

Workers' Voice or Voice of Workers (VoW)

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Abstract: *Workers' voice, also known as Voice of the Workers (VoW), is a crucial aspect of organizational behaviour that allows employees to express their ideas and opinions on job - related issues. It involves three types of social dialogues: information exchange, consultation, and negotiation. The goal is to create a workplace where employees feel comfortable speaking up and motivated to do so, knowing their opinions will be valued and potentially result in significant improvements. Leaders play a crucial role in encouraging employees to express themselves, and human resources experts are responsible for creating procedures and policies that incorporate employee input into the company's working culture. VoW has two primary functions: it ensures everyone has the right to voice, which is essential for quality work, and it allows workers to provide suggestions for enhancing operations, ultimately improving an organization's efficacy and performance. Organizations need to address factors such as the illusion of being superior in the industry, bosses discouraging workers who give feedback, and management not responding or doing anything if workers speak out. Smart workers quickly understand that giving feedback is not a good idea and choose to stay quiet instead. Workers often choose to stay silent due to fear, embarrassment, and narrow conceptions of ethical responsibility, complicated friends, lack of opportunity for voice, and lack of organizational political skills. Fear is the most difficult barrier to overcome, as whistle blowers face reprisals in their professional careers. Humiliation is another barrier, as many people are afraid to discuss sensitive subjects like sex, finances, politics, and ethics. Giving people the chance to authentically and freely share their thoughts, worries, and points of view without worrying about the repercussions in their personal or professional lives is what is meant by workers voice, also known as Voice of the Workers (VoW). This idea makes sure that workers actually have a say in decisions made at work by using their input. A crucial component of organisational behaviour is Workers voice, which includes the channels and procedures by which workers express their ideas and opinions on issues pertaining to their jobs. The intention is to establish a workplace where Workers/Employees are comfortable speaking up and are motivated to do so since they know their opinions will be valued and may result in significant improvements.*

Keywords: Workers voice, Voice of Workers (VoW), Employee feedback, Employee Participation, leadership, HR policies, Silence and Organisational behaviour

There are three types of social dialogues: -

- Exchange of information - It refers to passing or giving of information from one party to the other (Employee to Employer or vice versa). It can be formal or informal. It is the simplest form of social dialogue, It is not two way.
- Consultation: - As a due diligence, It refers to the process of seeking information proactively from other party & requesting their inputs on a topic or a discussion point. For example: - Management holds a meeting with worker representatives to receive feedback on a new H & S policy before making changes.
- Negotiation: - It is the most advanced type of Social dialogue where both parties sit on the table and decide collectively on a policy, topic resulting in a collective bargaining agreement.

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The factories have not even reached first level of social dialogue.

One project alone is unlikely to produce effective voice; instead, leaders' support and complementary channels are needed. Encouragement of employees to speak up and express themselves is greatly aided by senior and line managers. It is the duty of human resources experts to create procedures and policies that incorporate employee input into the working culture and ethos of the company.

Managers must pay attention to employee input and take appropriate action in order to facilitate true two - way

communication. In the context of evolving work practices, it's also essential to guaranteeing job quality

Why does VoW matter?

VoW has two primary functions:

- Everybody has the **fundamental right to employee voice**. It is essential to quality work and gives workers a platform to communicate issues that are meaningful to them.
- Voice of Workers (VoW)** enables Workers to provide suggestions for how to enhance operations, which can enhance an organization's efficacy and performance.

Why Workers prefer to stay Silence

The Richard (2003) listed, **Fear, Embarrassment, Narrow conceptions of ethical responsibility, Implicated Friends, Lack of opportunity for "voice and Lack of organizational political skills as the reasons for silence.**

- Fear:** The fear barrier is arguably the easiest to understand but more difficult to go past. Nonetheless, there are a few techniques that can support bravery. The majority of us dislike fighting. The powerful individuals involved in unethical behaviour may react against us if we protest their actions.

We ought to feel terrified. The overwhelming body of data shows that whistle blowers in the public sphere face effective reprisals in their professional careers, which frequently have disastrous effects on their personal and family lives.

- 2) **Feeling of shame (Humiliation):** The barrier of humiliation is more subdued. Many of us are afraid to discuss sensitive subjects like sex, finances, politics, and ethics for fear that we won't be able to articulate our issues clearly and/or effectively.
- 3) **Limited ideas on one's ethical obligations:** Rather than understanding ethical duty in the context of organisational citizenship, many define it very narrowly and individualistically. We believe that even in situations where unethical behaviour is prevalent, we are ethical if we personally grasp what is moral and do not act unethically ourselves. It is not our duty to witness, hear, or discuss immoral acts going on around us if we behave morally within our own organisational work boxes. According to Edmund Burke, "The good must associate when bad men combine; else, they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle. " This overly restrictive paradigm is reinforced by research and instruction on organisational ethics as seen in textbooks and journal papers. The majority of the time, textbooks and journal articles come to an end when a person comes to their own personal, individualistic conclusion about what is ethical. That is undoubtedly only the beginning of the issue; it is by no means its conclusion.
- 4) **Friends Involved:** Occasionally, friends who engage in immoral behaviour might pose an equal challenge to more powerful individuals. We naturally want to help our friends and not hurt them, even when we may dread the powerful. When we enquire about, question, or confront friends' behaviour on ethical grounds, we run the danger of jeopardising such friendships. It is quite challenging to put the proverb "opposing the sin but not the sinner" into practice, even though it sounds nice.
- 5) **Absence of "voice" opportunities:** Organisations' macro - level structural features frequently prevent political room for speech. Silence can occur when there isn't a political space that is safe for voice. Where can we talk about problems with organisational ethics? Democracies do not exist in most organisations. Even in situations when organisations promote collaborative management and decision - making, the involvement is carefully regulated and centralised. Upper management, for instance, can promote discussion on how to more effectively achieve the goals of top management. The agenda is frequently not particularly conducive to collaborative agenda - setting. Furthermore, only a small number of organisations have democratic or participatory assemblies or
- congresses where staff, members, and other interested parties can set agendas and take part in deciding on crucial matters, such as moral dilemmas.
- 6) **Absence of organisational political skills:** A large number of us lack the political knowledge and abilities necessary for effective organisational ethics. At least five categories of strategies—forcing strategies, win - win strategies, dialogic strategies, third - party strategies, and social movement strategies—have the potential to be both efficacious and reasonably safe. Even while dialogic approaches are theoretically superior, in practice powerful individuals participating in unethical behaviour are frequently unable or unable to participate in dialogue about unethical and corrupt practices due to political and economic realities. They also have the authority to decide not to talk about the problems. Furthermore, the behaviour of those who share the same culture with the group is valuable. As a result, these cultures aid workers in enhancing their output (Hofstede, 1980). Also, the employees' silence is a result of the cultural differences.
- There are **other factors** that management need to think & address: -
- 1) **Delusion of being superior & best in the industry:** - Many companies and their owners believe they are the finest and no one else can do what they are doing; so, they live in illusions and keep themselves far from truth. They also have support from several other Sycophant staff members who do not want their employer to know the truth in the organisation.
- 2) **Bosses discouraging workers who give feedback:** - If a worker has the guts to tell their boss the truth and give feedback, the phrase "You don't know it well yet" is always a clear sign that the rank ego is being activated.
- 3) **If workers speak out, management doesn't respond or do anything:** If workers give honest feedback, management won't do anything, and this sends the message (in a different way) that nothing will change.
- 4) **Smart workers quickly understand that giving feedback is not a good idea** and choose to stay quiet instead: smart workers would rather be quiet and believe in "Silence as a skill for survival".
- The Mechanism through which ability of the workers is enhanced to Elect, Represent, Include, Protect, Enable & Empower their members & their organisations is called Voice of Workers or Worker voice.
- Word to Remember Eripee**

<p>1 Elect</p> <hr/> <p>Workers must be able to act together to form worker-driven organizations that democratically elect their leaders free from interference by employers or the government.</p>	<p>2 Represent</p> <hr/> <p>Workers need to be informed of their rights, engaged, and mobilized for action. Leaders must be fully accountable to their members and responsible for consulting them on key matters.</p>
<p>3 Include</p> <hr/> <p>Organizations and their leadership should be fully inclusive and address obstacles to full representation and participation of the diverse workforce in their ranks, including diversity of race, gender, and status.</p>	<p>4 Protect</p> <hr/> <p>Workers must be protected from retaliation when using their voices, including protection from firing, deportation, abuse, harassment, threats, violence, and coercion.</p>
<p>5 Enable</p> <hr/> <p>Workers need to be given the time, space, and information to organize, train, and engage in bargaining practices that lead to the fulfillment of their rights.</p>	<p>6 Empower</p> <hr/> <p>Workers must be empowered by labor laws, leveraging binding actions to advance their objectives, and must have the power to strike and participate in the grievances and remedy process.</p>

Source: - Bureau of International Labor Affairs, United States Department of Labor

How to improve Worker Voices

Participation of Workers to air their Voice could be through three types; Direct, Indirect & through stakeholders

Direct Participation: - They can convey their feedback to the Management through open door policy, Create help groups to figure out how to deal with current problems, Grape vine, Buddy system (Mentoring - Senior workers are training the Junior ones and reporting to Manager), One to one Worker meeting with Supervisors & Managers, Worker Helplines / Hotlines, Helpdesk (directly reportable to senior Management), WOVO, Labour Solution’s Worker voice/ Coaching mobile application, Worker’s Board (Canteen, Toilet area Etc.) where workers can write anything) & Feedback forms.

Representative Participation (Indirect): - Through Worker committees/Trade Unions, Through Pulse surveys, Performance Improvement Consultative Committees, through Suggestion boxes & Idea Generation forum.

Through Third party Stakeholders: - Normally Workers interact maximum with Security, Canteen, Medical staff (if it is there), Supervisors, Electrician, HR Junior staff, Grocery shops near to their residences. Factory management can arrange a Survey to know “What workers feel about the working environment in the company”

It's more important than ever for businesses to listen to their employees: -

- a) Factory management shall have procedure on Worker Voice & Effective Worker listening strategy.
- b) Top Management, Managers & Supervisors need to be trained on getting Worker voice.
- c) Be respectful & Supportive when workers are saying something.
- d) Encourage dialogue.
- e) There shall be a strategy to have Voice of workers at all stages of Worker/Employee Cycle (Application,

Interview, Selection, Recruitment, Induction (On boarding), Retention, Development, Off boarding, Exit)
 f) Due diligence & risk assessment if workers are not participating.

So, employee speech isn't a separate project; it should be seen as part of a company's overall plan to keep employees interested and motivated.

Normally HR sometimes think that “No news is good news” but on the other side it could be “No news means sense of unease”.

Albert Hirschman's important 1970 work, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, says that worker voice and exit, or turnover, are closely linked.

When someone uses their voice, they are trying to change something that they don't like instead of running away from it. They can do this by petitioning the people in charge, going to a higher authority to try to get a change in management, or taking different actions and protests, even ones that are meant to get people to speak out.

Tools for VOW

Other than Direct & Indirect modes of participation, Workers should be encouraged to air their voice through Anonymous Phone calls, Hotline, Dialer HQ, WhatsApp groups,

Conclusion

Businesses must prioritize employee voice and actively engage with their employees. Factory management should establish a worker listening strategy, train top management, and encourage dialogue. Employees should be heard at all stages of the employee cycle. There are tools to encourage workers to air their voices through anonymous phone calls, hotlines, dialers HQ, WhatsApp groups and other multiple ways. If Workers are Silent, then there is a cost to it in terms of Increase Absenteeism, High Attrition rate, Reduced

productivity, Go slow, Decline in Morale & trust. Employees feel comfortable to speak up and should be motivated to do so.

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