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TALKING ABOUT VOICE

Insights from case studies

Report

March 2021

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Report

Talking about voice: insights from case studies

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1 Foreword

The tongue can paint what the eyes cannot see.

– Chinese proverb

The world at present can seem a bewildering place. Leaders fomenting unrest and division; countries nationalistically fighting over supplies of COVID-19 vaccine; regulators who silence journalists presenting evidence of fraud instead of investigating; company directors abusing government schemes designed to save jobs during the pandemic; and corporate executives who blithely ignore the climate emergency and Black Lives Matter. In vying to be heard, some use evidence, others stories or economics, and some resort to outright lies. Simply having multiple channels in play at the same time hasn't led to clarity or understanding. Instead, we have a cacophony of voices, all claiming privilege, authority and truth – and so little of these are edifying.

And yet, voice and voices matter. It is a human impulse to connect, to communicate, to share. This could be communicating knowledge, acknowledging a concern, showing care, building relationships or brainstorming ideas and solutions. The understanding of the nature and constituents of 'voice' in organisations is often unclear and contested, but what is clear is that without 'voice', there is no organisation.

While this report draws on pre-pandemic data, the lessons here remain relevant. Think of the voices warning of PPE shortages, the workers flagging up managerial inattention to workplace safety, the excluded voices and homogenous thinking resulting in poor governance and sub-optimal decisions. Contrast these with examples of meticulous, thoughtful and inclusive planning, deep knowledge and expertise, and clear communications from around the world. The COVID-19 death rates of each country stand as stark reminders of the dangers of the former and the advantages of the latter, when key decisions are taken.

Talking about voice: insights from case studies follows on from our 2019 report which explored the dynamics of 'voice' and its variety and intent in the workplace. Here, the focus was to see how employee voice operates in a selection of organisations – the context, the ways 'voice' is understood, the expectations of employees, their experiences and the organisational outcomes. We intend to continue this series of investigations on 'voice', as the experience of work and the employment relationship evolves for countless workers all over the world.

I'd like to thank the participants and their organisations for opening their doors to research. In many organisations, voice is conflated with communications and feedback. It is rarely dialogic. Few organisations understand the role potential of voice, and fewer reach that mutuality of interests and genuine engagement of mature dialogue. Here, the organisations have freely shared so that we may examine their experiences critically. Wisely, all recognise that it is the journey and not the mythical destination that matters. We hope this report with its analyses and findings will benefit scholars and practitioners in equal measure.

Dr Wilson Wong, Head of Insight and Futures/Interim Head of Research, CIPD

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2 Key findings and implications

The organisations involved in this study became involved because they are committed to improving employee voice within their organisations. Most of the organisations had implemented a number of initiatives to try to achieve this. The impetus for improving employee voice often came from a combination of factors, including a change in leadership, desire to retain good staff, and key events such as poor staff satisfaction surveys. These provided the opportunity for interventions championed by communications or people professionals to increase the profile and prominence of employee voice within the organisation.

Define voice for your context. The phrase 'employee voice' had no single meaning, and interviewees often used it interchangeably with other terms such as 'engagement' and 'communication'. This lack of single definition makes the term highly mobile; it can mean different things to different people who project their own purposes onto the term. However, this lack of shared understanding makes designing suitable voice initiatives more complex, as people within organisations have different goals and expectations for what employee voice is, why it matters and what it can achieve. People professionals and voice champions need to clearly communicate how voice is defined within their organisation.

Consider accessibility when designing employee voice mechanisms. Employee voice mechanisms were largely designed by people who work in HR, but often without input from the end users. For instance, some channels were designed with the assumption that all employees had access to the channels that were available to them. Subsequently, some voice mechanisms were not used, partly because ineffective design failed to consider the lived experience of operational workers, meaning some employee groups were excluded from utilising voice mechanisms.

Those responsible for voice generally focused more on the voice mechanisms they had direct control over, such as employee forums, rather than ones that employees considered important, such as the line management relationship. Therefore, they faced the danger of focusing on areas they could control but not ones that had the greatest impact.

Be aware of initiative overload. One of the central challenges for those championing employee voice is that they want to see the organisation develop many strategies that support and grow employee voice, but this can result in them trying to set up too many different initiatives, which can feel overwhelming to those on the receiving end. A few of our case study organisations suffered from what we label 'initiative overload'.

Look at voice mechanisms as two-way versus one-way. For many of the organisations the employee voice mechanisms were one-way (top-down) rather than two-way. Few organisations saw employee voice as the opportunity for employees to directly influence decisions. Instead, it was considered a means for employees to be engaged with the management agenda, as opposed to directly transforming this agenda themselves.

Developing employee voice in a deep way is challenging, time-consuming and complex. While organisations may sometimes want an easy fix, it can involve an uncomfortable journey to really embed employee voice within an organisation as it requires most people to change their behaviours, attitudes and relationships with others. From our research, there are several key considerations for people professionals that enable employee voice:

- Consider how to gain buy-in from senior management and increase recognition of the importance of employee voice in achieving wider organisational strategies and goals.

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- Support and develop line management capability so that people managers have confidence to:
  - encourage employees to use their voice through available channels
  - develop strong, trusting manager–employee relationships across their team.
- Capture employee experiences around voice to refine voice mechanisms and ensure they are accessible to all employees across the workforce.
- Focus on developing an organisational culture that promotes trust, where employees feel psychologically safe to speak up and there is a climate of transparency and open communication. Implementing channels for employee voice alone is not enough; culture will be integral to improving employee voice.
- Manage the balance between initiative overload and going at the right pace for your organisation – more initiatives won't necessarily mean more successful employee voice outcomes. Professionals should carefully consider which initiatives are most important to employees, and focus on the channels that are most effective and have the largest impact.

Ultimately, voice is a journey, not a destination.

3 Introduction

As we write this report we are in the middle of a global pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted issues around racial inequality, and businesses are concerned about their survival post-pandemic. It is a challenging time requiring new working practices and deep, long-term transformations in organisations and society. Organisations need to work *with* their employees, and a central component of this is listening and communicating effectively with their workforce.

For most people these large-scale global issues are experienced in everyday actions and events: the social distancing rules on the production line, an ethnic minority employee being overlooked for promotion, or the fear a parent might have about taking time for childcare responsibilities and the potential impact on redundancy decisions. Being able to raise concerns about these issues without fear of retribution, and to do so knowing that they will be listened to and acted on, is vital to creating good work and a positive working environment.

Employee voice is important for organisational effectiveness as well. Getting ideas from employees on the front line, as well as insights into making operations more effective, can have significant benefits to the organisation. Organisations need employees to have a voice.

So how do organisations support people to speak up? What can be done to create an environment in which people feel comfortable about raising concerns, or putting forward ideas for how to do things differently? Specifically, what can senior leaders and people practitioners do to help change their organisational processes to create good employee voice?

In the first phase of this research,[1] we ran a national survey to explore how employees experience different forms of voice at work, and the factors that enable or inhibit their ability to speak up. This national survey of 2,372 employees across a range of sectors was conducted by YouGov and sought to understand:

- how individuals' experience of voice influences broader feelings of job satisfaction
- the main channels for voice in organisations and what issues are commonly raised by employees

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- whether various types of voice are experienced differently across workplace settings and workforce groups
- the contextual barriers and enablers of employee voice.

The report highlighted the importance of employee voice with work satisfaction, which voice channels employees engaged with the most, what types of issues employees felt able to raise, and how free individuals felt in expressing their opinions.

This report builds on our previous research by exploring the practices of particular organisations. The individual case studies that accompany this report capture the experiences of each organisation as they seek to improve their employee voice. The cases range from small organisations with around 50 employees to large multinational corporations with thousands of employees.[2]

Five organisations completed the case study process and feature in the report, with two choosing to be anonymised. Four of the case studies are covered in more detail in the accompanying Case studies.

Table 1: Case study organisations

Organisation	Size	Sector
Airline logistics	Multinational	Airline logistics
Fast-food restaurant	Multinational	Fast-food
Fircroft College	Regional	Education
NHS Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust	Regional	Health
NMCN	National	Construction

This report presents the core findings on why organisations are interested in employee voice, the key mechanisms they use, and the enablers and barriers to employee voice for them. This case study approach is designed to show the importance of the context and the opportunities and challenges that arise in each organisational setting. Our case studies also provide insight into the implementation of employee voice mechanisms across a range of organisations with various business models, structures and cultures.

While all the fieldwork was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the issues that it raises are highly pertinent to the current situation. All the organisations in this study became involved because they are committed to improving employee voice. They are not perfect – no organisation can be. They are not the model organisations in which employee voice is 'solved'. Instead this report focuses on the activities, routes and struggles the organisations are facing in their improvement attempts.

What is employee voice?

As highlighted by examples in this report, the meaning of employee voice is not obvious or universally understood. Within this report, as in our first report,[3] we have taken Dromey's definition of employee voice as our starting point.[4] For Dromey, employee voice is *'the ability of employees to express their views, opinions, concerns and suggestions, and for these efforts to influence decisions at work.'* This definition argues that not only should employees feel able to express their opinions and concerns, but importantly, they should have the ability to genuinely influence decisions.

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This view of employee voice echoes Pateman's description of 'partial participation', where employees can influence decisions but they do not have the same power as management.[5] This can be contrasted with 'full participation', where everyone has equal power (as in a worker co-operative),[6] or 'pseudo participation', in which managers consult employees but have already made the decision.

As in the first report, we also concentrate on two main focuses of voice – **organisational voice**, in which the aim is for organisational improvement, and **individual voice**, where people can speak out on issues that matter to them. Thus we go beyond the focus solely on employee voice as something that is about innovation or just about organisational improvement, towards the space that organisations can create for employees to express their feelings, ideas and concerns.[7] See **Meaning and expectations for employee voice** for further details.

Representative participation

Representative participation relates to voice channels that involve employee representatives as opposed to direct representation (that is, direct contact between employees and their managers or organisation). Instead, this type of voice participation is mediated through a third party or representative through indirect means.[8]

It is important to note that one of the major representative channels of voice, unions, are not included in this study. We are conscious that for many, employees' unions represent a vital channel of voice, not only for collective bargaining but also in articulating collective concerns and issues to management. Thus, unions play an important role in the fabric of employee voice.[9] However, few interviewees spoke about unions directly, and when they did it was about creating representative channels, such as employee forums, which they felt substituted the need for union involvement.

Yet, as we will see below, within our case study organisations such forums had a more limited remit, particularly around issues of pay, than unionised forums. Most of the case study organisations were non-unionised, and therefore it was unsurprising that unions did not feature that heavily. It also echoed the results in our national survey that, for many employees, unions did not feature as one of the main sources of interaction for employee voice. Additionally, the CIPD's *Good Work Index 2020* found that the majority of UK organisations use direct forms of employee voice participation, with far fewer utilising representative channels of voice. However, voice representation varied considerably across organisational sector and size.[10] It should also be noted that while employee forums appear relatively late within the list of voice channels, this should not be interpreted as forums being viewed as less important. Rather we have presented them in line with the responses that employees gave within the national survey in phase one.

This report examines the mechanisms and practices that can enable, or limit, employee voice, and how that varies within different contexts. It aims to understand the types of activities, processes and practices that organisations try to use to bring out employee voice. Our intention is to provide insight of value for people practitioners and senior leaders who want to improve employee voice in their organisations. You will not, however, find ready-made, quick-fix solutions to employee voice. Employee voice should not be thought of as an add-on, one-size-fits-all approach that applies to all workplace settings. Furthermore, employee voice is not something that can be 'solved'. Therefore there are a number of reflective questions throughout this report, designed to encourage you to think more about your organisational context, the challenges and opportunities that you have to develop, and your organisation's commitment to successfully embedding employee voice.

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In this report we address the following:

- **The case for employee voice:** while academic literature often assumes that employee voice is a good thing,[11] for those who are interested in improving employee voice within their organisations, they often need to convince key stakeholders (senior leaders and decision-makers) of its importance. In our case study organisations we saw two core types of arguments: those that draw on the business case and those that make moral arguments. The report provides an overview of some of the key arguments that champions of employee voice make.
- **Putting voice on the agenda:** even if you have a clear argument for why employee voice matters in your organisation, understanding how to get buy-in and holding the interest of key decision-makers in employee voice matters. This section explores the strategies that champions of employee voice use to put voice on the agenda.
- **Meaning and expectations for employee voice:** while all the organisations within this study talked about the importance of employee voice, they were often less clear about what they meant by employee voice. In this report we explore individual voice, self-expression and organisational voice, which focuses on improvement. This lack of agreement on what employee voice means also raises a wider issue about the expectations that organisations have around who can speak out and what they can raise. This section reflects on these issues.
- **Implementing employee voice channels:** one of the central ways in which our case study organisations have sought to improve the employee voice experience within their organisations is through developing a range of employee voice channels. This section explores these channels, and how organisations have sought to use them to improve employee voice.
- **Reflections for people professionals and voice champions – transforming employee voice within organisations:** while channels are an important mechanism for developing employee voice within organisations, by themselves they are not enough. This section reflects on the wider challenges when developing employee voice channels, such as issues of inclusion and access as well as the tension between driving change and bringing people with you.

4 Case for employee voice

This section explores how the organisations in our research made the case for voice in their organisations. There are two key justifications that our organisations used: the business case and the moral case.

Business case

One of the approaches taken when making the case for voice is the business case, based on the impact voice can have on the organisation in terms of profits, productivity, innovation or efficiency. The underlying assumption here is that improved employee voice increases employee satisfaction through early identification of problems and helps employees feel more connected with the organisation.

Recruitment, retention and improving staff satisfaction

Most of our case study organisations operated in a context of tight profit margins, challenging recruitment conditions and high employee turnover. Many interviewees saw employee voice as important for organisational growth, to reduce staff turnover and save costs:

> ***[Key shareholders' interest in employee voice is] really aligned with the fact that we need to have this [voice], and it is driven purely by the commercial driver of bottom line. He's wanting capital growth and he's wanting dividends, that's it.***
>
> ***We don't want people going down the road for an extra 50p an hour, we want them to come and work for us because of who we are, that we listen to people and that we provide opportunities.***

Several managers believed improved employee voice would help identify underlying concerns and increase staff retention:

> ***We've had meetings... about how to improve the business because they noticed that people weren't very happy.***

Therefore many managers we interviewed saw employee voice as a way of uncovering everyday concerns that might impact employees' work, for example, issues with uniforms, shift patterns or working conditions, which if left unaddressed could lead to employees leaving the organisation (incurring costs, time and money to replace and reducing the knowledge base).

Improved engagement

Improving employee engagement was another part of the business case for employee voice. Indeed, engagement was often used interchangeably with the notion of employee voice. Some believed voice to be a process of empowerment for the employees:

> ***You're empowering people to feel they can have their say, not necessarily that they'll be able to change everything they want to, but to at least feel they can raise their voice and just by doing that it will make a difference.***

By seeing employee voice as interchangeable with engagement, organisations often drew on ideas from Engage for Success and talked about employees feeling motivated and fulfilled at work. However, it should be noted that while employee engagement is referred to in an interchangeable manner by our case studies, it is conceptually different from employee voice. In particular, employee engagement encompasses other psychological concepts such as organisational commitment and work motivation.

Improved communication and buy-in

Employee voice was seen by some respondents as synonymous with improved communication. Senior managers often talked about the need for the organisation to improve communication, to inform staff about organisational changes, and to aid understanding, thus aiding commitment and productivity.

This type of communication was often described in ways that were one-way, top-down, focusing on helping employees know what was going on. While some discussed two-way communication, this was often presented as employees 'having a say' to feel included, rather than to influence strategy or change practice:

> ***It's the employees being able to say what they want to say... They've just got to have the ability to be heard and [say] how they feel. We should be understanding how they feel and how they want things to be and listening to them rather than just dictating as a business.***

Improved communication was often presented as either a way of getting buy-in for changes managers wanted to make or to create feelings of involvement ('pseudo participation' in Pateman's terms). It was rarely about communication that might lead to a significant change in organisational practice (partial or full participation).

Eliciting feedback

Two-way communication was discussed when managers attempted to elicit feedback on ideas and initiatives that they were developing. They discussed this as an opportunity to understand what was and wasn't working within the organisation:

> ***We'd be getting feedback on what's working well, what's not working well. What could we do in terms of improving working conditions? What could we do in terms of improving the work–life balance? What could we be doing in terms of engaging with the local community and the wider community? And overall making it a more enjoyable and better place to work and an enjoyable experience while still satisfying what the customer needs.***

However, this form of voice was often framed as a way for managers to understand employees' views to inform how their initiatives might 'land', rather than as a dialogue where employees could shape the agenda or directly inform decision-making. Employees gave examples where employee voice forums provided a place for staff to have a say in how things were run, but the primary objective was to gain feedback rather than engage in meaningful dialogue.

Moral case

Some stakeholders claimed that improving employee voice was 'the right thing to do', presenting it as a sense of moral duty. They argued that to create meaningful and enjoyable workplaces, it was important to have an environment where people can speak up, express themselves and raise concerns without blame:

> ***It's respectful, it's the right thing to do. It's not just about what benefits employee voice can bring towards us as a business, but its reputation as well as an employer. We don't want to be seen as somebody who doesn't listen. We don't want to be seen as somebody who just brings people in on a conveyor belt and out.***

This connected with employees' personal values and the type of workplace they wanted to be a part of. This moral perspective also linked to wider employee expectations about the type of organisation they wanted to work for – somewhere that put people at the front and centre and is inclusive and engaging.

At the CIPD, we believe giving employees voice and the ability to shape their working lives is a key dimension of good work, as highlighted by our Good Work Index. Additionally, valuing people is a core behaviour of the CIPD's New Profession Map, which highlights the importance of taking a people-centred approach to professional practice, ensuring employees have meaningful voice on work-related matters.

Legal/normative case

The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code obliges organisations' board members to be exposed to concerns, issues and ideas from the workforce and to consider how these issues relate to their company culture and strategy. For this purpose, the Code states at least one from the following options should be used:

- a director appointed from the workforce
- a formal workforce advisory panel
- a designated non-executive director.

Only a few interviewees used this case as the logic behind employee voice, but interestingly, those that did occupied finance or CEO roles. Additionally, the Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) Regulations were amended in 2020, lowering the threshold of employees needed to trigger a formal request to set up ICE arrangements.[12]

Combining the business and moral case to embed voice in the organisation

Combining the business and moral case for voice is likely to increase buy-in from the largest number of decision-makers, potentially pushing employee voice up the agenda to a critical position.

The business case is primarily based on a consequentialist argument – that employee voice is justified because of the potential outcomes, that is, reduced turnover and increased innovation. However, this thinking only justifies employee voice when it contributes to the achievement of wider business goals. If staff retention is no longer a significant business goal, the justification for employee voice could be reduced. Consequently employee voice is vulnerable to (often short-term) claims about the outcomes that it can produce for the organisation and risks being dropped if it is not achieving these outcomes or if other, seemingly more pressing, organisation goals arise.

In contrast, the moral justification is based on what is called deontological perspective, the assumption that it is 'the right thing to do' regardless of the outcomes. The strength of this approach is that even if employee voice does not immediately produce the desired outcomes, organisations will persist. To make the case within organisations, key stakeholders drew on *both* arguments – that it produces good consequences *and* that it is the right thing to do. Combining these two arguments strengthens the case more than just relying on one perspective.[13]

Reflection questions

- What organisational goals are your business trying to achieve with employee voice?
- When you are making the case for employee voice, what people strategy ideas do you draw on? For example, could you draw on the 2018 UK Corporate Governance Code, particularly when talking to CFOs or CEOs?
- When presenting the case for voice, do you use the consequentialist arguments (it will produce good outcomes) and/or deontological (it is the right thing to do) or both?

5 Putting employee voice on the agenda

One of the central questions faced by those seeking to develop employee voice is how to get the support that can lead to change. This section highlights how some organisations face the challenges of achieving buy-in across the company, taking into consideration those at the board level, senior management, line managers and front-line employees.

Importance of senior management buy-in

Most interviewees, particularly people professionals, saw senior management commitment as vital in shaping the success of any intervention. Not only is senior management support vital, but it is particularly important when results do not immediately materialise:

> ***You need a lot of support from your leaders in the organisations, not just people saying that they support it but genuinely putting action behind words… you can't say it is important and then when you talk about your priorities as a business it falls by the wayside.***

Boards often play an important role in being able to support the environment for employee voice to flourish. A few of our case study organisations had recently had a change in senior leadership that produced an opportunity to put employee voice on the agenda:

> ***We ended up going nowhere because there wasn't an advocate at the top. Whereas now, there is an advocate at the top who is pushing things through... I suppose it's kind of just getting that recognition really that actually everyone is as important as each other.***

Gaining buy-in

Given the importance that most of our stakeholders attached to senior management involvement, getting their buy-in was essential. For our case study organisations, the interest in employee voice often arose out of a combination of issues, including:

- leadership change towards being more people-focused than finance-driven
- organisational restructuring
- concern about 'third parties' like unions becoming involved in the business
- concern about retention rates, turnover, staff satisfaction surveys producing negative results.

This combination of factors often provided an opportunity for employee voice. Within our case study organisations, this mainly occurred in two ways. Either senior leaders explicitly wanted to shift the culture in ways that included more employee voice, or people professionals or communications practitioners saw changes in leadership as an opportunity to prioritise employee voice initiatives as part of wider transformations in the organisation.

Visibility of leadership

> ***The thing that comes out on the survey [most frequently] is lack of visibility of leaders. And understanding our strategy is [something] that people wanted us to be better at. So over the last few months we now video our quarterly events, where all the managers get together and share those.***

In some case study organisations, employees said they thought senior managers were not visible and perceived as out of touch with the work happening on the ground.

In turn, employees felt they were not listened to, and even if they made suggestions to their managers, it would not reach the levels where decisions are made.

Reflection questions

- What opportunities exist within your organisation to put voice on the agenda – for example, a change in leadership, strategic priorities, and so on?
- How do you appeal to the different interests and strategic goals of the board – that is, CEO, CFO, and so on?

6 Meanings and expectations for employee voice

Even for those organisations that were highly committed to developing employee voice, there was less agreement about what employee voice means. In this report we draw on Dromey's definition of employee voice, seeing it as *'the ability of employees to express their views, opinions, concerns and suggestions, and for these efforts to influence decisions at work'*.[14] This research considers two broad focuses of employee voice:

- **individual voice:** refers to the scope for self-expression at work, reflecting whether people feel recognised and valued as human beings
- **organisational voice:** represents employees' efforts to help the organisation to perform better (for example, through sharing ideas).

Individual voice

In our case study organisations, the concerns that employees raised individually and in forums focused mainly on everyday practical issues, for example, improvements to the physical workspace.

The prevalence of these everyday concerns could be viewed through two contradictory perspectives. On the one hand, it highlights the importance of seemingly mundane everyday issues to those affected. As the COVID-19 crisis has revealed, everyday issues like PPE and toilet paper might be thought of as trivial, particularly by senior managers who are not involved in the day-to-day work, but for those directly involved they are seen as important. One senior manager described these seemingly mundane issues as 'everyday maintenance work', which, left unaddressed, might cause dissatisfaction and increased staff turnover.

Focusing on small-scale issues can be seen as a result of low expectations about what can be covered in employee voice. Within our case studies, employees rarely became actively involved in more strategic decisions, or directly influenced key issues, in ways that Dromey would recognise.[15]

Additionally, in most of our cases it appears that individual voice was more welcomed by organisational managers than organisational, improvement-focused changes. Often, it seems, line managers saw employees expressing everyday concerns as less threatening. This is because raising issues that would lead to long-term improvement often required significant change in organisational processes.

Silence

While individual voice and everyday concerns were welcomed by some stakeholders, significant issues, such as the working culture, pay and the impact of working practices on employees' wellbeing and work satisfaction, were often not raised. On some occasions, such issues were actively discouraged, with senior managers and people practitioners choosing to focus on what they saw as more positive discussions.

This raises larger questions around the depth and expectations that employees and senior managers have for employee voice. Keeping controversial issues off the agenda is an example of what Stephen Lukes calls *'behind the scenes agenda setting'*.[16] By keeping certain topics off the agenda (such as pay) or not explicitly seeking to elicit topics which might be seen as taboo (that is, bullying managers), certain topics are silenced.

Hickland and colleagues call this employer silencing, where managers *'prevent dialogue with the workforce on issues that encompass employment contract matters, job prospects, work organisation, and the firm's economic circumstances'*.[17] Zerubavel draws on the well-known metaphor of the 'elephant in the room' to describe this type of silencing as a situation *'whereby a group of people tacitly agree to outwardly ignore something of which they are all personally aware'*.[18] It is a form of wilful blindness, where groups collectively avoid discussing difficult issues.[19]

In phase one we explored the role of HR practices in alleviating employee silence, suggesting that this is the case where such practices foster employees' psychological safety, a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.[20]

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Organisational voice

Organisational voice, in contrast, is about improving the organisation. While the academic literature often focuses on this improvement voice as the key driver for employee voice, within our case study organisations, few employees felt as compelled by the organisation to provide improvement-focused voice (see **Suggestion schemes** below). However, when they did have opportunities to contribute improvement-focused ideas, these channels were often so popular that many of the organisations were overwhelmed with the quantity of suggestions.

Within our case study organisations, improvement forms of voice took on three broad categories:

- **Improve processes or mechanisms to address frustrations:** here, employees provide suggestions to enable them to do their job more effectively. For instance, employees highlighted that the tools for their job were inadequate or did not work properly, and this was impacting their capacity to hit their key performance indicators (KPIs). Similarly, they sought to change processes that were leading to mistakes that were costly to the organisation and stressful for the individual. Sometimes employees reported that these types of improvement-focused suggestions were dismissed, leaving them feeling unheard, belittled and frustrated: *'somebody has tried to flag issues and ask for help and they've been told to carry on regardless.'*
- **Unsolicited improvement-focused ideas:** this is where employees suggested improvement ideas unprompted by the organisation. For example, a new graduate employee shared ideas about how to make his organisation more sustainable.
- **Implementation of ideas and decision-making:** while employee ideas and suggestions were gathered, implementing innovative ideas was often more challenging. Perhaps best described as a partial form of participation,[21] the process of soliciting ideas without actively implementing them could cause frustration, hence the best cases would attempt both.

7 Eliciting organisational voice

Most of our case study organisations had mechanisms for employees to put forward suggestions for organisational improvement. Employees suggestions could lead to some interesting ideas emerging, yet across our case study organisations most employees felt their knowledge and experience was not fully utilised. There were relatively few examples where managers actively elicited the views of employees; indeed, in some cases employees felt they were actively discouraged from putting forward ideas.

Where organisations successfully facilitated organisational voice, employees felt able to raise concerns to line managers and knew action would be taken. For example, the airline logistics company introduced Kaizen[22] meetings, an approach that is used by organisations when improving processes, learning from previous mistakes, or talking through the suggestions of team members. In one meeting, managers flagged that their KPI was low, which encouraged practical and constructive problem-solving from the team:

> ***Going through all the Kaizen tools… we all discuss it [the suggestion from a team member], so we have a brainstorming activity… so every single member will be there… tools down, bring them all around if capacity allows… and then we'll go through it round the whole team… could be an hour, could be two. It gives everyone a chance to have their voice.***

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An important point to note here is the power of line managers as gatekeepers for organisational voice and the resulting outcomes. In the example above, a line manager actively sought employee suggestions and showed a clear desire to use organisational voice to problem-solve and improve work practices to achieve a strategic goal. Without this level of engagement and facilitation from line managers, it is possible that employees may have remained silent and operational issues left unresolved. For more details, see **Line management relationship** below.

A key question that most of the case study organisations juggled with was how much they should expect employees will want to speak up about their work. Many of the case study organisations had a large group of employees who were in quite operational roles, where few employees appeared to want to speak up:

> ***We've got the population in Depot probably say maybe 60%, 70% aren't that fussed about it. Definitely a few people that want to be involved.***

Many of the employees we interviewed did express views that they wanted to go to work, keep their heads down, focus on tasks and then go home, rather than engaging in wider involvement. However, many had tried to speak up about everyday issues, such as access to scanners, working WiFi or other operational parts of their task, but in some cases felt thwarted and thus not able to use their voice effectively. Based on their experiences of raising their voice on these everyday issues, some indicated it made them less likely to want to speak out.

Employee voice and decision-making

When we asked our interviewees what employee voice meant to them, most interviewees referred to it as improving communication or engagement – few discussed employees directly influencing decisions. Some employees appeared to have higher expectations about what their jobs could entail, particularly those who were younger and more educated. This, however, had the potential to induce frustration where they were not able to share their views or to influence working practices.

Returning to our definition of employee voice as a key to influence decision-making,[23] it is notable that while many of the organisations sought to encourage communication (often one-way, with some two-way communication), there was significantly less focus on the second part of the definition, that of influencing decisions at work.

Reflection questions

- How does your organisation approach individual and organisational voice?
- Are you using knowledge exchange across your workforce by capturing employee ideas and suggestions – how can your organisation capitalise on this knowledge?
- How does your organisation create a culture where employees are encouraged to feel safe and confident sharing their ideas and suggestions to improve organisational and individual outcomes?

What does employee voice mean?

As has been alluded to so far, while there was often a consensus on wanting to improve employee voice, there was a lack of agreement about the actual meaning of employee voice. Lots of different, parallel ideas, such as engagement, communication, participation and sometimes different channels for voice such as employee forums, were evoked in the

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definitions that people gave to describe employee voice. The CIPD's *Alternative forms of workplace voice* paper highlights several perspectives on voice based on previous literature.

One way of explaining this difference in how people interpreted employee voice is that the term itself is flexible, meaning many different things to different people and allowing them to use it for different purposes. Although most people we interviewed said that they wanted employee voice, they were not always as clear as to what it was or why they wanted it.

In this sense, the lack of agreement on what employee voice means is a strength, in that it provides a phrase that everyone thinks that they agree with and like. Employee voice as a term is also non-threatening, rather than using terms like power relations, which might be seen as more contestable. Often the phrase 'employee voice' was used by our interviewees in contrast to unions, which were seen as more aggressive in nature, while employee voice was seen as an employer-friendly way of engaging without perceived negative side effects. Having said that, employee voice should not be seen as an alternative to unions, which can be a valuable representative channel for voice within some organisations. It is important to highlight that we would recommend people professionals and voice champions develop a clear understanding of what voice means within the context of their organisation and communicate this alongside voice initiatives.

Reflection questions

- What does employee voice mean in your organisation?
- What do *you* understand by the term employee voice?
- What assumptions do you hold about employee voice and are they the same as other people in your organisation?
- What can you do to create a larger vision of employee voice?

8 Implementing employee voice channels

Creating, developing and growing the right channels for voice was a key consideration for most of our case study organisations. Organisations placed a lot of consideration into how these tools could be used and engaged with, what worked and how they could be improved. This section focuses on the channels for voice, structured in line with the results from our first report. It is worth reiterating that this research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has introduced quite significant changes in working practices for many organisations, particularly with the rise of digital forms of communication. As such, it is likely that many of the channels that were in their infancy during the research period may have accelerated significantly since. Similarly, some of the more collective channels (such as employee forums), while important, feature lower in this list because they are mirroring the order of the survey from phase one.

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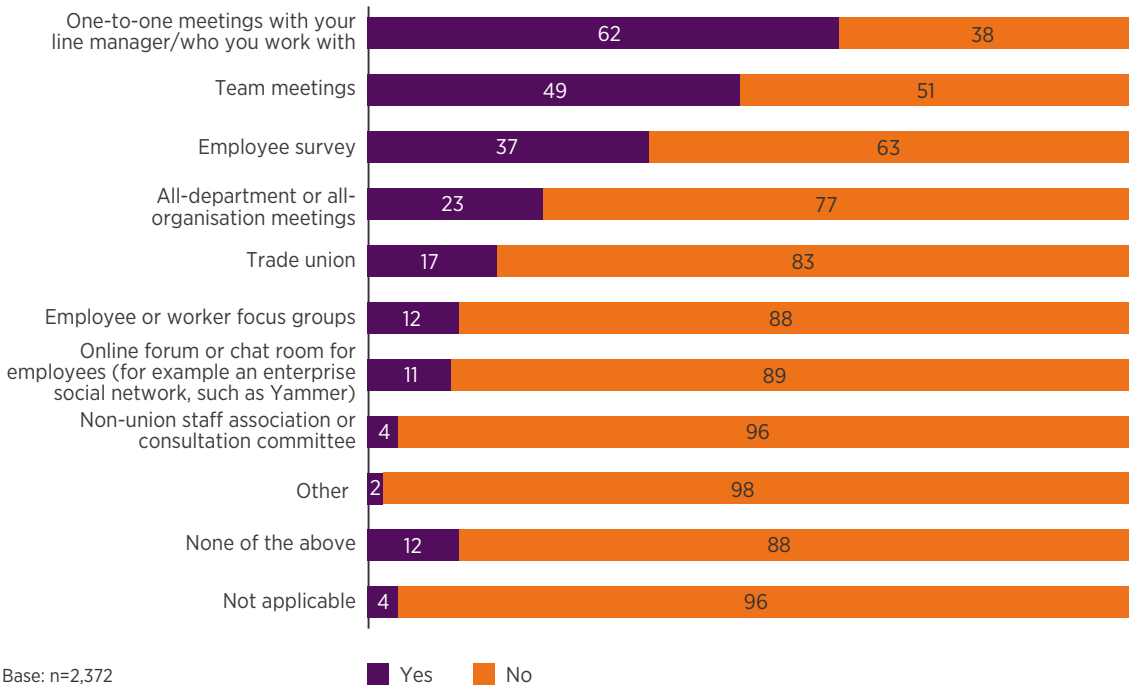
Figure 1: Forms of voice experienced in the workplace (%)



Base: n=2,372

Source: Shipton et al (2019).[24]

Line management relationship

Summary

- Employees highlight several key management and leadership characteristics that encourage voice: accessibility, creating a psychologically safe and trustworthy team environment and building strong employee–manager relationships.
- Building good employee–manager relationships requires more than a series of initiatives and is fundamental for employee voice.
- To improve employee–manager relationships, case study organisations used three broad strategies: focusing on promoting through people management skills, line manager training and development, and adjusting KPIs to consider the people side of management as a core part of their performance review.

Being able to speak to one's line manager was seen in phase one as the central way for employees to express their voice, with 62% of respondents saying it was a main channel they used.[25] We know from past research that line managers are important in voice.[26] This echoes wider research where employees have far more of their interactions with their immediate line managers[27] than with senior leaders. Line managers set the tone, shape the patterns of interaction with staff,[28] and therefore employees' perception of employee voice[29] is shaped by their expectations of the likely reaction of line managers and higher-level managers in turn. Key roles for line managers include upward problem-solving, communicating and translating organisational initiatives, and providing the link between the strategic direction of the organisation and the employees.

Managing through the line

Employees described several important characteristics of good line management that encourage voice:

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- **accessibility and visibility:** checking in with the team, building relationships, being available and approachable, including when staff work remotely
- **creating an environment of trust:** developing psychological safety and a culture where people can speak up without fear of repercussions
- **creating bonds:** some of the employees described those line managers that they could speak up to as ones that they had a bond with. Sometimes these were not their direct line manager, but someone that they had built a relationship with and with whom they felt safe.

Many of our case study organisations recognised that the line management relationship varied considerably, with examples of good practice, but also specific line managers or departments that were less effective, particularly in the industries that traditionally had a 'command and control' culture. Some organisations did, however, seek to formalise line management relationships by setting up mechanisms that shape these interactions, including:

- The fast-food restaurant has 'how are you doing' conversations with hourly-paid employees. These are described as an open conversation with employees designed to give space for honesty and for sharing their plans. It is about *'how things are going in the restaurant, but there's also what they'd call a one-to-one, that's more about them personally'*.
- NMCN provides training for line managers on how to improve their communication, particularly trying to shift the culture from command-and-control towards one that seeks to elicit voice.
- The airline logistics company has run what they call 'pilot and co-pilot sessions', where the co-pilots were lower management who were progressing to the next layer of management. They also run workshops around values and what it means to be a manager in practice to help develop future leaders.
- NHS Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust is moving towards a 'Just Culture' that gives staff an opportunity to learn rather than blame when mistakes are made. Within this there is a recognition that staff have to make risk-based decisions under pressure and, sometimes, consulting with line managers over the right thing to do is not always an option. Just Culture aims to give staff the autonomy to take risks with the overall aim of improving patient safety.

The line manager relationship is more than a series of initiatives. At its core is the way that the line manager builds a relationship with the employee to elicit voice. This concept becomes evident when individuals rely upon the different initiatives as their main source of voice expression, instead of through their line manager:

> ***[The voice initiatives are] a crutch until people feel it's okay to have that conversation with their manager or anybody they want to because we should all just be talking about this stuff.***

Reflection questions

- How much attention does your organisation pay to the line management relationship as a channel of voice?
- What mechanisms do you put in place to create good line management that encourages employee voice?
- How much attention do you pay to online management in comparison with other voice channels?

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Improving line manager–employee relationships

Line managers play a fundamental role towards implementing people and HR policies, therefore organisations should carefully consider how people managers are selected, managed and developed. The CIPD has a hub of resources to support line managers to develop their people management capability.

To build line manager relationships with employees, the case study organisations had three broad strategies: promotion based on people management rather than technical skills; training and development; and changing focus of KPIs (towards a more holistic, people-focused approach).

Promotion based on people management rather than technical skills

In many of our case study organisations and the industries that they operate in, traditionally line managers were recruited and promoted based on technical rather than people management skills. This meant that not only are people with career ambitions more motivated to focus on their technical skills, but also when people are promoted to line management roles, they may be ill-equipped to deal with managing people, particularly with regard to creating an environment to elicit voice.

Some of the case study organisations have been reviewing their recruitment practices to look at how to recruit and promote for these people management skills and train selection committees on values-based recruitment. For example, the fast-food company is moving towards values-based recruitment by asking 'are you employing somebody with the right mindset, the right behaviours, the right values?' However, there is a recognition that this approach will take time before the benefits appear.

Reflection questions

- Does your organisation prioritise and reward good people management? Is this part of line managers' performance management focus – that is, having set objectives based on the 'people side' of their role?
- How important are people management skills in your organisation's recruitment and selection processes?
- What are the cultural practices within your industry and what types of learned behaviours might this create?

Training and development

In most of our case study organisations there was a recognition that few line managers had received any formal management training or development, in particular, on how to bring out employee voice. As one respondent described: *'What do you do when you suddenly are in charge of other people? It's like saying... here're ten more kids. Well, hang on, what do I do? What do I think about?'*

Reversing this long-standing, industry-wide, command-and-control approach towards collaborative management styles was a core challenge for many case study organisations. These organisations are seeking to shape the values and behaviours of existing staff, through training and conversations, to get them to think about the behaviours that they exhibit with regard to employee voice. One of the challenges that some of the organisations feel is that this line management relationship becomes shaped, or even infected, by the wider culture of the organisation and the industry that they work in. Line managers often learn through the way that they have been managed and this shapes their own experiences. Many case study organisations recognise that they need to invest in this training and development:

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I recognise they are the difficult middle... given instructions top–down and they have been given requests bottom–up... I don't think we've equipped our managers to be successful in handling those pressures.

Reflection questions

- What training do you provide line managers and those progressing to become future line managers?
- What attitudes and assumptions might they have picked up about how to manage voice from other managers and through industry norms?
- How much do you prepare line managers for the people side of their role?
- What are the implications of investing in training and development for employee voice?

Balancing people, KPIs and voice

Line managers in operational roles, such as warehouses and construction sites, often faced challenging and relentless KPIs, deadlines and tasks, with significantly less emphasis on staff satisfaction and voice. Many of the organisations worked in fast-paced environments that had challenging targets, creating an environment where people felt discouraged from speaking up.

Many of our interviewees stated that the focus on KPIs creates command-and-control styles of management and can give employees the perception that they don't have time to speak up, even if they wanted to: *'They haven't got time to be a flowery, nice manager. They need to get things done.'*

To respond to these issues, many of our case study organisations are seeking to shift the culture away from focusing solely on narrow targets towards a more holistic approach where the line managers have to consider the people element as part of their performance review. However, some were concerned that this shift in wider focus from KPIs to employees would just create an additional burden on line managers to still hit their KPIs and have to improve employee voice:

My job is to get the job done safely. Get it done on time. Get it done on the budget and get it done on specification. If I've done those four things, I've done my job. Now you want me to make people feel good as well?!

Reflection questions

- Do your line managers' targets include measures of employee voice and staff satisfaction?
- Is there sufficient time and space in their workload to enable employee voice?
- Do line managers see it as part of their job to facilitate employee voice?

Team meetings

Summary

- The style and structure of team meetings varied considerably across organisations, impacting on the degree of elicited voice. Some key considerations include: how meetings were led (for example, the input and capabilities of managers to create opportunities for employee voice); whether meetings were formalised/structured; and the focus of team meetings (for example, everyday issues versus tackling more substantial issues).
- Creating a trustworthy and safe environment where employees could speak up was important for team meetings, particularly to encourage less confident, marginalised and under-represented voices.

In the phase one research, 49% of respondents said that team meetings were a key channel of communication.[30] Most of our case study organisations had some form of team meeting, such as daily briefings or monthly meetings. Yet many also found them challenging and reported that, at times, particularly where there is an intensity of work, team meetings tend to become deprioritised.

Style of team meeting

Our case study organisations described a variety of team meeting types, from top–down, information briefings to two-way, problem-solving ones. Many of the team meetings were described as broadcast, emphasising downward communication, such as briefings, where the line manager presented, or even read out, the updates to a largely passive team. One of our case study organisations tried to introduce daily shift briefings. However, it became increasingly obvious that line managers ran these meetings in a very passive manner (for example, printing off the agenda and pinning it to a noticeboard), instead of, as intended, using the meeting to create an open dialogue with the team around the agenda items.

Others described meetings that were interactive and joint problem-solving, where the line managers were more explicit in creating opportunities for their employees to speak up with explicit structures to encourage listening. Many teams also met in ways that were more informal, focusing more on having an 'open door' approach to discussions and issues: *'We are quite a smallish team working together, it's very much [open] door. We have a conversation about what's going on. We didn't formalise it once a month, but it's very much open. Everybody's kind of involved with where we are.'*

While this approach is advantageous because of its 'always open' nature, it is only effective if the employees feel comfortable being able to raise issues as they arise, requiring trust.[31]

Creating the right structure

Most organisations left the team meeting structure to the individual line manager and therefore meeting structures varied considerably. However, some case study organisations were more prescriptive. Some organisations used tools from agile project management[32] or total quality management[33] to share ideas within the team:

- The airline logistics company uses Kaizens to work through challenges and ideas that have been raised by employees.
- NMCN are working on forms of collaborative planning, drawing on agile project management methodologies to help the employees work together.

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Yet, some organisations found employee resistance against doing things differently, particularly those who have been working in the industry for a long time:

> ***[Some of the long-serving employees might say] 'I've been doing this 30 years. I know how to build. I don't need everybody telling us to do all of this rubbish.' Yeah, but it's about communication. It's about getting their involvement, their commitment to what they've actually got to do today.***

Importance of team leaders' skills

According to our interviewees the quality of team meetings varied quite considerably and was largely dependent on the capabilities and attitude of the line manager. Some thought team leaders 'go through the motions', doing it for compliance reasons rather than seeking to engage: *'The more confident and more skilled facilitators are able to genuinely engage in a conversation, manage expectations. Those who are less skilled and less confident might literally go through a checklist.'*

During our interviews, team meetings received less attention than the other channels of voice and few organisations gave their line managers explicit direction and/or training on how to run these meetings. However, some organisations have been experimenting with doing meetings differently. For instance, Fircroft College has redesigned meetings in ways aimed at making them more interactive and participatory, using sociocratic meeting structures.[34]

Engaging meetings: finding ways to give people the confidence to speak up

While team meetings can be a powerful place for employees to express their views, they can also be one in which people can feel marginalised and even criticised to the extent that they fear speaking up.

A key challenge that some interviewees identified about team meetings was helping to get employees to speak up, as often people feel intimidated to speak up in a large meeting. Two of the key skills required to enable people to speak up included:

- **building trust:** developing a relationship where people feel safe to speak up, increasing psychological safety
- **developing new structures:** experimenting with different meeting formats so that employees do not have to talk in such large groups.

Creating spaces to help less confident employees to speak up was one strategy organisations used:

> ***We always book a meeting room for half an hour after the brief because generally… nobody wants to ask a question… we have had as an average two or three people come in asking questions all because we create an environment for them on a one-to-one basis. But what that's encouraged is now we are getting a few questions at the end of the brief… it's given the guys a level of confidence.***

Reflection questions

- How do your organisation and people managers consider the design of team meetings (whether face-to-face or virtual), particularly to make them more interactive and participatory?
- Do employees who facilitate team meetings get training and support to make them more effective?
- How do you adapt virtual meetings to have as much impact as possible when face-to-face meetings are not possible?

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Whole-organisation meetings

Whole-organisation meetings are another channel of voice that was identified in the phase one survey. For the smaller organisations, whole-staff meetings were opportunities for all the employees to come together in one room and discuss things collectively. The larger organisations ran these as conferences, generally for middle or senior managers. For example, NMCN runs recorded video conferences to update everyone about what is going on, but also a senior leaders' conference for middle management to engage in the wider strategy of the organisation. Generally, these whole-organisation meetings presented limited scope for individual voice, although the most interesting examples would allow the sharing of perspectives across levels of the hierarchy by drawing on the insights of exemplar employees.

More recently, this is one of the voice channels that has become more difficult to uphold given the social distancing restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

Reflection questions

- Does your organisation run whole-organisation meetings, and if so, what is their purpose?
- What types of common messages do you try to create?
- What opportunities are there for interaction and sharing in these events?

Employee surveys

Summary

- Many of the case study organisations perceived employee surveys as a key mechanism for voice, allowing businesses to: gain an understanding of employee perspectives, build an annual picture of how employee attitudes are changing, benchmark against other organisations and develop actions of people management areas that need addressing.
- Practical and implementation issues of managing employee surveys was one of the key challenges noted by our case study organisations. Specifically, responding to employee feedback by creating and implementing actions following the survey and how to effectively manage and position the survey findings back to the workforce.

In the national survey, 37% of employees felt that employee surveys were an avenue for them to express their voice.[35] Employee engagement surveys are one of the most established and recognised channels for voice used in an organisation. They offer an annual chance for all employees across the organisation to provide an account of their experiences at work. Many interviewees responsible for the survey were concerned with the practical issues of designing the survey such as the timing, frequency, response rates, and logistics of conducting the survey. Interviewees reflected that running the survey at the wrong time might produce misleading (or negative) results. While such issues are important, the remainder of this section focuses on employees' survey experience and utilisation of the results by the organisation, particularly by HR and the board.

Importance of surveys

All case study organisations had an employee survey and most talked about them as a key employee voice channel. Some of the perceived strengths of the employee survey were:

- gaining insight into employees' perspectives
- benchmarking against other organisations
- benchmarking against previous years' surveys
- developing insights that shape the actions the organisation undertook around people management issues.

Understanding employee attitudes

Many organisations used the surveys to better understand employee attitudes, which would later shape subsequent actions that the organisations took. For instance, Fircroft College conducted a survey prior to their restructure where the results for *'trust in management was at 17% and engagement was 36%'*. These statistics became part of the discussion that shaped the decisions in favour of the restructure. Organisations also used employee survey results to benchmark themselves against similar organisations. More recently, organisations have relied on employee surveys to understand the changing attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it continues to impact on working lives.

Responding to feedback

Capturing opinions and attitudes was one aspect of using the employee survey, but many organisations highlighted the importance of taking actions in response to the feedback from employees. Survey fatigue was a key concern for organisations, particularly where organisations were slow to share survey results and take any actions. When organisations had longer turnover times for survey results being shared, employees would have less trust in the survey and this would reduce future response rates. Organisations also noted that a successful survey might produce significant insights and learning. However, taking actions and assigning responsibility based on the survey often became a key challenge:

> ***We end up with about 16,000 actions [from the survey] and we have to figure out which ones we're gonna focus on.***

Information overload: managing and presenting the data

One of the challenges with employee surveys is managing the vast quantities of data the survey produces. Many of the organisations were seeking to get more interpretive, qualitative feedback, which meant addressing the issue of data management and interpretation: *'We've started to give free text as an option on the survey, but then we'd never get time to read through it because there's so many comments. It's great, but we have to just scan read it.'*

To solve this, organisations were looking at the use of technology and including machine learning and sentiment analysis: *'Some organisations are seeking to use data analytics from machine learning as a way of analysing the free-text responses, using sentiment analysis.'*

Reflection questions

- Consider who is completing employee surveys and who fails to complete them. Are there some groups or teams that are consistently not completing them and do you have an understanding of why this may be?
- Is the turnaround of getting the results back to the staff an appropriate length of time? How do you frame the results and what message is that sending to the organisation?
- How much trust is there within the organisation of the process, the results and the decision-making processes that are involved following the staff survey?
- How transparent and accessible are the results of the survey? How much room do you give for departments and teams to see the results, to interpret them and develop action plans to address the issues that they raise?

Suggestion schemes

Summary

- Suggestion schemes were perceived as a way of gathering solutions and innovative ideas from front-line workers to address organisational issues and improve work practices. Most organisations used online platforms for suggestion schemes, raising the issue of accessibility for operational workers.
- Managing the quantity of ideas and prioritising ideas that best aligned with the business strategy and objectives were key challenges for organisations. Failure to manage this process effectively or to provide regular, clear feedback can lead to disengagement with the scheme or frustration from employees.

One of the key channels for voice that many of the organisations used were suggestion schemes. Some of them were rather basic whereas others used advanced forms of technology. These (online) suggestion schemes are an important tool because they can help employees to voice their innovative ideas.[36]

Developing solutions

Generally, the suggestion schemes were seen as solution-driven opportunities for employees to express innovative ideas based on very practical, everyday issues that they faced. It was recognised that managers do not have all the answers, but that the best ideas can come from those who are doing the job: *'I think there's a real opportunity to use the eyes and ears of 127,000 people.'* Suggestion schemes are therefore an example of organisational voice, getting ideas from the staff on how to improve things, particularly those who have ideas on organisational improvement. Some of them have built-in incentives for staff, where they get prizes or rewards, recognising the suggestion.

Most of the ideas that were put forward in these suggestion schemes were about **organisational voice**, focusing on improvement, particularly redesigning systems or procedures, for example, ideas around sustainability, improving operational efficiency, saving time and money, and developing solutions to improve health and safety. Some ideas also related to **individual voice**, including suggestions to improve employees' working lives (for example, flexible working suggestions).

Suggestion tools and engagement

Many of the organisations have electronic systems to enable people to submit their ideas. These include suggestions via email and suggestion scheme platforms (some of which enable organisations to pose questions for idea suggestions). Organisations also used more traditional tools, like suggestion boxes around the building. These were seen, particularly in warehouses, as more accessible to gather employee ideas.

Most organisations use suggestion schemes as a way of harvesting ideas, but they also use it as an engagement tool: *'Once a month we'll come up with a question. How could we improve speed of service... just make it more general and then listen to the feedback.'*

Managing suggestions

Once organisations have elicited the suggestions, the next challenge is to manage them. Some use a matrix system to rank the suggestions according to business priority. For others this goes to a central team, or staff are encouraged to vote on proposals. This is an important phase because suggestion schemes do not always lead to positive outcomes as they could limit the involvement and engagement of employees that submitted the ideas.[37]

While some organisations felt they wanted more suggestions, some also stated that they were overwhelmed with too many ideas. Those that struggled either did not give feedback or ended up closing the schemes:

> ***I bet if I open up [the suggestion box] now there would be 300 bright ideas in there and 295 have not been replied to. How demoralising is that for the people who say, 'All right, I had a bright idea. It's gone on there, but it hasn't been dealt with'?***

One of the impacts of this is that trust between employees and managers can decrease when the organisation does not have enough resources to cope with the suggestions:

> ***People are putting their ideas on, but they feel like they're being ignored now so people get frustrated, because they've got some really good ideas but they're not being listened to.***

Some of our case study organisations are exploring how technology can help manage the volume of submissions. Importantly, they are also looking at ways to give feedback quickly and effectively to those who submitted ideas, to encourage them that doing so was worthwhile.

Reflection questions

- How does your organisation ensure that suggestion schemes are accessible to all employees?
- How would you manage a large number of suggestions – what processes are in place to manage the volume of the ideas?
- How would you give feedback to those who submit suggestions? What are the turnover times and how will you communicate this feedback to people?
- What are the expectations for suggested ideas? Do they need to be fully formed to solve the whole problem identified or can you make use of ideas that need further development?
- Do employees have the time and ability to leave suggestions? For example, do front-line workers in operational roles and hourly paid roles have the ability to submit a suggestion?

Intranets and online platforms

Summary

- Online platforms provide a space for two-way dialogue between organisation and employees, as well as between employees. Given that many organisations are working more remotely, it's likely that such platforms are more heavily relied upon as a primary communication tool since our initial research with organisations. For example, since the pandemic, more employees are working from home than ever before. This has huge implications for how technology is deployed and its effects on employee voice.
- Using online platforms for voice has some challenges, particularly the issue of accessibility for some employee groups across the workforce and the dilution of key messages as a result of competing communications.

Whereas small organisations largely rely on face-to-face communication, most of our larger case study organisations were developing online platforms to communicate with employees at scale and find ways for employees across the company to connect with each other. While in the first phase of the research only 11% of employees felt that this was an important channel,[38] for our key stakeholders, particularly those with a responsibility for employee voice, such platforms were a principal focus of attention. Given the increased reliance on digital ways of working due to the pandemic, it would be expected that the use of such platforms would only increase.

Intranet

Most of the larger case study organisations have their own intranet. These platforms provide mechanisms for the organisations to communicate directly with employees about important updates and provide information about important HR tools, but they also try to develop more two-way communication and integrate social media into the communications, including blogs and social media to help employees feel connected with the company and each other. For instance, NMCN has an intranet dubbed 'iConnect':

> ***iConnect is really intuitive and we've got the communities on there so I really see it as modern, bright, vibrant, engaging, and people just communicating with each other, with managers, with directors, and having a real interactive workforce… they can have their own community and give themselves a voice.***

The central aim is to move away from one-way briefings, towards communication that is two-way and engaging. Some of the key goals for intranets include:

- **communication:** understanding what is going on within the business, a way of bringing everyone into the same space to deliver a consistent message in a consistent way
- **transparency and equality:** allowing people across the organisation to get equally informed about company updates no matter what role they have
- **connecting people:** creating a hub, particularly a way of dealing with the geographic distances, so that people can connect with one another
- **increasing engagement:** rather than having one-way communication, the intranet seeks to create opportunities for engagement and dialogue with the organisation and with other departments
- **sense of ownership:** increasing participation and sharing, where people feel part of a community.

Online tools to enable employee voice

Many of our case study organisations, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, were already experimenting with tools such as Yammer and Microsoft Teams to allow employees to connect with each other. Lockdown restrictions have now caused a significant rise in their usage across most workplaces, given that they are the primary way businesses communicate when permanently homeworking.

For senior managers and many of the people practitioners in our organisations, the primary goal of these tools was to:

- help employees keep up to date with the developments in the company in a way that was meaningful and interesting
- provide updates, key messages, information about the company
- share insights on current activities.

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Challenges of online platforms

While many of the organisations have invested in these online platforms, they have not always been adopted in ways that they had hoped: *'We've got lots of technology around us to facilitate communication, yet I would say it's taking a little bit of settling to understand what to use [and] when.'*

While online platforms worked well for some staff, there was a disparity between who had access to a computer throughout their day and whether staff wanted to use their personal phones for work-based communication and technologies: *'The [operational staff] do not use Yammer. They don't. You can download it on your phones, but they are personal phones and they're not going to want to download work things on personal phones.'*

Some organisations found that not all employees wanted to engage with the digital platforms, with some preferring more traditional forms of communication:

> ***The guys who are weekly paid don't necessarily always check email, some of them haven't for a long time. The feedback that we got was that the monthly paid wanted [the magazine] on their mat [so they can] show the family, be proud of who they're working for.***

Others are concerned that these channels of communication create a lot of distracting noise. Key messages can be lost, and they can also reduce productivity, encouraging what Cal Newport calls surface work, rather than the more value-creating deep work.[39]

Reflection questions

- Who has easy access to these electronic platforms and who is excluded from them?
- What types of communication do they support?
- How are they mainly used – are they productive or do they lead to more distraction?

Employee voice forums

Summary

- All our case study organisations had an employee voice forum and they were perceived as an important channel for voice. Their primary purpose was to engage with employees and/or respond to potential threats and issues that could become detrimental to the business, if left unaddressed.
- The effectiveness of employee voice forums was an area of concern for organisations. Key considerations were: getting a representative participation; the focus and remit of such forums; raising awareness of the existence of voice forums; and the level of influence and decision-making power representatives of the forum should hold.

While in the phase one survey only 12% of respondents said that employee voice forums were an important form of voice,[40] within our case study organisations, particularly for HR practitioners and employee voice non-unionised forum representatives, they were an important, albeit challenging, avenue for employee voice:

> ***I think that a lot of organisations struggle to see how you can run an effective employee voice team. When I blog on LinkedIn, [and] talk about employee voice, I get inundated with people asking, 'how do you make it work?'***

All of our case study organisations had some form of employee voice forum, which people practitioners saw as a key channel of voice. For instance, one of the hospitals in the NHS Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust runs a staff forum every two months where employees raised issues in an environment without their managers present. Issues raised in this meeting are either dealt with immediately or are followed up after the meeting by the chair. The level of issues discussed ranges from having poor quality supervision in the workplace to issues about the on-site restaurant. To enable the employees to attend, line managers work on the front line during the meeting.

Some of these forums were developed out of works councils or were redesigned where previous forums were perceived as unsuccessful, while others were new initiatives. Forums had different purposes, ways of running, and levels of management engagement and remit, which impacted the resulting actions.

Why employee voice forums?

There were two primary reasons why organisations set up employee voice forums – either to increase engagement or to respond to perceived outside threats. Some respondents stated that the employee forums were a tool to increase engagement. Indeed, many called them employee engagement forums. Some set them up as a response to issues or perceived threats that the organisation faced, such as awareness of potential union involvement or retention issues: *'Obviously you've got these external threats and things around the employment markets and... a third party intervention as in union activity... it just catapulted it up to the top of the agenda.'*

These responses revealed that some organisations would rather develop an employee voice forum to reflect their specific needs (as seen by management) rather than rely on trade unions to represent the voice of employees, as suggested in one comment:

> ***We had employees who clearly had signed up to the union and saying that we were not being very fair [with] our working hours. [So our response] was challenging some of the employees directly, not in a confrontational way, but, 'tell us what it is that you think we're doing wrong and let's see if we can talk through to see where we are actually going and what the plan is.' ... We did a massive relaunch of the [forum].***

Agenda-setting and topics

The topics covered in the employee voice forums varied considerably. Some forums focused on very practical, everyday topics that concerned the employees, from issues like bike sheds, car parks, and toilet rolls through to more substantial concerns, such as potential redundancies, or strategic issues like changes in policy or practice. When these worked well, employees provided their perspective on changes that were proposed, enabling employees to have voice about the changes or the barriers that they faced.

In many of the forums, managers attended and actively managed the agenda. However, one of the hospitals in NHS Nottinghamshire Healthcare Trust we examined took the opposite approach, asking managers not to attend, ensuring confidentiality of all the staff and empowering staff to set the agenda. As a result, this forum has seen attendance rise tenfold.

Improving meeting productivity

A key concern was the effectiveness of employee voice forum meetings. Specifically some senior leaders and people practitioners were concerned that these meetings might end up as a place where employees raised issues in an unconstructive manner, or cover topics of little importance. In these situations, the organisations reconfigured the forums to make them more focused:

> ***I don't think they had an agenda. I think they just met every so often and just talked about whatever came to their heads, which was generally gripes. So my suggestion was that we cease that and then we start an employee voice group, and it has an agenda. It has a structure. It's got clear aims, and it's chaired by HR.***

Many of the case study organisations relaunched their employee forums to overcome these problems, with actions such as:

- **rebranding:** changing the name and giving the forum a relaunch
- **changing membership:** reflecting the types of people that they wanted on the forum
- **agenda-setting:** providing structure to make the meetings more productive
- **improve links back to management:** creating a management sponsor or line of communication back to the board.

Most of the case study organisations noted they still struggled with four areas:

- **representation:** getting employees from across the business to participate
- **agenda-setting:** creating an agenda that those participating felt was meaningful and worthwhile
- **communicating to employees:** many employees we spoke to were unaware of the forums' activities or even that they existed
- **decision-making powers:** often the remit and the extent to which the forum could feed into policy.

Selection, representation and attendance
Most of the case study organisations struggled to recruit members of the forum, particularly those in operational positions: *'We used to have a bit of a struggle getting ops reps... they're very time short, I think they see that "I've got to be on the shop floor because I've still got my KPIs to meet".'*

For operational staff, even talking to the forum members could be challenging as they often had limited time to engage: *'[Operational staff] weren't allowed to leave the shop floor because they'd got their deadlines and everything to achieve. They weren't allowed to spend half an hour and come and talk to us.'*

A work-around example was noted by our NHS organisation, who release front-line staff to attend employee forum meetings by getting senior managers to cover their work: *'So once in two months, I have staff open forums. What I do is that I ask all the ward managers and the senior leaders to cover the wards to leave the front-line staff to come for this forum.'* This method of prioritising voice in this way was not seen across other organisations, where the work almost always seemed to supersede employee voice.

Bridge between management and employees
Employee voice forum members often saw themselves as the link between management and employees, representing the needs and interests of employees and navigating the different interests between the organisational demands and employees' needs. Some also saw it as a way of connecting employees together to bring about a collective voice on issues employees cared about.

Others saw it as a consultation process between managers and employees, to sense-check and test ideas, to understand how employees might react: *'Before we make a significant change to the organisation, we would then consult with EEF [employee engagement forum] to say, how do you think this message is going to land with the people? And can you help us manage that message?'* Rather than influencing decisions, or as a form of participation,[41]

employees on the forum were more akin to translators, helping the managers understand how to communicate better with employees. This may include 'translating' management-style terms to ones that would be more easily understood by employees.

Transformative experience of the employee voice forums
Some members of employee voice forums stated participating in them had significant benefits for their personal confidence and career. Participating in the forums gave them a sense of confidence and enabled them to develop skills to articulate their views and represent others, build connections and networks throughout the organisation, and develop understandings of wider issues that the organisation faced. A number of employees described how they had personally changed through the process:

> ***Employee voice gave me a platform... I can't even put into words how much it's developed me and just made me believe in myself, but what I've been able to do for other people I feel like I have a really good relationship with a lot of staff. And I feel like a lot of staff trust me and allow me to be supportive in that capacity. That's massive.***

Reflection questions
- Who attends your employee voice forums and what barriers exist to those who cannot attend?
- Who sets the agenda?
- What power and discretion does the forum have? Is it representative of employees' views or controlled by management?

9 Transforming employee voice within organisations

While our interviewees often focused on the channels, the channels alone cannot create meaningful employee voice. We need to think about how channels are designed, used and experienced, and how they interact with the broader culture of the organisation. In this final section we consider how voice mechanisms are received by those working within the organisation. Specifically, we note several important considerations beyond voice channels alone:

- awareness and access to the channels
- leading change around employee voice
- transforming the expectations for employee voice.

Awareness and access to the channels

The first theme is the awareness and access to the channels. Most of the case study organisations had many voice channels. However, many employees, particularly operational staff but even middle managers, often seemed unclear about the names and purposes of the channels.

For instance, employee voice forum members we interviewed were huge advocates for them, yet many employees not involved in the forums were often unaware what the forums did, or even that they existed. A similar pattern could be seen with suggestion schemes or employee surveys.

A challenge for those directly involved in employee voice channels is not to assume that other people understand why these channels exist or what the benefits of them are, particularly in busy organisations where people have many competing demands for their attention.

Reflection questions

- How clearly known and understood are the voice channels that your organisation uses?
- How often do you gain feedback on these mechanisms to understand what people feel about them?
- What could be done to communicate them more clearly to everyone in the organisation?

Who has access to the channels?

Even for those who were aware of the channels, there were two key barriers that influenced access to them:

- **Digital divide:** There was a significant digital divide where many employees had no or very limited access to key digital resources, technology or online communications channels.
- **Geographical divide:** Where people were physically separated and dispersed, this shaped access to informal forms of communication and knowledge about voice channels.

Digital divide

Even before the pandemic, many of the case study organisations were seeking to digitise their communication. However, access to these tools varied considerably between those who were office-based with regular computer access, and operational staff, who frequently found it hard to access digital platforms. A consequence was that office staff often felt more connected with the organisation and able to participate in these channels than operational staff, causing an unintentional digital divide.

Such digital divides also meant well-intentioned initiatives can backfire. One organisation created an online reward system that allows employees to recognise each other's extra work. While office staff and operational staff both had access to the same system, it was significantly easier for office staff to give each other recognition, whereas operational staff had to take extra time to give the reward. This had the potential to impact their KPIs, meaning that they would either have to work harder or risk getting disciplined. This led to some operational staff feeling poorly treated:

> ***The office will raise an applause for just doing them a simple favour... It's kind of crazy... in the warehouse, you need to really, really go above and beyond to get an applause or appreciated properly.***

The digital divide demonstrates the importance of understanding how different groups might access the channels and what barriers they might experience.

Geographical divides

A second key barrier towards how channels were accessed were physical divides. Most case study organisations had communication challenges because people were split physically between offices, geographically across the country or between office and warehouse. This made formal and informal interactions more challenging.

Some organisations sought to tackle this by encouraging senior managers to be more visible by physically going to different sites. Doing this helped them to break down geographical and social divides:

> ***So, that, for me, is an example where somebody at a van driver level is coming up to the chief executive at 7:30am and saying to me, 'I'd really like one of these jackets.' We will get that sorted.***

However, it should be noted that physical presence alone does not reduce the power inequalities involved in such communication,[42] but it does open up the possibilities for interactions to occur. However, such possibilities might be more challenging during periods where social distancing is more prevalent, and organisations need to consider other ways of working.

Reflection questions

- To what extent are geographical divides shaping employee voice in your organisation?
- How present are senior leaders or HR professionals throughout the organisation?
- What opportunities do you have for informal interactions where people can raise concerns in a less pressurised setting?

Who designs the channels?

As has been mentioned, a recurring challenge for the case study organisations was that those in operational roles often did not access voice channels, due to practical barriers such as pressing KPIs, or limited access to the right equipment. Consequently, some employees in operational roles said the channels felt distant or irrelevant to them.

This raises a wider question of who designs employee voice channels. In most of the case study organisations, they were designed by HR or communications professionals, with little input from other professionals, particularly those in operational roles or geographically dispersed teams. Consequently, although often created with best intentions, the design did not take into consideration the lived experience of all employees and how they might interact and engage with these channels.

Reflection questions

- Who has been involved in the design of the employee voice mechanisms within your organisation?
- Can employee voice and employee engagement initiatives be co-designed with those who might be impacted by them?

Leading change around employee voice

The second major theme is the tensions faced by those championing employee voice within their organisations, namely:

- the tension between the channels that they have control over and those that would make a more substantial impact
- the tension between seeking to drive change and going too far ahead and leaving people behind.

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Focus on what you can control or on what will make an impact?
In most of our case study organisations, there was at least one person who was responsible for employee voice, either as part of their job description or within a project they led. During the interviews they often spoke at length around specific channels, such as surveys, forums, or intranet platforms, they were developing. Often this was more than a role: for many it was a real passion and interest, personally and professionally.

However, while they spoke extensively about these channels, it is notable they focused less on channels such as line manager relations and team meetings, which employees responding to the phase one survey considered were important. Why did they often focus on areas that employees considered less important? In analysing the interviews, there are three areas which could explain this discrepancy:

- **Focusing on areas that they can control:** The mechanisms that these interviewees discussed were ones that they had direct control or strong influence over, and thus could manage more effectively. The line management relationship and team meetings, for example, while more important are significantly more difficult to influence. They require behavioural and attitudinal changes on the part of line managers, while the voice mechanisms such as forums or surveys are within the purview of the HR/communications practitioner, hence something they can directly influence.
- **Focusing on what is feasible:** Many of the mechanisms that interviewees discussed focused on manageable outcomes, such as setting up an employee forum, rather than on more substantial outcomes such as organisation-wide cultural change.
- **Focusing on areas with clear definable outcomes:** Many of the mechanisms that interviewees discussed had clearly definable outcomes or metrics, such as the response rate for surveys, or meetings for focus groups.

Reflection questions
- Which voice channels/mechanisms do you focus on most in your work?
- Are these the most effective or the easiest to control/influence?
- Where might you have maximum impact?

Driving change versus leaving people behind
The second key challenge for those seeking to transform employee voice is how quickly they can bring about change. Some interviewees who were not connected with the design and implementation of employee voice channels felt an 'initiative overload'. This is where there are too many initiatives, making it difficult to know which mechanism to use, leaving employees (and some managers) overwhelmed and confused:

> ***We've had quite a few new initiatives fall down. People are bombarded with communications and information and, you know, a sense that if we're not careful, we could get to a point where people switch off, because they've got their day job to do.***

A key reason for initiative overload was not enough time being given for each initiative to work, often resulting in multiple initiatives being created. As Landau argues, there is *'no relationship between the number of voice mechanisms that exist and the propensity of employees to speak up at work'*.[43] A second reason for initiative overload was due to a significant focus on the channel rather than the experience of employee voice. Those responsible for voice acknowledged the danger of searching for a silver bullet, rather than changing the culture that facilitated employee voice:

> ***I think that's part of a challenge we've got, is there are lots of channels of how you can engage with the business, and maybe it's a bit confusing for people… you just need the mindset of the leaders and line managers to want to engage their people.***

A third reason for initiative overload was the desire to quickly bring about change. Many of those responsible for voice were passionate about improving employee voice, but this passion often meant their vision, understanding and reasoning for prioritising voice was far more progressed than other colleagues within the business. Often voice champions sought to rush ahead with new initiatives rather than embed them slowly over time within the organisation.

The final reason for initiative overload was the challenges that arose in transforming the culture. Many operated in a context where command-and-control is deeply rooted in the culture of the organisation and wider industry. This can take a long time to change:

> ***This is like turning a tank, the whole engagement and employee voice thing, because it's trained and ingrained. Your mentors have taught you this… 'Don't trust him' and 'Don't trust that' and 'The system's wrong'. That's been built up in people through generations.***

Those seeking to improve the quality of employee voice within their organisation, therefore, have a difficult balancing act to perform, seeking to push forward initiatives that support employee voice while simultaneously working within and trying not to be held back by this culture.

Reflection questions

- How does the culture within your organisation and wider industry impact employee voice?
- Consider the pace of voice initiatives. Are you able to take more of a lead to support the development of employee voice within your organisation?

Transforming the expectations for employee voice

The third challenge many of our case study organisations experienced was around the expectations for employee voice and what it can achieve. Many senior leaders in the case study organisations saw employee voice as little more than a tool to communicate to employees. Significantly less attention was placed on employees stating their views or influencing decision-making. This focus on top-down communication was partly a feature of how the channels were designed, but it also highlights the culture and expectations for employee voice.

Employee expectations

One aspect of this challenge was around the expectations that the organisations should have of employees. A tension some case study organisations experienced was around employees' expectations about speaking up.[44] On the one hand they wanted to create an environment that encouraged and supported people to speak up. On the other, there was a recognition that for many employees, they did not want to put in the additional discretionary effort that speaking up requires. Therefore they grappled with how much they should expect employees to speak up.

Two-way communication

Many of the case study organisations were seeking to develop more two-way communication, but recognised that it was challenging, particularly in industries that were traditionally dominated by command-and-control forms of management. Being able to transform this culture can take time and significant levels of support:

> ***It's hugely true that people don't feel that psychological safety to speak, the tide is turning… I have had people come to me and say… I've kept this quiet for four years. Can I tell you this? Which is a good, healthy start.***

Therefore, two-way communication requires more than the right channels, substantial changes in culture, trust, and psychological safety. Considerations of the wider culture and environment that supports employee voice need to be had.[45]

Using voice to influence decision-making

The third aspect was the extent to which employee voice was seen as a process through which employees can influence decision-making.[46] For most of the case study organisations, employee voice was welcomed to the extent that it chimed with or extended goals that the organisation already had (such as suggestion schemes), or more regularly as ways of listening to the needs of employees to reduce turnover. Even those practitioners who stated that they were highly committed to employee voice presented it in rather muted terms, such as communication. Few considered employee voice through the lens of being a fundamental democratic right,[47] or one that would begin to challenge power relations or decision-making processes within organisations.

Transforming employee voice is, at its core, about changing the way that people work and how they relate to each other, changing how people interact, to speak up and to really listen. Developing trust and psychological safety, particularly in organisations, or even in industries which have traditionally been quite hierarchical, requires considerable energy directed at creating relationships based on trust throughout the organisation:

> ***There's an attempt to be a better culture… People were saying, I've got an issue here and am I going to bury it and not talk to anybody, or am I actually going to go and raise it straight away? It will be uncomfortable, nobody likes making mistakes, we know, but if it's shared, it's out there, we can deal with it.***

Interviewees in one case study organisation actively sought to do this by focusing on their values in meetings. While this was challenging, they found that it gave more room for reflection and therefore opportunities to deepen voice.

Reflection questions

- Do the channels in your organisation support more one-way or two-way communication?
- Is there a genuine desire for two-way communication in your organisation?
- Are the prerequisites for two-way communication, that is, trust and psychological safety, in place within your organisation?

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10 Conclusion

The in-depth interviews with our case study organisations, all of whom were committed to enhancing employee voice, revealed that there is no one way that works for everyone. Indeed, different histories, structures, patterns of interaction and overall strategic goals dictate that voice takes a variety of forms. What we have learned, and what we hope the reader will take from this report, is that overall, employee voice serves two key purposes: first, to enhance and enrich employees' working lives, and second, to pave the way for effective and successful organisations by developing new ideas to allow organisations to adapt.

From our research, there are several principal considerations for people professionals that enable employee voice:

- **Engagement with senior management:** Consider how to gain buy-in from senior management and increase recognition of the importance of employee voice in achieving wider organisational strategies and goals. Understanding the various perspectives of senior management for employee voice can increase interest and adoption within the organisation
- **Understand the difference between individual and organisational voice:** Alongside this, it is also important to know the implications presented for voice channels as well as line manager capability to elicit voice.
- **Develop line management capability:** Support people managers to:
  - encourage employees to use their voice through available channels
  - develop strong, trusting manager–employee relationships across their teams.
- **Understand employees' experiences of using voice channels:** Explore how different employee groups experience voice channels, and some groups might inadvertently be excluded or marginalised by different channels.
- **Overcoming initiative overload and prioritise mechanisms offering greater impact:** Consider the balance between actively leading change around employee voice and going at the right pace for your organisation. Consider which initiatives and channels are most effective to maximise impact and improvement of employee voice.
- **Consider not just channels but the wider culture needed to encourage employee voice:** Focus on developing an organisational culture that promotes trust, where employees feel psychologically safe to speak up, put forward ideas and make suggestions. Ensure that a range of channels are in place, some of which should offer two-way communication to enable employee feedback and open communication.

In the current climate, faced with the backdrop of the pandemic and the UK's departure from the EU, these overall purposes seem more important than ever before. We hope that this report helps readers to strategically plan their own voice journey, whether that be as an individual seeking to be heard, or as a member of the management team looking at ways to strengthen voice channels and listen to the diverse and valuable voices within the workforce.

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12 Methodology

The cases cover a variety of sectors, including retail, construction and education, as well as organisations that have developed strong employee voice structures and those that have been working more recently on transforming them. The organisations were recruited through a mixture of the contacts that the research team and the CIPD have, and by organisations who approached the research team on the publication of the first report.

The case studies were conducted primarily by interviews, focusing on key stakeholders (managers, HR specialists, employee communications/engagement leaders, those heading training and development functions) as well as employees across levels of the hierarchy. In total, 71 interviews were conducted, predominantly face-to-face, but also through video-conferencing. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The team analysed the interviews through NVivo 12. Key themes from the literature were used as a framework to undertake the analysis, as well as reading and re-reading the interviews to look for emerging themes within and between the organisations.

We have sought to remain as true as possible to what people have told us in the interviews, although some quotes have been edited for brevity and clarity. Bearing in mind that our analysis is shaped by everyone we spoke to and what they wanted to say in a formal interview, we are not presenting this research as the ultimate 'truth' of these organisations. Rather, we aimed to capture the experiences of the organisations and to represent their experiences.

13 Endnotes

1 Shipton, H., King, D., Pautz, N. and Baczor, L. (2019) *Talking about voice: employees' experiences*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

2 See **Methodology** for details on the method of this research.

3 Shipton, H., King, D., Pautz, N. and Baczor, L. (2019) *Talking about voice: employees' experiences*. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

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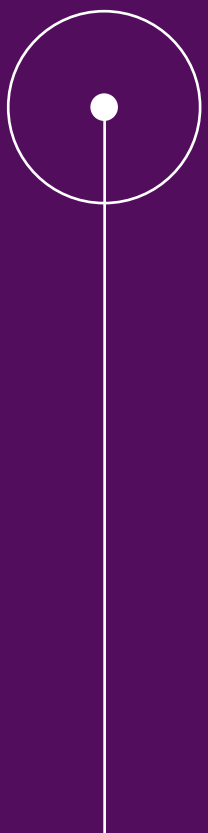

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