

The Dynamic Mechanism of Voice-Oriented Human Resource Practices in Promoting Sustained Employee Voice Behavior: Postprint

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Abstract

In today's rapidly changing information landscape, the long-term stability of organizations urgently necessitates that employees continuously provide critical information and effective solutions from the front lines of the market and business operations, rendering the sustainability of employee voice increasingly vital. While existing literature has predominantly focused on motivating employee voice, there remains insufficient understanding of how to promote sustained employee voice. Adopting a "phenomenon-driven" approach, this study first summarizes effective voice practices in the local industry to investigate the conceptual connotation and content structure of "voice-oriented human resource practices." Building upon a two-stage model of employees' subsequent voice behavior from an actor perspective—encompassing "initial triggering" and "subsequent reflection"—it further examines the differential moderating effects of voice-oriented human resource practices across these two distinct stages. Finally, employing the case study method, it reveals the multi-stage dynamic evolution process through which voice-oriented human resource practices foster sustained employee voice. The research findings are expected to advance understanding of the antecedent mechanisms underlying sustained employee voice and offer reference and guidance for voice practices in domestic enterprises.

Full Text

The Dynamic Mechanism of Voice Behavior-Oriented Human Resource Practice in Promoting Sustained Employee Voice Behavior

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Abstract: In today's rapidly changing information environment, organizational longevity critically depends on employees continuously providing feedback on key market and frontline business information and effective solutions, making the sustainability of employee voice increasingly important. While existing literature has primarily focused on how to stimulate initial voice behavior, our understanding of how to foster sustained voice remains limited. Adopting a "phenomenon-driven" approach, this study first summarizes effective voice practices in local Chinese enterprises to explore the conceptual meaning and structural dimensions of "voice behavior-oriented human resource practice." Building on an actor perspective, we then examine the differential moderating effects of voice behavior-oriented HR practice across two stages of subsequent voice behavior: "initial induction" and "subsequent reflection." Finally, using case study methodology, we reveal the multi-stage dynamic evolution through which voice behavior-oriented HR practice promotes sustained employee voice. The findings are expected to enhance understanding of the antecedents of sustained voice and provide reference for voice practice in local enterprises.

Keywords: voice behavior, sustained voice behavior, voice behavior-oriented human resource practice, self-regulatory framework

Classification Code: B849:C93

1. Problem Statement

Today's business environment is increasingly characterized by dynamism and uncertainty. Organizational development requires not only strategic leadership but also employee wisdom (Li Yiran & Peng He, 2021). Research demonstrates that employee voice contributes to improved organizational performance (Frazier & Bowler, 2015; Li et al., 2017), enhanced organizational innovation (Guzman & Espejo, 2019; Liang et al., 2019), and elevated team creativity (Deng Jinzhong et al., 2018), making it vital for organizational development. However, maintaining high levels of employee voice over time proves challenging for many organizations. A common phenomenon involves employees who were once vocal becoming passive or silent. Although individual suggestions may improve organizational health, long-term stability requires continuous feedback on market and business frontlines. The reduction or interruption of voice behavior can lead to information gaps and decision-making errors that threaten organizational survival. Therefore, investigating the generative patterns of sustained employee voice in local contexts and designing corresponding management strategies is of great significance.

Observational evidence reveals that as the value of employee rationalization suggestions in improving organizational health and decision-making effective-

ness becomes increasingly prominent, numerous local enterprises have successfully developed voice cultivation programs centered on HR practices. Examples include the “trouble board” and “proposal improvement system” at Huzhou Tiangen Flooring Company, the “rationalization suggestion points system” at Changsha BYD Auto Company, the upgraded employee “complaint” mechanism at Changbaishan Wanda International Resort, and the “lean projects” at Guangdong Boliv Power Company. These initiatives have opened new avenues for cultivating sustained voice behavior and creating voice climates, providing substantial intellectual support for cost reduction and efficiency gains. What, then, constitutes the content structure of these widely applied and vital voice practices? What is the underlying logic and specific process through which such practices effectively stimulate sustained voice? How can other enterprises learn from these examples? These questions represent both a practical concern for local enterprises and a scientific issue requiring theoretical explanation.

Despite the importance of the relationship between management practice and voice sustainability, current literature exhibits clear limitations. First, insufficient attention has been paid to the dynamic evolutionary characteristics of workplace voice behavior. Researchers have long assumed that extra-role behaviors are trait-based and static, with differences primarily manifested between individuals (Bolino et al., 2012). Consequently, most voice research examines antecedents of individual differences based on static point-in-time measures. However, recent studies increasingly show that employees dynamically adjust their voice levels when adapting to external environments (King et al., 2019; Zhang Kai et al., 2020; Li & Tangirala, 2021; Zhang Liangting et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022), suggesting voice is “time-dependent and dynamic” (Bolino et al., 2012). Yet existing literature pays inadequate attention to these dynamic features and rarely employs process research to examine voice evolution trends. This leads to conclusions that can explain between-individual differences in voice at a given time but cannot account for within-individual changes over time (Zhang Liangting et al., 2022).

Second, there is insufficient summarization of excellent local voice practices. Previous strategic HR practices have specific goals and contexts—high-performance work systems and innovation-oriented HR practices emphasize performance improvement and innovation orientation respectively, making them ill-suited to address practical voice behavior shaping demands. In fact, rationalization suggestion systems, proposal improvements, and lean projects have been widely applied and demonstrated strong vitality in Chinese local enterprises, yet few studies have conceptualized or theorized these practices, leaving their core elements and content structure unclear and limiting their practical guidance value.

Third, existing research lacks “thick description” of dynamic processes. Most mechanism studies treat voice elicitation as a one-step management practice effect (King et al., 2019), stopping at the point of voice behavior enactment. Methodologically, they primarily adopt quantitative paradigms to reveal mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions. However, the dynamic evolution

of individual voice behavior results from long-term social interaction between organizational members and management practices, featuring strong contextualization (Zhu Yongyue & Ouyang Chenhui, 2018), which quantitative research struggles to capture (Han Yi & Zong Shuwei, 2021). This limitation restricts scientific understanding of how management practices and employee voice behavior co-evolve.

In summary, adopting a dynamic process perspective to examine voice sustainability from the perspective of voice behavior itself is crucial for effectively addressing the practical challenge of “how to sustain employee voice.”

2.1 Research Status of Voice Behavior Continuity

2.1.1 Concept of Sustained Voice Behavior

LePine and Van Dyne (2001) defined employee voice as “organizational members proactively offering opinions, suggestions, or ideas to improve the status quo of their team, department, or organization.” Subsequent scholars have developed this definition from various angles, reaching consensus that voice is a constructive yet challenging, discretionary extra-role behavior (Morrison, 2011; Lu Hongxu et al., 2020). Since its introduction, researchers have generally viewed voice as trait-based and static, with differences primarily between individuals (Bolino et al., 2012), implicitly assuming cross-time stability as the ideal state.

However, recent research increasingly shows that employees dynamically adjust voice levels when adapting to external environments (King et al., 2019; Zhang Kai et al., 2020; Li & Tangirala, 2021; Zhang Liangting et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). Voice is not instantaneous single behavior but rather exhibits decreasing, interrupting, or sustaining trends over time (Zhang Liangting et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). Therefore, using simple static point-in-time measures to reflect true voice behavior characteristics may misinterpret a momentary voice level as sustained voice. As research progresses, literature has begun focusing on voice behavior trends, with several concepts emerging related to “voice sustainability,” such as voice resilience (King et al., 2019; Wang Yao et al., 2022), “next-round voice” (Zhang Kai et al., 2020), enduring voice (Li & Tangirala, 2021), and subsequent voice (Liu et al., 2022). These studies recognize voice’s dynamic nature and examine explanatory variables and antecedent mechanisms for voice evolution trends, contributing valuable theoretical knowledge about voice behavior’s essential characteristics.

To deepen understanding of voice behavior change trends, this study argues for a systematic examination of voice sustainability from a dynamic perspective. Drawing on related concepts such as sustainability of altruistic behavior (Yu Kun et al., 2022) and subsequent voice behavior (Liu et al., 2022), we define sustained voice behavior as the tendency of employees to exhibit subsequent voice behavior over time, built upon prior voice levels, demonstrating short-term fluctuation stability and long-term trend consistency.

2.1.2 Formation Mechanism of Sustained Voice Behavior

As research progresses, increasing attention focuses on the dynamic characteristics of individual voice behavior (Morrison, 2023), extending voice contexts to subsequent voice and providing effective reference for addressing the challenge of voice sustainability. Current literature primarily follows two lines of inquiry.

The first line examines relationships between prior voice experiences and subsequent voice development trends. Representative studies include King et al. (2019), who introduced “voice resilience” to describe employees’ willingness to continue voicing after non-endorsement. Their research shows that when suggestions are not adopted, thorough managerial explanations enhance psychological safety and increase voice resilience. Zhang Kai et al. (2020) found that managerial voice endorsement enhances employees’ sense of work meaning and voice efficacy, stimulating sustained voice enthusiasm. Liu et al. (2022) discovered that when prior voice behavior is accompanied by leader humility, employee psychological safety increases and subsequent voice tendency strengthens; when accompanied by abusive supervision, psychological safety decreases and subsequent voice weakens. Kim et al. (2023) conceptualized constructive voice as continuous dyadic exchange between voicers and managers, suggesting that managerial responses of agreement or implementation prompt employees to respond with subsequent constructive suggestions, continuing relationship development and fostering voice feedback cycles.

These studies reveal that responses and feedback from prior voice experiences are crucial factors influencing subsequent voice behavior (Shi Xiaoyun et al., 2022). Actors observe and react to prior voice outcomes, forming emotional and cognitive traces that provide evidentiary input for subsequent risk-benefit assessments (Chen Jian & Shi Kan, 2017). Self-regulation theory also indicates that subsequent behavior is largely influenced by feedback and cognitive adjustments from prior behavior enactment (Le Guoan & Ji Haiying, 2007). These studies advance understanding of how prior voice feedback relates to subsequent voice behavior.

The second line examines individual voice behavior change trends from a dynamic process perspective. Morrison (2011) early recognized voice behavior’ s dynamic nature, advocating multi-timepoint data collection to examine voice dynamics over time. Many scholars have adopted experience sampling methods to investigate short-term voice behavior variability. However, as understanding deepens, researchers increasingly recognize voice as proactive behavior representing sustained energy output rather than short-term decision-making (Grant & Ashford, 2008). While short-term dynamic models can describe voice changes, their brief time spans limit prediction of long-term changes. Therefore, examining voice evolution trends over relatively longer timeframes better aligns with voice’ s nature (Zhang Liangting et al., 2022). Consequently, more scholars are adopting process perspectives in research design. For example, Wang Qu (2018) used grounded theory to construct rural female cadres’ voice-silence selection

mechanisms and dynamic transformation paths, finding that dynamic switching between voice and silence is influenced by prior behavioral choices and integrated cognitive and emotional processes activated by current contexts. Other scholars have examined linear or nonlinear evolution patterns, with Li and Tangirala (2021) noting that voice momentum may exhibit self-amplifying “positive spirals” or self-deflating “negative spirals” over time. Their empirical results show that supervisor-employee proactive personality matching positively affects both linear and nonlinear changes in voice levels six months later through the mediating role of change goal congruence. Zhang Liangting et al. (2022) found that newcomers’ voice behavior follows an inverted U-shaped trend during organizational socialization, with stronger relational self-concept individuals showing greater voice behavior variation, and transformational leadership significantly moderating this trend through interaction with relational self-concept.

These findings enrich theoretical knowledge about individual voice behavior evolution patterns in workplaces, reaching three consensuses: First, voice behavior has objective dynamic attributes over time, and dynamic and longitudinal research helps scientifically reveal formation and evolution patterns (Morrison, 2023). Second, dynamic process inquiry places higher demands on research methods, and future studies should select appropriate methods to address dynamic mechanism challenges (Chen Jian & Shi Kan, 2017). Third, voice behavior intensity and evolution trends are comprehensively influenced by individual and environmental factors (Zhang Liangting et al., 2022), representing an emotional-cognitive process with multiple counterbalancing forces (Wang Qu, 2018).

2.2 Mechanisms of Management Context Influence on Employee Voice Behavior

Most existing research on management context and employee voice is grounded in “rule-of-man” contexts of leadership styles, primarily drawing on social exchange theory, social identity theory, information processing theory, and social learning theory to explore how leader trustworthy behavior (Jin Tonglin et al., 2018), proactive voice solicitation (Zhou Hao & Sheng Xinyi, 2019; Shi Xiaoyun et al., 2022), and information sharing behavior (Chen Qianqian et al., 2017) influence subordinate voice mechanisms and boundary conditions. These studies significantly advance understanding of voice antecedents, generally viewing leadership behavior as a soft means of regulating employee behavior that conveys “subjective” norms to organizational members (Peng Jian et al., 2020). Particularly in voice contexts, leaders—being the targets of upward voice—hold reward power and serve as key sources for subordinates to judge voice safety and worthiness (Detert & Burris, 2007; Duan Jinyun et al., 2016). However, research also notes that leadership effectiveness largely depends on personal trait tendencies, is not easily changed in the short term, and cannot constitute broad organizational context, limiting practical implications (Yan Aimin & Li Ying, 2020; Chen Silu et al., 2020).

In contrast, the behavioral perspective of strategic human resource management posits that HR strategies, as institutional “hard means” (Peng Jian et al., 2020), are formal management rules and procedures implemented in organizations that regulate employee participation (Xu Long & Meng Huaxing, 2021; Jiang et al., 2015). These practices feature visibility, comprehensibility, and consensus (Jia Jianfeng et al., 2021; Wu Ruxin, 2017), providing clear contextual cues for individual decision-making and forming effective institutionalized levers in practice. They represent effective measures for shaping employee voice behavior norms (Xu Long & Meng Huaxing, 2021; Zhao Hongdan et al., 2019). Based on this consensus, the relationship between HR practices and employee voice has gained increasing attention. Researchers have examined voice antecedents from perspectives including high-performance work systems (Miao Rentao et al., 2015; Qi Yujue & Yang Dongtao, 2018; Wang et al., 2019; Xu Long & Meng Huaxing, 2021), socially responsible HR practices (Zhao Hongdan et al., 2019), high-commitment work systems (Duan Jinyun et al., 2017), and union practices (Hu Enhua et al., 2019), yielding important conclusions. For instance, union practices can enhance psychological safety and voice efficacy, addressing employees’ concerns about voicing risks and ineffectiveness while stimulating their sense of responsibility to contribute suggestions, thereby promoting voice behavior (Hu Enhua et al., 2019). These studies advance voice behavior antecedent research while compensating for gaps in meso-level antecedent studies and providing effective management implications.

Notably, although research on HR practices and voice has yielded beneficial results, most studies adopt static perspectives, focusing on voice enactment as the outcome and stopping there. According to self-regulation frameworks, the individual voice behavior chain includes multiple stages beyond enactment, such as pre-action prediction and post-action reflection, with management contexts potentially influencing different stages (Shi Xiaoyun et al., 2022). However, most research concentrates on the initial occurrence stage, leaving a knowledge gap regarding management strategies that can elicit subsequent voice (Fu Chunjie et al., 2023), neglecting the practical challenge of “how to sustain employee voice.” Additionally, these studies have another limitation: when revealing HR practice effects, most measure practices at the individual perception level (Shao Fang & Fan Yun, 2014), ignoring differences between objective implementation and employee perception (Chen Jianan et al., 2017) and failing to reveal dynamic longitudinal mechanisms across multiple time points. Consequently, despite abundant research on management practice-voice relationships, local enterprises still lack effective theoretical guidance when facing the practical challenge of sustaining employee voice.

2.3 Literature Review Summary

The literature review reveals that predictors and generative mechanisms of sustained voice have become a new research direction, with studies extending voice contexts to subsequent voice and examining dynamic trends and antecedents.

However, existing literature has several limitations: In research pathways, few studies follow “phenomenon-driven” approaches, with insufficient summarization of excellent local voice practices. In fact, theoretical research on voice cultivation has lagged behind management practice. Regarding antecedent mechanisms, inadequate attention is paid to meso-level HR practice effects, with measurement focusing solely on perceived practices while ignoring heterogeneity across operational levels and stage differences between implementation and perception. In process mechanisms, most studies use quantitative approaches to reveal mediating mechanisms and boundary conditions, lacking detailed descriptions of dynamic processes through which management contexts influence voice evolution. This results in local enterprises lacking effective theoretical guidance for the practical challenge of sustaining employee voice despite abundant academic research.

3. Research Design

This study proposes three research projects (Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]) to address the practical challenge of sustaining employee voice. First, following a “phenomenon-driven theory research” paradigm, we summarize vital voice practices in local enterprises, propose the concept of “voice behavior-oriented human resource practice” (hereinafter “voice practice”), and explore its conceptual meaning and content structure (Research 1). Second, to clarify how voice practice influences individual voice behavior evolution, we progressively build an actor-based self-regulation framework comprising two-stage process models of “initial induction” and “subsequent reflection” for subsequent voice behavior, then examine voice practice’s differential moderating effects across these stages (Research 2). Finally, to provide dynamic, dialectical, and detailed theoretical description of how voice practice promotes sustained voice, we employ multi-case study methodology based on Research 2’s quantitative findings to extract dynamic process theory (Research 3). Overall, this study addresses two questions: First, what is the content structure and strategy system of effective voice practices implemented in local enterprises as important institutional levers for voice cultivation (Research 1)? Second, what are the internal logic and specific processes through which local organizational voice practices stimulate sustained voice (Research 2 and 3)? Answering these questions holds significant research value and practical importance.

3.1 Research 1: Conceptual Meaning and Content Structure of Voice Behavior-Oriented HR Practice

This study attempts to summarize vital voice practices in local enterprises, naming them “voice behavior-oriented human resource practice” and defining them as: a series of management practices implemented by enterprises to achieve the goal of maintaining high-level voice behavior among organizational members, used to enhance employees’ voice-related abilities, motivation, and opportunities. These practices help elicit employee initiative and high-quality suggestions

while promoting subsequent voice behavior. Research indicates that HR system practices do not function in isolation (Zhang Ruijuan & Sun Jianmin, 2014); specific combinations of practices help develop subsequent capabilities (Kang & Snell, 2009), and their synergistic effects can enhance HR management's impact on employee behavior and performance (Chadwick, 2010). Regarding voice behavior, Mowbray et al. (2021) note that HR practices related to ability, motivation, and opportunity have cumulative effects on employee voice. Observational evidence shows that rationalization suggestion systems, proposal improvements, and "trouble boards" demonstrating strong vitality in local enterprises encompass not only opportunity-oriented practices like suggestion solicitation and channel establishment but also diverse measures including evaluation, material rewards, recognition, and training. Given the lack of research integrating synergistic effects of HR practice systems that drive voice behavior, this study adopts the classic AMO (Ability-Motivation-Opportunity) theoretical framework (Jiang et al., 2015) to conceptualize voice practice systems as comprising voice ability enhancement practices, voice motivation enhancement practices, and voice opportunity provision practices, using qualitative and quantitative methods to explore conceptual meaning and content structure.

Based on literature and observations, we propose that voice practice may include: (1) **Ability enhancement practices** that strengthen voice capabilities, experience, and knowledge through selection, training, and job enlargement. Frontline employees possess the most critical business information, and their perspectives are vital for organizational improvement, but they may lack sufficient organizational information, have limited cognitive processing capacity, or poor expression skills, constraining effective internal communication and solution generation. Organizations can address this by sharing organizational information, job rotation, and enlargement to foster holistic thinking; organizing visits to excellent enterprises to learn advanced models; and providing training to enhance professional and communication skills, thereby improving employees' capacity for information collection, processing, solution formation, and opinion expression, and enhancing their ability to engage in high-quality suggestions (Mowbray et al., 2021).

- (2) **Motivation enhancement practices** that induce desired voice behavior through evaluation, reward, and incentive systems. In local organizational contexts, employees often face dilemmas: while familiar with their work and having many good ideas, high power distance and cultural values of "staying in one's place" (Li Shuwen et al., 2020) make them particularly cautious about risky extra-role behaviors (Cai Xia & Geng Xiulin, 2016). Combined with ambiguous organizational intentions and contextual uncertainty, individuals cannot accurately assess voice risks and benefits (Zhou Hao & Sheng Xinyi, 2019), resulting in insufficient voice willingness. Organizations can implement "rationalization suggestion" systems and special funds, providing timely feedback, fair evaluation and rewards, public recognition, and implementation of suggestions to transform "respect" and "democracy" into visible institutional norms, fully conveying

organizational expectations for employee wisdom and establishing voice legitimacy, thereby enhancing voice efficacy and achievement motivation. Additionally, work team design can promote effective employee interaction and relationship coordination, motivating employees to act in the organization's best interests and fostering voice motivation and subsequent behavior (Mowbray et al., 2021).

- (3) **Opportunity provision practices** that provide greater space for voice through empowerment, teamwork, and supportive participation. As a “challenging the status quo” extra-role behavior, voice involves discretionary choice—employees can speak up or remain silent (Grant, 2012). To maximize convenience for timely expression, organizations can establish improvement special funds and rationalization suggestion systems to standardize voice channels and processes, such as regular morning meetings, public solicitation, dedicated collection personnel, workplace boards, and online complaint platforms. These normalized “voice” mechanisms provide higher workplace democracy, strengthen procedural justice and downward information sharing (Mowbray et al., 2021), help employees understand how, to whom, and with what results to voice, and provide greater freedom and autonomy for voice enactment.

Notably, although we categorize voice practice strategies into three AMO dimensions, these dimensions are functionally interconnected rather than isolated. For example, proactive managerial solicitation, empowerment, and participative decision-making not only provide opportunities but also enhance motivation. Therefore, our classification represents which dimension a strategy best serves, though content 归属 may vary by context and objective.

Research methods and steps: First, follow theoretical sampling principles to conduct field research in typical enterprises to understand application forms, characteristics, and effectiveness of proposal improvement systems, “trouble boards,” and lean projects. Second, conduct 1-2 focus groups (5-8 people each) and semi-structured interviews with approximately 15 employees and managers, using qualitative analysis software and AMO theory to identify dimensions. Third, develop scale drafts after obtaining expert feedback on dimension rationality and item wording/quantity. Fourth, conduct pilot testing, factor analysis, and validity testing to finalize the content structure and measurement tool.

3.2 Research 2: Two-Stage Process Model of Subsequent Voice Behavior from an Actor-Voice Practice Interaction Perspective

Employee voice behavior is not instantaneous single behavior but exhibits decreasing, interrupting, or sustaining trends over time. To reveal underlying dynamics and HR practice effects, this section first builds an actor-based self-regulation framework with “initial induction” and “subsequent reflection” stages, then examines voice practice's differential moderating effects across these stages.

3.2.1 Two-Stage Model of Subsequent Voice Generation from an Actor Perspective Self-regulation theory has been widely applied to analyze dynamic evolution of individual cognition and behavior (Lord et al., 2010). According to this theory, individual behavioral self-regulation involves self-observation and strategy application to control behavior, typically accompanying internal process development (Lord et al., 2010) and comprising prediction, behavior operation, and self-reflection stages (Le Guoan & Ji Haiying, 2007). Prediction refers to pre-action preparation and action determination; operation refers to processes during behavior enactment affecting attention and performance; self-reflection occurs post-action and influences reactions to prior experiences, which in turn affect subsequent behavioral prediction, completing a self-regulation cycle. This theory provides an effective framework for revealing subsequent voice generation processes.

Guided by self-regulation's "prediction-operation-reflection" behavior chain and incorporating voice cognitive process models (Duan Jinyun & Zhang Qian, 2012), dynamic evolution models (Chen Jian & Shi Kan, 2017), and four-stage models (Lu Hongxu et al., 2020), we construct an actor-based two-stage model of subsequent voice generation (Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper]).

- (1) **Initial occurrence stage:** This corresponds to the process from voice idea generation through risk-benefit assessment to voice intention formation and behavior enactment—"voice idea $\rightarrow$ voice intention $\rightarrow$ voice behavior." When employees observe and reflect on organizational tasks and positions, they compare current states with ideal standards, generating voice ideas (Lu Hongxu et al., 2020) and preliminary solutions. They then "act according to circumstances," collecting information to pre-assess voice risks and benefits and determine environmental safety (Duan Jinyun & Zhang Qian, 2012), forming voice intentions that transform into behavior at appropriate times.

Proposition 1: Employee voice idea generation influences voice behavior enactment through voice intention.

- (2) **Subsequent reflection stage:** This corresponds to the post-voice reflection and cognitive adjustment phase affecting subsequent voice—"prior voice behavior $\rightarrow$ cognitive adjustment $\rightarrow$ subsequent voice behavior." After voice enactment, adoption status and environmental responses trigger reflection on prior experiences (King et al., 2019; Zhang Kai et al., 2020), forming voice efficacy cognition. When employees perceive high voice efficacy, they believe they can competently perform the voice role and confidently express subsequent ideas to solve work problems (Liu et al., 2022). Conversely, low voice efficacy leads to perceived low adoption likelihood, ideal outcome unachievability, and powerlessness, causing employees to avoid sharing suggestions (Duan Jinyun & Wei Qiujiang, 2012).

Proposition 2: Prior voice behavior influences subsequent voice behavior enactment through voice efficacy.

3.2.2 Two-Stage Model of Subsequent Voice Generation from an Actor-Voice Practice Interaction Perspective Previous research typically defines voice as informal discretionary behavior (Mowbray et al., 2021) and proactive behavior (Liu et al., 2022), with intrinsic motivation considered the key driver. Recent research notes that voice intensity and evolution trends are comprehensively influenced by individual and environmental factors (Zhang Liangting et al., 2022), with context maintaining or inhibiting voice motivation (Liu et al., 2022). We argue that voice practice, as an institutional “hard means,” can regulate and guide employee voice through formal rules and procedures, potentially amplifying and strengthening voice behavior’s longitudinal self-regulation.

Research indicates HR practices operate at two levels: subjectively perceived HR practice and objectively implemented HR practice (Shao Fang & Fan Yun, 2014). Without effective communication and interaction between HR departments and employees, gaps between implementation and perception become significant (Chen Jianan et al., 2017). According to cognitive theory, employees’ cognitive processes regarding HR practices evolve from “perceptual 初级阶段” to “rational 高级阶段” (Chen Jianan et al., 2017). During early organizational socialization, employees form holistic perceptual impressions through initial interactions, characterized by variability and superficiality that don’t reflect true implementation levels (Zhao Huijuan & Long Lirong, 2008). Over time, employees actively adopt strategies to adapt, while organizations transmit necessary knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes, stimulating adaptive regulation (Zhao Huijuan & Long Lirong, 2008). Through bidirectional individual-organization interaction, employees develop more accurate and clear evaluations of HR practices, with the gap between “subjective perception” and “objective implementation” narrowing and converging to advanced rational cognition.

We argue that as employees’ self-regulation of voice behavior progresses, their cognition of organizational voice practices evolves from “初级阶段” to “高级阶段,” with these different cognitive evaluations having differential effects during “initial induction” and “subsequent reflection” stages.

- (1) **Initial occurrence from an actor-voice practice perspective: Moderating effect of perceived voice practice.** In local enterprises, voice practice implementation varies significantly across organizations and even within the same organization, members form different perceptions and evaluations. According to the two-stage model, employees in the “initial induction” stage experience “voice idea → voice intention → voice behavior.” Lacking actual voice experience, actors have insufficient cognition of organizational norms and remain at the perceptual 初级阶段 of voice practice evaluation, which may not reflect objective practice levels. We argue that individual voice practice perception plays an important moderating role in both the voice idea-voice intention and voice intention-voice behavior transformations. When individuals perceive high-level voice practice and have generated voice content, they are more likely to

form high voice intentions and exhibit voice behavior, interpreting the situation as organizational emphasis on employee initiative and favorable conditions encouraging expression. This facilitates positive risk-benefit and safety assessments, forming higher voice intentions. Furthermore, when organizations create convenient opportunities and channels, this promotes transformation from voice intention to behavior.

Proposition 3: Individual perceived voice practice positively moderates the relationship between voice idea and voice intention.

Proposition 4: Individual perceived voice practice positively moderates the relationship between voice intention and voice behavior.

- (2) **Subsequent reflection from an actor-voice practice perspective: Moderating effect of implemented voice practice.** In the “subsequent reflection” stage experiencing “prior voice → cognitive adjustment → subsequent voice,” employees have enacted voice behavior and experienced management practice “responses” and “interactions,” reducing uncertainty and forming more accurate organizational norm evaluations. The gap between “subjective perception” and “objective implementation” narrows, entering advanced rational cognition. We argue that objectively implemented voice practice as a key context plays an important moderating role in both the prior voice-voice efficacy and voice efficacy-subsequent voice transformations.

Specifically, during prior voice enactment, employees apply previously created cognitions about voice opportunities and safety to guide decisions and behavior, conducting self- “experiments.” External contextual responses become focal observation points and important cognitive processing cues. When organizations implement high-level voice practice (e.g., recognition, adoption, rewards, thorough communication), behavioral evaluation and feedback systems convey supportive signals (Mom et al., 2019). Employees observing and reacting to these signals tend to believe organizations affirm and support prior voice, developing competence and confidence in the voice role—voice efficacy. Voice efficacy, as employees’ expected perception of their capacity to perform the voice role effectively (Su Weilin & Lin Xinqi, 2019), is considered a key driver of voice behavior. When practice provides participative decision-making opportunities and channel resources through empowerment, cooperation, and support, this facilitates transformation from voice efficacy cognition to subsequent voice action. Conversely, limited opportunities and channels constrain perceived empowerment and autonomy, hindering the efficacy-to-behavior transformation.

Proposition 5: Organizationally implemented voice practice positively moderates the relationship between prior voice behavior and subsequent voice efficacy.

Proposition 6: Organizationally implemented voice practice positively moderates the relationship between voice efficacy and subsequent voice behavior.

Research methods and steps: First, develop a questionnaire using established

scales for voice idea, intention, prior voice behavior, voice efficacy, and subsequent voice behavior, and the scale developed in Research 1 for voice practice. All scales use 6-point Likert scales with even-numbered scoring. Second, collect data through multi-timepoint surveys. Given voice practice' s two operational levels, collect nested samples at individual (perception) and organizational (implementation) levels. Third, conduct empirical analysis using SPSS, Mplus, and HLM for aggregation tests, CFA, descriptive statistics, and hypothesis testing.

3.3 Research 3: Dynamic Process of Voice Practice Promoting Sustained Voice Behavior: A Multi-Case Study

Although Research 2 adopts quantitative methods to reveal how voice practice as a key contextual factor influences individual voice cognition and behavioral tendency evolution, workplace voice behavior dynamic evolution actually results from long-term social interaction between actors and management contexts (Zhu Yongyue & Ouyang Chenhui, 2018), featuring strong contextualization (Han Yi & Zong Shuwei, 2021). In local enterprises, how does voice practice interact with actors during early, middle, and late voice behavior chain stages? What are the interaction contents, methods, and outcomes? What factors influence the interaction process? How do interaction results drive subsequent cognitive and behavioral evolution? These questions require process research beyond quantitative models.

Compared to outcome-based research, case studies better demonstrate holism, dynamism, and dialectics of processes (Wang Yangmei et al., 2020; Jing Runtian & Sun Xuan, 2021) and are more suitable for revealing causal relationships (Chen Xiaoping & Shen Wei, 2016) and building process theory (Mao Jiye & Chen Cheng, 2017). Moreover, case studies have natural advantages in internal validity compared to quantitative research' s high external validity (Lü Li, 2014; Chen Xiaoping & Shen Wei, 2016). To strengthen robustness, this study combines case study methodology with Research 2 to detail the specific process of voice practice promoting sustained voice.

Self-regulation theory posits that individual behavioral self-regulation typically accompanies cognitive development (Lord et al., 2010). With behavior chain evolution, individual cognitive self-regulation under external environmental influence typically experiences three stages: "cognitive creation," "cognitive experimentation," and "cognitive reflection" (Le Guoan & Ji Haiying, 2007), with HR practice as key external context interacting multiple times on the cognitive chain to drive behavioral dynamic evolution. Based on self-regulation theory, we divide voice behavior evolution into pre-action "initial induction," in-action "responsive interaction," and post-action "subsequent reinforcement" stages, further constructing a case analysis framework for voice practice promoting sustained voice (Figure 5 [Figure 5: see original paper]).

- (1) **Initial induction in the "cognitive creation" stage:** Pre-voice enactment, employees lack voice experience and have insufficient organizational

norm cognition, creating contextual “ambiguity.” Employees primarily create cognitions about voice efficacy, motivation, and opportunity based on prior beliefs, observed contextual cues, and interactions with organizational members. Implemented voice practices such as information sharing, capability development, appreciation, empowerment, and rationalization suggestion adoption optimize external environment perception, giving voice practice the function of eliciting employee voice. However, at this stage, lacking actual voice experience and interaction with organizational practice, the formed cognition is typically superficial and variable.

- (2) **Responsive interaction in the “cognitive experimentation” stage:** During voice operation, actors apply previously created cognitions about voice efficacy, opportunity, and safety to guide voice decisions and behavior, conducting self- “experiments.” When voicers observe unclear environmental information, they may adjust voice strategies for further “experimentation.” Organizational practice responses (e.g., evaluation fairness, recognition/non-recognition, adoption/non-adoption) constitute key contextual information, becoming focal observation points and important cognitive processing cues. Employees’ observations and reactions provide more sufficient evidentiary input for subsequent cognitive adjustment and behavioral decisions, evolving “correct” behaviors that align with organizational culture.
- (3) **Subsequent reinforcement in the “cognitive adjustment” stage:** Post-voice reflection triggers self-judgment and self-reaction processes for self-evaluation and causal attribution. Specifically, individuals compare observed environmental information with internal goal information after behavior, with attribution judgments influencing subsequent reactions. When voice practice intensity is high, positive interaction experiences activate positive spirals of voice cognition (Li & Tangirala, 2021) and adaptive reasoning (Le Guoan & Ji Haiying, 2007), leading to positive evaluations of prior voice utility, enhanced voice efficacy and safety. Actors’ voice cognition then depends not only on pre-action creation but also on reflection of voice feedback and response experiences, with positive responsive interaction bringing cognitive gains and upgrades that stimulate subsequent voice willingness and motivation.
- (4) **“Induction-Response-Reinforcement” evolution framework:** Under external environmental influence and the “prediction-operation-reflection” behavior chain, individuals’ voice-related cognitions (safety, efficacy) evolve through “cognitive creation → cognitive ‘experimentation’ → cognitive adjustment.” Over time and with socialization progression, employees’ cognitive evaluations of organizational voice practices evolve from “subjective perception levels” to “objective implementation levels,” with the gap narrowing and converging. For management, to shape “correct” behaviors aligned with organizational goals and achieve voice sustainability, it is essential to understand stage differences in voice

behavior and cognitive chain evolution, design and implement targeted practice strategies accordingly, strengthen interaction and communication with employees, eliminate “information asymmetry” between organizational intentions and individual perceptions, fully convey organizational expectations, and enhance employee safety and efficacy to drive positive spiral evolution of subsequent voice behavior and cognitive chains.

Research methods and steps: First, build an analytical framework based on self-regulation theory and literature review, defining research questions. Second, select typical cases based on theoretical sampling principles, choosing enterprises with rich voice management practices, strong voice climates, and observable actor-practice interaction processes. Third, collect data through field observation, interviews, and questionnaires to provide multi-source support. Fourth, analyze data by establishing basic patterns for each case, then conduct cross-case analysis to seek replication patterns and extract dynamic process theory. Fifth, compare the resulting dynamic process theory with existing literature, identifying similarities and differences and revising as necessary.

4. Theoretical Contributions and Innovation

Based on prior research’s important limitations regarding voice behavior evolution dynamics, research methods, and lack of summarization of excellent local voice practices, this study employs AMO theory and self-regulation theory as primary theoretical foundations, using theoretical, empirical, grounded, and case research to address “how to sustain employee voice in local organizations.” Theoretical innovations manifest in three aspects:

First, this study follows a “phenomenon-driven theory research” path, emphasizing concept development based on phenomena and advancing the emerging research theme of voice practice. Previous strategic HR practices have specific goals and contexts—high-performance work systems and innovation-oriented HR practices emphasize performance improvement and innovation respectively, making them ineffective for addressing voice shaping demands. In fact, rationalization suggestion systems, proposal improvements, and lean projects have been widely applied and demonstrated strong vitality in Chinese local enterprises, yet their content systems and mechanisms remain unclear. This study conceptualizes and theorizes these practices, proposing “voice behavior-oriented human resource practice” and using the AMO framework with qualitative and quantitative methods to explore its conceptual meaning and summarize a three-dimensional content structure and practice system comprising ability enhancement, motivation enhancement, and opportunity provision practices, providing effective reference for enterprise practice.

Second, this study focuses on the sustainability characteristic of organizational voice behavior, constructing a two-stage model of employee voice behavior self-regulation (“initial occurrence” and “subsequent reflection”) and examining differential moderating effects of individually perceived and objectively imple-

mented voice practices across these stages. This enriches dynamic examination of voice behavior trends and antecedents. Previous research rarely distinguished between initial and subsequent voice, leaving theoretical understanding insufficient regarding subsequent voice influencing factors and formation processes, unable to explain why some employees continue voicing while others' willingness declines after initial suggestions. Guided by self-regulation framework and the "prediction-operation-reflection" cognitive-behavior chain, we construct two-stage process models that depict subsequent voice generation details and relationships with prior voice experiences. These explorations are theoretically important for understanding why voice behavior evolves toward decrease, interruption, or sustainability over time and how prior voice experiences influence subsequent voice. Additionally, by distinguishing between perceived and implemented practice effects, we help clarify cognitive evolution stages, differentiate mechanism heterogeneity across operational levels, and provide more actionable guidance for successful voice practice implementation.

Third, this study employs multi-case methodology to build dynamic process theory of voice practice promoting subsequent voice, deepening rational understanding of management practice-voice relationships. While abundant literature uses quantitative paradigms to reveal mediating mechanisms, voice evolution's strong contextualization (Zhu Yongyue & Ouyang Chenhui, 2018) makes quantitative research ill-suited for capturing process dynamics and complexity (Han Yi & Zong Shuwei, 2021). Building on self-regulation framework, we use multi-case studies to extract dynamic process theory, constructing a three-stage model of "initial induction in cognitive creation stage," "responsive interaction in cognitive experimentation stage," and "efficacy reinforcement in cognitive gain stage." This not only supplements theoretical details about how management practice influences sustained voice but also provides effective reference for addressing the practical challenge of sustaining employee voice in local enterprise contexts.

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