit, it motivates people. |
1) An employee could not upload information to the client platform because some of the software is outdated (she said).

First the employee said it was the laptop that was the problem, then the version of the JAVA. It became a really vague thing and there was no solution. Mixed messages again, back to square one.

A bit nervous, laughing, like a nervous tick

First response was, please talk to the person responsible [she took the project over from someone else]. I said talk to the client at some point. I told her in the meantime you need to find out how we can solve this because we still have the problem. Then I was just at the point to let the project leader know to escalate it, as it is a big problem and she could not solve it…The she said it was
not the JAVA. I discussed it with her [that the message is mixed], I got annoyed with her. I tried to work on this with her and thought we were there, but now it is her challenge.
| 2) The legislation around freelancers changed and someone raised a concern that we have to be complaint with the new law, we have to change the way we look or process them. |
|---|---|---|
| I felt the worry and concern, definitely. |
| I did not like that it was more like you need to tell me what to do, you need to decide. This is why I felt I need to read up about it. I would have wanted more advice, scenarios. I said we need more information about this. I read up about it, what will the effect be. |
| 3) We need to get costs signed off when we go into production, it this case it was a complicated production, we were shooting 5 different visuals. Nothing has been signed. We were missing money and were missing a signature. The employee came up to me and said what do I do? | There was not even an email signing off on the costs. We were missing money. | I think she was quite worried about it. She was worried, cause that is a rule we have here about it, at the same time she was quite indifferent, which was interesting, it was immediately putting the | I did not tell her it was her responsibility immediately. First I thought, let’s go through all the steps, so we can figure it out, so I got involved. She was able to sense my frustration, that is fine, she needed to understand the severity of the situation. |
blame on other people... She was not serious and was not taking ownership. She did not share with me her concern.
|   | 4) About intimidation because of the male culture here. One of the people came to one of my leaders and said, there is a big issue going on, do you know about it? | When it is prevention, you do not need a lot of arguments, you can act right away. | I asked have you talked to these people? I try to talk openly in the office, without names, to respect privacy, you want to take responsibility in your own hands and make sure people feel safe. | Yes, it resulted in people [who had an issue] shaking hands. Most of the time I ask people, how are you right now, are there any further actions needed? |
|   | 5) You have a 360 bar, there were not a lot of guests, so many spaces, three guys came in, wearing dark clothes. | My colleague said we need to keep an eye on these guys. | As bartenders we do not show a lot of emotions, we have to smile. | So I told the hostess and other guys to call the service guest leader, it is just prevention. | I told those suspicious guys: I do not know what you are doing there, but you stop before I call the police. |
Appendix 9. Study 2 Scenarios Chapter 4

Scenario 1: Promotive/enthusiasm

You are a leader of a call centre of a large telecommunications company. One of your employees has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss a **suggestion** related to reduction of the call volume of the call centre. You agree to meet him the following morning.

He looks **cheerful** and **happy**. He suggests to invest in categorizing and analyzing incoming calls in order to manage the call centre capacity. At the same time, he claims that this can **reduce** repeated calls and can **help track** customer satisfaction. He states that this can be easily done by purchasing Interaction Analytics software. He has an **upbeat tone of voice, smiles regularly** and seems **enthusiastic**.

As his leader, what would your most likely reaction be?

Scenario 2: Promotive/anxiety

You are a leader of a call centre of a large telecommunications company. One of your employees has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss a **suggestion** related to reduction of the call volume of the call centre. You agree to meet him the following morning.

He looks **anxious, nervous** and **tense**. He suggests to invest in categorizing and analyzing incoming calls in order to manage the call centre capacity. At the same time, he claims that this can **reduce** repeated calls and can **help track** customer satisfaction. He states that this can be easily done by purchasing Interaction Analytics software. He has an **agitated tone of voice, frowns regularly** and seems **worried**.

As his leader, what would your most likely reaction be?
Scenario 3: Prohibitive/enthusiasm

You are a leader of a call centre of a large telecommunications company. One of your employees has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss a serious concern of his related to the reduction of the call volume of the call centre. You agree to meet him the following morning.

He looks cheerful and happy. He claims that the focus on the reduction of call volume alone overlooks reasons why customers call. He does not have a solution to the problem but wants to alarm you that this might significantly increase the amount repeated calls and decrease customer satisfaction. He has an upbeat tone of voice, smiles regularly and seems enthusiastic.

As his leader, what would your most likely reaction be?

Scenario 4: Prohibitive/anxiety

You are a leader of a call centre of a large telecommunications company. One of your employees has asked for a face to face meeting with you to discuss a serious concern of his related to the reduction of the call volume of the call centre. You agree to meet him the following morning.

He looks anxious, nervous and tense. He claims that the focus on the reduction of call volume alone overlooks reasons why customers call. He does not have a solution to the problem but wants to alarm you that this might significantly increase the amount repeated calls and decrease customer satisfaction. He has an agitated tone of voice, frowns regularly and seems worried.

As his leader, what would your most likely reaction be?