

# FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH: HOW PEOPLE TALK ABOUT VOICE AND SILENCE AT WORK

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## **Abstract**

The overall aim of this research was to address the core problem that organisations appear to make decisions based on incomplete information.

Although many organisations invite their staff to give voice, people may choose to remain silent at work and not voice their opinions, comments and suggestions.

This research tried to shed some light on this problem by asking how people talk about voice and silence at work and by investigating the conditions under which they speak out or keep quiet. This research project, which used Morrison's (2011) definition and model of employee voice as a conceptual framework, was conducted from a Critical Realist perspective and adopted a Mixed Methods approach in order to triangulate the data across the project.

Study One used Q Method to gather data from 80 working adults who completed an on-line survey by rank-ordering 50 statements about voice and silence at work. The data were analysed using Centroid Factor Analysis and the factors identified were then orthogonally rotated to produce 5 factors that, together, accounted for 48% of the common variance in respondents' viewpoints. These factors described the benefits of voice, the risks attached to speaking out, the problems of thinking differently, the value of sharing knowledge and the importance of having good ideas.

Study Two explored these factors further and used Thematic Analysis to interpret the data from interviews with 15 participants who worked at various levels for a UK trade union and professional body. This analysis produced 5 main themes, which described how key people and a climate of sensitivity affected voice, how voice moved around the organisation in unpredictable ways, how voice could be packaged to get it heard, how senior managers, long servers and

people with certain dispositions were heard more, and how being heard or unheard impacted on people's behaviour and, by inference, on the organisation as a whole.

The main implications of this research for work organisations and occupational psychologists are that the climate of the workplace and the systems and processes in place for voice could mean that certain types of people and certain sorts of messages are heard more readily than others. This could lead organisations to make decisions based on incomplete information and could lead to the disengagement of those people who are not heard. Future research is recommended into the influence of context and individual differences on voice, and the impact on people at work when their voice is not welcomed.

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**Mark Holloway**

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## **Preface**

This research aims to develop a better understanding of how people talk about voice and silence at work and the conditions under which they will speak out or keep quiet. Despite concerted efforts by organisations to hear the voices of their employees, either through participation or involvement initiatives, people may choose to remain silent at work and not to voice their opinions, comments and suggestions, nor to share their knowledge with colleagues. This means that organisations may be making important decisions based on incomplete information, because they are not hearing the ideas, opinions and suggestions of their workforce.

Empirical research suggests that managers have a critical role in voice at work. Managers who are approachable and open, who genuinely invite voice and who downplay status differences will encourage their staff to speak out, because they will feel safe in giving voice and will not think it a waste of time. There are also certain features of the workplace that will impact on voice behaviour.

Hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations with centralised decision-making will not easily hear the voice of their staff. A climate of silence may develop which might quickly spread around the workplace. Certain types of people are more likely to give voice than others. These include people who feel a strong attachment to the organisation, who experience a strong obligation for change and who report high (and low) levels of personal control at work.

For voice to be heard, it needs to be packaged in the right way. People should engage in moderate levels of voice, and this shouldn't be too challenging, critical or change-oriented. Voice has also been shown to have a positive impact on organisations and the individuals who work for them.

Research on voice and silence has been conducted from a predominantly positivist perspective, which is a problem because it assumes that voice is an entity, which, if observed and measured properly, can be predicted according to these research findings. It also makes possible certain types of research questions and not others, therefore those with an interest in voice are getting an incomplete view of it from the research.

The positivist perspective has also impacted on the methodology employed in empirical research in this field. Early research into voice and silence was, typically, laboratory based, which meant that, although carefully controlled, the findings lacked generalisability to real world settings. More recently, empirical research has moved into work organisations, although this field research is often subsequently validated by laboratory studies. Most field research has taken place in single organisations.

The current research thesis has attempted to address some of these problems by adopting a critical realist rather than a positivist perspective, by using working adults as the participants and by using a mixed methods approach across two studies, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions are asked of different groups in different ways. In this way it is hoped that new and fresh insights and perspectives on voice and silence will emerge.

**Chapter 1** is an introductory chapter, which briefly describes the aims of the research project, the background to the research and the researcher's epistemological position. It then goes on to outline details of the methodology employed and the setting in which the research took place along with the participants who took part, before concluding with a summary of the research question and the overall methodological approach that was used.

**Chapter 2** provides a full, critical account of the empirical research into voice and silence at work to date. It begins by defining voice and silence and describing a model of voice and silence that will be used as a template to organise the findings from the current research project. It goes on to look in detail at the research literature around the main components of this model, namely the antecedents of voice and silence, how voice can best be packaged and targeted, and what the implications of voice and silence are for people and organisations.

**Chapter 3** is a rationale for the chosen research methodology and discusses the research paradigm, the setting for the research and the sampling strategy that was employed. It then provides a rationale for the use of mixed methods and, within this, the use of Q Method and Thematic Analysis. It goes on to explain in detail how these methodologies were applied to the data across the two studies that comprised the current research project, before concluding by measuring the quality of the two studies against relevant and robust criteria.

**Chapter 4** describes the design, conduct and findings of the research that forms Study One of the current research project. It explains how Q Methodology was used to shape the study and to interpret the data that emerged. It explores in depth the five factors that were extracted from the data and attempts, where possible, to explain these factors with reference to the existing research literature.

**Chapter 5** is a full account of the qualitative study that forms Study Two of the current research project. It describes how Thematic Analysis was used to make sense of the data from the qualitative interviews. It goes on to describe five main themes that were drawn from the interview data, along with the sub-themes that clustered together to form these main themes. It uses verbatim quotes from the

interview transcripts to help illuminate and give meaning to the identified themes and attempts, where possible, to explain these themes with reference to the existing research literature.

**Chapter 6** triangulates the data from Study One and Study Two where possible, to discuss the findings from both studies and their bearing on the research question. It goes on to consider the strengths and limitations of the current research project before moving on to suggest questions for future research and implications for the practice of organisations and occupational psychologists.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Aims Of The Research**

The overall aim of this research was to address the core problem that organisations appear to make decisions based on incomplete information. Although many organisations invite their staff to give voice, evidence suggests that people choose to remain silent at work and not voice their opinions, comments and suggestions, nor share their knowledge with colleagues (Detert, Burris & Harrison, 2010; Detert & Edmonson, 2006; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin; 2003). Employee voice may be invited but it isn't necessarily welcomed or heard. The implications for organisations are that this could be detrimental to the quality of decisions made, could stifle innovation, could inhibit error detection and correction, and could compromise the organisation's ability to learn (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Bourgeois, 1985; Enz & Schweck, 1991; Nemeth & Wachter, 1983; March, 1991; Argyris, 1977).

The subsidiary issues that arise from this core problem are, therefore, that if organisations are not drawing on the full range of information they have at their disposal this has implications for them moving forward in terms of growth and survival, and if employees are rendered voiceless this has implications for their own health, wellbeing and satisfaction. In other words, failing to welcome and hear the voice of its staff could send the organisation down the wrong road in terms of production, core business, employee satisfaction, and other basic phenomena that make it successful.

When employees don't give voice, does it mean that they are not given a space to voice or do they choose to keep quiet? Why are they keeping their opinions to themselves as, surely, the last thing they want is for their organisation to suffer

in any way? What is going on in the organisational climate that makes an employee feel safer, in their longer-term career, not to give voice, when voicing might make the organisation function more effectively?

When organisations fail to welcome and hear the voice of their staff, does it result in them making bad decisions or are they making the right decisions and, therefore, choose not to tap into the full range of information at their disposal because it's too complex? If senior people are making important decisions against time pressure the last thing they may want is more information. Instead, they may consult with their employees by talking at them, then passing this off as consultation because the workforce at least knows what the organisation is doing.

The overall aim of the current research study is, therefore, to address this core problem by investigating why employee voice is not properly welcomed or heard, and what the implications are for organisations and the people who work for them.

## **1.2 Background To The Research**

The inspiration for the current research study came from working with a fellow occupational psychologist who had developed a software package to help organisations hear the views of their employees in a richer and more dynamic way than the traditional staff attitude survey could offer. By setting up an anonymised on-line chat room populated by a representative sample of employees who would be asked to exchange views on various issues of importance as and when they arose, organisations could tap in to how their staff were thinking and talking about important matters on an ongoing basis. This software package had been developed for market research with consumer

groups and was starting to make in-roads into work organisations, but the uptake was slow and the response was guarded, in spite of the package being offered free for a trial period. This led the researcher to question the extent to which work organisations truly wanted to hear what their staff were thinking and saying about matters of importance, and this, in turn, led to the current research.

The researcher conducted a systematic and thorough review of the extant empirical research literature on employee voice and silence and concluded that work to date in this area had been largely carried out from a positivist perspective, that it was mainly US research based in routine and low skill jobs, and that it was predominantly cross-sectional and quantitative in nature. This led him to develop a rationale for his research study, which is detailed in the next sub section.

### **1.3 Development Of A Research Rationale**

The main rationale for the way the current research study was designed is that it was intended to address a number of shortcomings and gaps in the empirical research literature to date. These shortcomings can be usefully categorised as issues with epistemology, methodology, location and participants.

#### **1.3.1 Epistemology**

Empirical research on voice to date has been conducted from a predominantly positivist perspective, which is a problem because it assumes that voice is an entity which, if observed and measured properly, can be predicted according to these research findings. It also makes possible certain types of research questions and not others, meaning that those with an interest in voice may be getting an incomplete view of it from the research. A critical realist perspective,

on the other hand (which this current thesis adopts), would assume voice is a real phenomenon but one that is experienced and interpreted by culture (organisational and national), political interests and the language we use. Bearing in mind the very personal nature of voice and silence, this perspective would appear to offer a richer interpretation of these phenomena but it hasn't been taken up in the research literature to date. The current study was intended to address this gap.

### **1.3.2 Methodology**

Empirical research on voice to date has been predominantly quantitative and cross-sectional in nature. Mixed methods research is relatively rare in employee voice (for notable exceptions see, for example, Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes & Wierba, 1997; Edmonson, 2003; Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin, 2013; McClean, Burris and Detert, 2013), and qualitative data, where used, are often subservient to quantitative data and subjected to sometimes rudimentary content and frequency analyses so that, ironically, the language people use to talk about voice may be lost.

The current research thesis is cross sectional in nature, as field research in organisations is rarely longitudinal, but the author has resisted the temptation to draw causal inferences from his findings. In addition the current study has adopted an authentic sequential mixed methods strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One, which used Q Method, informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, which used Semantic Inductive Thematic Analysis, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in different ways.



### **1.3.3 Location**

Most empirical research on employee voice has taken place in US work organisations, often with low skill, routinised and low status roles in industries with notoriously transient workforces. In Study One of the current research thesis, participants were drawn from a variety of organisations in the UK. In Study Two, participants all worked at various levels in a large UK trade union and professional body. This is a knowledge intensive work environment and an organisation where it was assumed that, because of their remit to listen to and represent their members, the issue of employee voice would be high on the organisational agenda.

Most empirical research on employee voice has taken place in single organisations, and Study Two of the current research thesis was no exception. This had benefits because it allowed the researcher to present an in-depth study of a particular setting and to control for a number of extraneous variables. It also recognised the impact of context on behaviour, although it is open to criticism, because of the difficulty in generalising findings beyond the host organisation. Put another way, however, it suggests that organisational context has an impact on voice behaviour and, therefore, was worthy of attention in its own right.

### **1.3.4 Participants**

All participants in the current research study were working adults. A good deal of research into employee voice has used students as participants (see, for example, Whiting, Podsakoff & Pierce, 2008; Grant, Gino & Hofmann, 2011; Fast, Burriss & Bartel, 2014), which could be problematic as they may not have had any direct experience of the tasks they were being asked to undertake, such as rating another person's performance. Like these students, however, voice was not

critical for the participants in the current research thesis. Although these participants seemed to want voice it was not critical for them to carry out their jobs unlike, for example, the nurses in the research by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008a), where good communication was important for patient safety, or the cardiac surgery team members in the research by Edmonson (2003), where good quality communications promoted quicker and more successful implementation of new cardiac surgery technology.

In summary, the researcher believes that the current research study is the first UK mixed methods study of employee voice and, as well as looking at the antecedents of voice, it has looked beyond this into how the message is packaged, who it is targeted at, and what difference, if any, voice makes to organisations and the people who work for them. These research questions will now be itemised in more detail in the next sub section.

#### **1.4 The Research Questions**

The main research question addressed by the current research project was "How do employees talk about voice and under what conditions will they give voice or remain silent?" Within this overall research question are a number of subsidiary questions that have been devised to address gaps in the extant research literature on employee voice and are located in the definition of employee voice proposed by Morrison (2011) as "the discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning". The main features of this definition of voice are that it is self-initiated and promotive behaviour designed to invite the organisation to do something differently or to cease current practice, and that it is focused on and targeted at one's immediate line manager, at another

manager or to one's coworkers. The author used this definition and the accompanying model of voice (see Chapter 2, p. 32 for full details) as a template around which to organise his research.

The subsidiary questions addressed by the quantitative section of the current research project study were drawn from gaps in the current literature and from the findings from the early interviews conducted in advance of Study One. The subsidiary questions addressed by the qualitative section of the current research project study were drawn from gaps in the current literature and from the findings from Study One. They were organised according to the main features of the model of voice presented by Morrison (2011):

"What impact does organisational context and climate have on employee voice?"

"What types of people get heard more readily at work?"

"Is it safe to give voice at work and does it make any difference?"

"Does the way voice is packaged make a difference to whether it is heard?"

"What is the impact on organisations when voice is welcomed or not welcomed?"

"What does it feel like when voice is welcomed or not welcomed and how do these feelings influence employee behaviour?"

### **1.5 A Methodological Approach To The Research**

The current research project adopted a Mixed Methods approach, utilising a Sequential Explanatory Design where experiences of voice and silence at work were initially investigated through a pilot study involving semi-structured one-to-one interviews with 6 participants, the results of which formed the basis of the quantitative study, which asked participants to rank order a set of statements on voice and silence at work according to how much importance each statement had for them. The patterns of responses from this pilot study were

developed into a set of 50 Q Statements that were presented to 80 participants all of whom were adults working for UK organisations. Participants in the quantitative study were asked to declare certain biographical data, such as their gender, age, length of service and job type, as these were all issues that could be thought likely to influence their viewpoints in some way. PCQ software was used to run Q Sort Analysis on the quantitative data and employee voice factors were drawn out and labelled appropriately.

The factors that were identified and labelled by the Q Study were then combined with a range of questions that had yet to be properly answered by the extant empirical research literature. Together, these two sources formed a set of questions, which were asked in one-to-one semi-structured interviews with 15 volunteer participants who worked at various levels for a large trade union and professional body, which represents health professionals in the UK. This qualitative research formed Study Two of the current research project.

Q Method was selected as the preferred quantitative approach for Study One as it is particularly suited to looking at different representations of a construct, in this case voice and silence at work. The research in this area has tended to overlook individual perspectives in favour of more generic research, which has attempted to devise models and rules to help explain and predict voice and silence. Study One of the current research project, on the other hand, took a more idiographic approach to investigate participants' viewpoints about voice and silence. The use of Q Method meant that the researcher assumed an exploratory focus as, in Study One, he tried to discover and develop a deeper understanding of the issue, by asking participants to rank order a set of statements on voice and silence at work according to how much importance each statement had for them. The end result

was a more holistic data set that started to tell the story of where voice and silence came from, what they looked like, what functions they served for the individual and what impact they had on their relationship with their organisation. A full description of, and rationale for, the use of Q Method in the current study will be provided in Chapter 3.

Thematic Analysis was selected as the preferred qualitative approach because it looks at themes and patterns in what different people say about an issue and it looks at commonality and difference across participants. Thematic Analysis was also used in the pilot research for Study One, and its outputs fed directly into the creation of statements for the Q Survey. A full description of, and rationale for, the use of Thematic Analysis in Study One and Study Two of the current research project will be provided in Chapter 3.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will start by defining the term 'employee voice' and this definition will act as a guiding model for the research that is carried out for this current study. It will assert that voice and silence are opposite ends of the same continuum rather than separate constructs and it will focus primarily on voice, as this has received much more empirical attention than silence. It will then go on to examine the extent to which research has evidenced the ways in which people give voice or remain silent at work before considering the factors that influence a person's decision to speak up or keep quiet. This will provide detail on the extent to which people give voice and will offer some empirical evidence on the conditions under which people give voice or remain silent. This chapter will then go on to discuss how people can express themselves most effectively at work, as recent research has examined the nature of the message and the target for voice as important influences on whether a person will be heard or not. The chapter will conclude with an evaluation of the implications that voice and silence have for organisations and the people who work for them, because much has been made of the importance of voice but empirical research has only recently started to examine this.

In doing this, it is the author's intention to draw out an alternative narrative about the literature on voice and silence. This literature contains a number of untested propositions and unfounded assumptions, and there is a lack of clarity on how much or how little people at work engage in voice. As mentioned above, empirical data on the positive impact of voice on organisations and people are only just starting to emerge. Moreover, empirical research on voice has been

conducted from a predominantly positivist perspective, which is a problem because it assumes that voice is an entity which, if observed and measured properly, can be predicted according to these research findings. It also makes possible certain types of research questions and not others, therefore those with an interest in voice are getting an incomplete view of it from the research. A critical realist perspective, on the other hand (which this current thesis adopts), would assume voice is a real phenomenon but one that is experienced and interpreted by culture (organisational and national), political interests and the language we use. Bearing in mind the very personal nature of voice and silence, this perspective would appear to offer a richer interpretation of these phenomena but it hasn't been taken up in the research literature to date. The current study intends to address this gap.

Another potential difficulty with research into voice and silence is that most of it has been cross-sectional, which is problematic because it offers a snapshot of a phenomenon at a particular point in time and cannot demonstrate causation, only that two or more variables are related to each other in some way. The current study is also cross sectional in nature, as field research in organisations is rarely longitudinal, but the author has resisted the temptation to draw causal inferences from his findings. In addition, although some mixed methods research has been undertaken in this field, qualitative data, where they exist, have often been subjected to quite rudimentary content and frequency analyses, which is somewhat wasteful of the potential richness of such data. The current study adopted an authentic sequential mixed methods strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One, which used Q Methodology, informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, which used Thematic

Analysis, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions are asked of different groups in different ways. Finally, most empirical research projects have been US based and most have focused on the antecedents of voice, whereas the current study, to the author's best knowledge, has been the first UK mixed methods study of employee voice and, as well as looking at the antecedents of voice, it has looked beyond this into how the message is packaged, who it is targeted at, and what difference, if any, voice makes to organisations and the people who work for them.

## **2.2 What Is Employee Voice?**

Employee voice has been defined as "the discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning" (Morrison, 2011, p. 375). This definition, although reflecting a positivist perspective (which could be problematic for the reasons stated on the previous page) and containing untested propositions, has been chosen because it integrates a number of different but related conceptualisations of voice that have emerged in the literature and because it contains a number of important features that have been drawn from that literature (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008a; Van Dyne, Ang & Botero, 2003; Van Dyne & Le Pine, 1998). Conceptually, it describes voice as discretionary, 'extra-role' behaviour that is constructive and intended to bring about improvements, even though it may be challenging because it threatens the status quo, meaning that voice carries with it a degree of risk. It can also be conceptualised as a form of Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), which is helping behaviour beyond the requirements of the job role (Organ 1988), but one whose focus is challenge oriented rather than



affiliative in nature, such as altruistic and courteous behaviour. This suggests that voice is a quite different form of OCB from other manifestations, such as dependability, cooperation and teamwork and that, unlike these behaviours, it may not always be welcomed, precisely because it is challenging to those who receive it (usually line managers). This could result in the employee being silenced rather than choosing to remain silent (Fast, Burris & Bartel, 2014), and this has implications for power dynamics at work: an individual who chooses to remain silent holds on to a degree of power but an individual who is silenced has power taken away from them.

The main features of the chosen definition of voice are that it is self-initiated and promotive behaviour designed to invite the organisation to do something differently or to cease current practice, and that it is focused on and targeted at one's immediate line manager, at another manager or to one's coworkers.

Employee voice has close links with the related concept of employee silence.

There has been some debate as to whether voice and silence are distinct constructs or opposite ends of the same spectrum. Silence refers to the deliberate withholding of information from others (Johannesen, 1974). Morrison and Milliken (2000) examined the nature and antecedents of organisational silence, which they referred to as the widespread withholding of information, opinions or concerns by employees about work issues. They described silence as a choice to remain silent rather than mere absence of voice. This choice is determined, at least in part, by organisation-wide norms and a climate of silence, which leads employees to conclude that speaking out is not worth the effort and could, in some instances, be dangerous as it might attract retaliation.

In an attempt to understand the nature of employee silence rather than its antecedents, Van Dyne et al (2003) used three primary employee motives of disengagement, self-protection and other-orientation, and developed a conceptual framework that identified specific types of voice and silence behaviours. The disengaged employee is resigned to not being able to make a difference and, therefore, engages in acquiescent voice or silence. An example of acquiescent silence would be withholding ideas and opinions due to low feelings of self-efficacy to make a difference. The self-protective employee is fearful and feels at risk and, therefore, engages in defensive voice or silence. An example of defensive silence would be withholding information and omitting facts to protect oneself. The other-oriented employee feels cooperative and altruistic and, therefore, engages in pro-social voice or silence. An example of pro-social silence would be withholding confidential information to benefit the organisation and its members. Although this framework has intuitive appeal and seems valid enough on the surface, it has not been empirically tested and it is a somewhat reductionist attempt to categorise the complexities of silence into a quite narrow range of options. Reductionism is a problem here because, by simplifying complex behaviour into more basic constituents, the richness and complexity of the original behaviour may be minimised, obscured or distorted. In addition, the researchers are naming these behaviours as if they exist but they offer no evidence to support their existence. There is also nothing to suggest that this is an exhaustive framework or that people do not shift between and across these types of voice and silence, even within a single interaction.

Some theorists suggest that silence is a separate construct, where it is not always a conscious choice but may be an automatic response or a reflection of a state of

resignation (Brinsfield, Edwards & Greenberg, 2009; Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino & Edmonson, 2009; Van Dyne et al, 2003). It seems likely, however, that people have a choice and an awareness of this choice to give voice or to remain silent. It seems plausible, therefore, to imagine voice and silence as co-existing, where a person engages in voice but also keeps certain information to themselves. If voice and silence are seen as opposites in this way then the same factors that predict the presence of one should also help to predict the absence of the other. This construction of voice and silence as opposites might help to integrate an already fragmented literature. However, these propositions about voice and silence have not been empirically tested and so remain as a set of unfounded assumptions but, for the purposes of this research, the position the author will take is that silence will be constructed as a failure to voice.

Employee voice has a relatively short history in research but has been present in work organisations and employee relations for much longer. In the past forty years or more, the practice of voice manifested itself initially in the idea of worker participation, followed later by the development of employee involvement and partnership working. It has also been used more recently to represent terms such as empowerment, consultation and communication (Boxall & Purcell, 2003).

Boxall and Purcell (ibid) defined employee voice as "a whole variety of processes and structures which enable and, at times, empower, employees directly and indirectly, to contribute to decision-making in the firm" (p. 162). A stronger and more extensive form of voice would be employee participation, where voice is invited and used to help employees take part in decision-making. On the other hand, the term 'employee involvement' suggests a more diluted form of voice,

where staff are invited to offer their ideas and opinions, while managers reserve the right to make decisions (Boxall & Purcell, *ibid*). The current research thesis will not explore the employee relations literature in any greater depth as the author believes it offers less insight into the behaviours that encourage or discourage voice but rather has focused more on the structures and processes for involvement that organisations have put in place.

It has been the intention of this chapter so far to present a useful working definition of employee voice. Later on this chapter will consider empirical evidence that explores the benefits of voice for organisations and employees alike. For the moment, the assumption is that voice is good for people and their employers. In spite of these perceived benefits, however, voice has not been taken up by employees as readily as might be expected. The next section will look at the data surrounding the extent to which people give voice at work.

### **2.3 The Scale Of The Problem**

Despite concerted efforts by organisations to hear the voices of their employees, either through participation or involvement initiatives, people may choose to remain silent at work and not to voice their opinions, comments and suggestions, nor to share their knowledge with colleagues. Detert, Burris and Harrison (2010) used the 2009 Cornell University National Social Survey to ask six questions about voice and silence at work. Four hundred and thirty nine people, who were in full time employment, responded to these questions in randomly selected telephone interviews. The researchers piggy-backed these six questions into a set of questions on a whole range of other subjects, including family spending patterns, religious beliefs, treatment for depression, political awareness and virtual worlds. The average interview duration was 23 minutes. It is possible,

therefore, that some of the respondents would have answered these questions about voice in a more expedient fashion and would have been unlikely to remember, for example, the precise number of times they had spoken up at work in the past year about problems and ideas, inequity and injustice, and illegal and unethical practice.

These concerns notwithstanding, however, these researchers found almost half of their respondents were "never quiet" about ideas and problems. They also found that 42% of their respondents reported speaking up at times but also keeping quiet when they thought they had something to lose, or nothing to gain, by speaking out. The same researchers found that 25% of people decided to keep quiet on routine matters for fear of wasting time. It would appear then that the majority of employees choose to stay silent on at least some of their concerns at work. For example, Detert and Edmonson (2006) reported that 70% of their survey group thought that speaking up at work was unsafe, while Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003) found that 85% of their sample had felt unable to raise a concern with their boss at least once, with only 51% feeling generally comfortable in speaking out and communicating upwards. These figures appear quite high on the surface but, with the exception of the study by Detert, Burriss and Harrison (*ibid*), the research used small sample sizes so one shouldn't read too much into them. For example, the research by Milliken et al (*ibid*) took place using face-to-face interviews with 40 incentivised MBA students who were in full time employment. Data from these interviews were content coded and organised into categories, which described respondents' comfort (or otherwise) in raising various issues with their line managers. The potential richness of these qualitative data risked being lost in an effort to produce generic categories of

responses and reactions to voice, and this is a theme that is played out in subsequent research into voice, where qualitative findings are subservient to quantitative conclusions. This is quite typical of the general malaise surrounding qualitative research in the behavioural sciences (Cassell & Symon, 2011) but it means, of course, that rich data are wasted in an effort to produce quantifiable findings that are thought to have wider appeal (Briner, 2010). In this way, the language people use to talk about voice is lost, which is not without a degree of irony.

In a different vein, researchers have looked at some of the main drivers behind the decision to speak out, which appear to be the intention to force a change, to improve the situation and to influence the organisation's actions (Mackenzie, Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2011). The main motivations behind the decision to remain silent appear to be disengagement, self-protection and cooperation (Van Dyne et al 2003). As stated earlier there is nothing to suggest that this is anything other than an interesting set of assumptions that have yet to be empirically tested. People at work are likely to withhold their concerns about the competence and performance of those around them, particularly their superiors, for fear of the negative consequences of doing so (Burris, 2012). They are also inclined to stay silent on any problems they observe with work processes, policies and decisions made, because it may be thought to be a waste of time to speak up (Ashford, Sutcliffe & Christianson, 2009; Detert & Trevino, 2010). Even heartfelt issues around pay and perceived inequities at work are not exempt from silence (Tangirala & Ramanujam 2008a), possibly due to a sense that it could be dangerous or futile to speak out (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

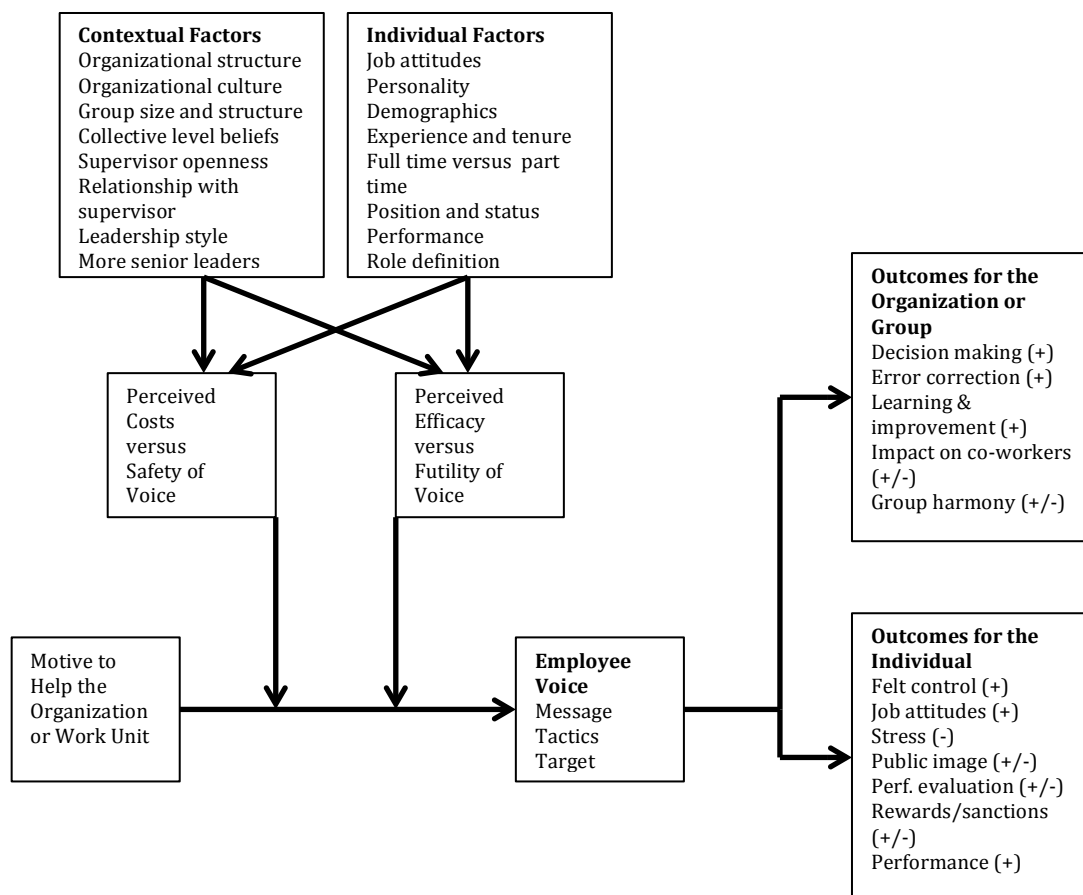
What influences a person's decision to speak out or stay silent on issues of importance at work? This question has occupied the thoughts of researchers in the field of employee voice for some time and has produced some interesting assumptions, which are now starting to be empirically tested. This empirical research has been located largely within the positivist paradigm of mainstream psychology and has looked for the antecedents of voice in order to predict the conditions under which voice or silence will ensue. The current thesis will now turn its attention to these antecedents.

#### **2.4 The Antecedents Of Voice And Silence at Work**

One key assumption about voice is that people engage in voice behaviour in order to help the organisation or work team to perform more effectively (Mackenzie et al, 2011). It could, of course, be the case that people are less altruistic and more self-serving than that. For example, they may be driven by the desire to get noticed and to get promoted. When staff give voice to the right people in the right way they could be helping themselves in this endeavour. For example, people who regularly give voice are rated higher in performance appraisals (Whiting, Podsakoff & Pierce, 2008), and their ideas, if packaged properly, are more likely to be endorsed (Burris, 2012), although there are important caveats to these proposals which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter in Section 2.5 (p. 82-98).

If these are some of the motives, why do people fail to give voice? It seems unlikely that they do not share those same motives but, instead, that other considerations lead to their silence. The decision to speak up or to stay silent can be an intelligent and strategic choice that might be the best available option under the circumstances. A decision to give voice, in this context, is a deliberate

cognitive process where the employee weighs up the costs and benefits of speaking out. This cost-benefit analysis is carried out by making decisions on the perceived efficacy, value and safety of voice. In other words, is it too risky to speak out and, if not, is there any point in doing so anyway? Decisions on efficacy and safety of voice are influenced by a number of factors, both contextual and individual, which include the behaviour of managers, the climate and context of the organisation and the workgroup, and various individual factors including demographics, experience and performance history. Morrison (2011) produced a useful and comprehensive model of voice (see Figure 2.1 below), which the author has used as a template to organise the material around the antecedents and outcomes of voice.



**Figure 2.1: Model of Employee Voice (Morrison, 2011)**



The main components of this model will now be used to inform and shape the following discussion by considering the impact of managers' behaviour, organisational context and individual factors on employee voice. It will then go on to examine how the effectiveness of voice could be influenced by the way that voice is packaged and at whom it is targeted. Finally it will consider what implications voice and silence might have for organisations and for the people who work for them.

#### **2.4.1 The Impact Of Managers' Behaviour On Employee Voice**

An important factor in deciding whether to speak out or stay silent is the perceived quality of an employee's relationship with their manager. In general, people look for a favourable context, involving listening and approachable managers, a supportive culture and little fear of repercussions when deciding whether to voice, along with calculating the extent to which this will damage or enhance their public reputation (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill & Lawrence, 2001).

Looking in more detail at the behaviour of managers, Vakola and Bouradas (2005), in an empirical investigation of employee silence, found that the attitudes of management and supervisors affected voice behaviour. In particular, they found the strongest predictor of silence was supervisors' attitudes to voice and involvement, which suggests employees are more influenced by the 'micro' silence climate created by supervisors' attitudes than the 'macro' climate of communication systems and senior management attitudes. It should be noted, however, that this research took place in a single organisation undergoing significant change. Such conditions of change could mean people kept their ideas, opinions and suggestions to themselves for fear of being singled out or it could mean that change gave the organisation an opportunity to rethink everything so

voice was actually more welcome than it might have been in more stable times (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes & Wierba, 1997).

Another potential problem for this research is that its findings were based on self-report questionnaires. There are well-documented problems with using self-report questionnaires in Organisational Behaviour research (see, for example, Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). These can be summarised as follows:

- People present themselves in a favourable light
- Responses cannot be validated by any other means
- People are engaging in a higher-order cognitive process when completing self-report questionnaires, so their responses are already several steps removed from observable behaviours
- There is a risk of common method variance when measures of two or more variables are collected from the same person (such as self-reports about job characteristics and job satisfaction). Any defect in that source will contaminate both measures
- People prefer to maintain consistency in their responses within and across different measures so observed relationships between responses are likely to be artificially inflated

In the research by Vakola and Bouradas (*ibid*) their participants were overtly encouraged to complete these questionnaires, which may explain why 677 employees (88% of the workforce) took part. The majority of these respondents worked for the technical and customer services departments of that organisation. Some caution should, therefore, be exercised when generalising the findings from this study, as it took place within a single organisational setting at

a time of uncertainty and used a methodology whose problems have been well documented.

An ethical or unethical management style also seems to have an impact on employee voice. Ethical leadership is defined as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making" (Brown, Trevino & Harrison, 2005, p. 120). An ethical leadership style was found by Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) to be strongly linked to the personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness, and this style promoted employee voice, in part by creating a climate of psychological safety where people felt comfortable in speaking out (Detert & Trevino, 2010; Fast et al, 2014).

Managers, however, have to gamble on whether to act upon voice (Milliken & Lam, 2009). Organisational learning is likely to take place when staff give voice to real concerns and managers act upon these concerns. If managers act upon insignificant concerns, however, this will likely be seen as a waste of resources. Managers may be more inclined, therefore, to do nothing because they risk punishment if they waste resources in pursuit of a false alarm, so may take a chance that the problem presented is not of sufficient importance to merit further action, notwithstanding the negative impact this might have on the job satisfaction and productivity of the 'unheard' employee. There is also the real possibility that managers may be tempted to disregard the voice of those who speak out too frequently on the same issue, particularly if the message is perceived as too challenging and change-oriented (Burris, 2012).

Managers are also more inclined to attribute low importance to issues raised because of the fallacy of centrality (Weick, 1995), where they think if an issue is important they would already know about it so new concerns and ideas can't, by definition, be of much importance. On the surface this is quite a compelling idea but it hasn't been empirically tested. Some managers will, of course, send out positive signals about how receptive they are to voice. Ashford, Sutcliffe and Christianson (2009) proposed that the psychology of leaders will significantly shape opportunities for voice, whether voice will make a difference or not, and the extent to which staff feel that the benefits of voice outweigh the costs attached to it. They believed that approachable, accessible, supportive and open leaders will increase the perceived opportunity for staff to express voice. This idea is based largely on theoretical propositions (Milliken et al, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000) but more recent empirical research (Fast et al, 2014; Grant, Gino & Hofmann, 2011) has demonstrated that leaders who send strong messages about voice and act in ways that are consistent with an interest in voice will find that staff are more willing to express their ideas, opinions and concerns. This research will be discussed more fully later in this section (p. 39-44).

Behaving in this way may present quite a challenge to some leaders, especially in hierarchical structures with centralised decision-making, where decisions are made by few people and negative feedback does not naturally flow upwards. In such situations leaders need to convince staff that, not only will they be heard, but that their voice will make a difference and will not be treated in a negative fashion. If such opportunities are denied, people may seek alternative channels for their voice to be heard, including leaders at levels above their immediate line

manager. For further details see the discussion of the research by Detert and Trevino (2010) later in this section (p. 46-49).

One of the problems here is that many leaders have strong opinions that they express forcefully so staff might think that their voice will go unheard. In teams, for example, the leader's experience of heightened power means they are often more dominant verbally (Tost, Gino & Larrick, 2014). This suppresses team members' communication and damages performance. Team members appear to be acquiescent to the leader's dominance because of their position of formal power as head of the team (Tost et al, *ibid*).

These researchers tested these propositions in a series of three laboratory studies involving students taking part in decision-making and problem-solving tasks. Participants were randomly assigned to small teams and, within these teams, were randomly assigned various roles, including, for some groups, formal team leader. Leaders' sense of subjective power was manipulated by getting them to complete a short written reflection of a time when they had used their power to achieve an important goal.

Across these laboratory studies Tost et al (*ibid*) found that those formal leaders with a high subjective sense of power talked more, were perceived as less open and led teams whose performance was worse when compared to teams headed up by leaders with a neutral subjective sense of power. This research, which carefully controlled for possible extraneous variables impacting on the outcomes, suggests that a subjective sense of power means that leaders become more verbally dominant, close down a free exchange of views and preside over teams whose performance suffers as a result. This makes an important contribution to research into voice and team performance because it

demonstrates how specific leader behaviours impact on voice and how this absence of voice can lead to worse performance. Their research measured verbal dominance and team performance objectively, but perceptions of openness were measured by self-report from team members, with the usual problems of self-report (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). However, it suffered from a potential lack of generalisability because it used students, some of whom were incentivised, undertaking tasks which were fairly meaningless in terms of the importance of their outcome to these students. Field research on real leaders in real organisations solving real problems would offer a potentially more powerful contribution to voice research and this account will shortly consider some examples of such studies (see, for example, the research by Edmonson (2003) on p. 49-50, and Mackenzie, Podsakoff & Podsakoff (2011) on p. 85-87).

It follows from this research that leaders need to show they are willing to accept input, be good listeners, take personal interest and communicate a sense of their own humility. These may represent significant challenges for some leaders, because of the relationship between subjective sense of power and subsequent behaviour, and they are made worse by what Ashford, Sutcliffe and Christianson (2009) call their cognitive and action biases. The premise behind cognitive biases says that people are 'cognitive misers' because of their limited information processing capacity, so they choose to take cognitive shortcuts wherever possible. These shortcuts include confirmation bias (where people search for information that supports how they think), perceptual bias (where, for example, the leader knows best and staff can't be trusted because they are self-interested) and the fallacy of centrality mentioned earlier. Such biases, if they exist, could mean that leaders don't listen to voice that is more critical, don't

invite voice that challenges the status quo and don't pay attention to new information because they would already know about it if it was important enough.

Action biases, on the other hand, refer to the fact that most leaders are not used to seeking out voice. They have been successful and rewarded for their decisiveness and action orientation, which means they may not want to hear all voice, because it may be overwhelming, or it may focus on non-critical issues, or it may be contradictory or too narrow, due to staff lacking the breadth of organisational understanding to make the best decisions. This theoretical proposition around cognitive biases makes a number of assumptions about the nature of leadership and what are considered prized behaviours for leaders to demonstrate. Although intuitively attractive in its reach, the proposition remains untested in the realm of leadership and voice.

Beyond general platitudes about managers' attitudes to voice and involvement, what else is it about managers that influences a person's decision to speak out or stay silent? Fast, Burriss and Bartel (2014) found that managers with low managerial self-efficacy ("a low self-perceived competence in the managerial role" p. 1017) were less likely to solicit voice from staff, were more likely to negatively evaluate those who spoke up, and were less likely to implement others' ideas. Managers with low self-efficacy are said to experience ego-defensiveness because there is a gap between what they think they're capable of doing and what they actually should be doing. The challenging nature of voice, therefore, may threaten them so they elect to close it down. Alternatively, of course, if a manager is low on self-efficacy he or she might seek out voice in

order to improve their unit's performance thereby demonstrating their own competence, but this idea was not tested.

The researchers' proposition was tested in a cross-sectional field study, which took place with 41 managers and 148 staff in the engineering and corporate administration divisions of a large multinational oil and gas exploration company. They found that managers with lower reported self-efficacy were less inclined to solicit voice and that staff were, in turn, less likely to speak up to such managers. This field research was then developed further in a follow up laboratory study. It is not uncommon for field studies of employee voice to be 'validated' in this way by laboratory studies: many of the studies referred to in this chapter have followed the same pattern. This could reflect the fact that one is not easily able to control certain variables in the field whereas in the laboratory such variables are much more easily controlled. Alternatively, it could suggest an inherent lack of faith in the field-work. The reality in Organisational Behaviour (OB) field research, though, is that researchers will typically get a narrow window of opportunity in which to test their propositions, so that questions that are raised by work carried out in organisations cannot often be answered back in the same organisation so, instead, they are validated and developed further in the laboratory.

In this example, levels of self-efficacy were manipulated in a follow up laboratory study, which supported these findings. This laboratory study used vignette methodology in a scenario where half those playing the role of manager read a script that affirmed their self-efficacy as the manager while the other half read a script that disconfirmed this self-efficacy. It should be noted that the very act of 'playing the role' of a manager raises doubts about the validity of the process,



because participants were instructed to behave in a certain way which may or may not have been at odds with their preferred behaviour, and because there was no guaranteed consistency in how these roles were performed. It is also debatable how much this methodology gave more accurate readings of self-efficacy than the self-report method used in the field study. Nevertheless, this study extended knowledge of manager behaviour and voice because it examined why managers might engage in voice-averse behaviour, as an ego-defence mechanism to protect themselves from the vulnerability associated with feeling less than competent to fulfill the requirements of the managerial role. This conclusion has an implicit ring of truth to it and it would be interesting to find out whether these feelings disappear with greater experience or whether some leaders maintain their feelings of low managerial self-efficacy throughout their careers.

In an effort to understand the effects of personal characteristics and how these might translate into management behaviours such as closing down voice, Grant, Gino and Hofmann (2011) looked at extroversion and its effect on voice. Their proposition was that extroverted unit leaders would respond less well than introverted unit leaders to proactive behaviour from their staff and that this, in turn, would affect their unit's performance because, according to Dominance Complementarity Theory (Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1983), high quality interactions will take place when dominance and assertiveness from one party are complemented by compliance, obedience and submissiveness from the other. There is an assumption here that extroverted leaders behave in a dominant and assertive way, which may or may not be true. This concern notwithstanding, however, research suggests that this theory only works in specific ways, so that

'friendly-dominant' behaviour will be responded to and complemented by 'friendly-submissive' behaviour, but that 'hostile-dominant' behaviour will be met by and responded to with more 'hostile-dominant' behaviour (Orford, 1986). Again this idea has intuitive appeal and one can easily imagine hostile-dominant behaviour being met head on by more of the same, although it is hard to imagine that these categories of behaviour account for all leader-follower interactions.

Proactive behaviour was defined by Grant et al (ibid) as voicing ideas, taking charge and exerting upward influence. In a cross-sectional field study set in a national pizza delivery company, unit leaders self-reported on their extroversion, unit staff reported on the level of proactivity within the unit, and unit performance was measured by profitability ratings. This methodology is somewhat problematic because of the well-documented issues surrounding self-report questionnaires detailed earlier (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). However, they found that extroverted leadership was associated with higher profitability when unit staff were low in proactive behaviours, and with lower profits when staff were more proactive. This suggests that proactivity, such as voicing ideas, taking charge and exerting upward influence, only works with less extroverted leaders and, by extension, that staff shouldn't waste their time voicing their ideas, opinions and suggestions to extroverted leaders. However, the situation is more nuanced than that as, according to Burris (2012), managers will react more positively to voice that is less proactive, more incremental and less change-oriented. This study will be explored in more detail later in this chapter as part of an examination of packaging and targeting voice and how these might influence the success (or otherwise) of the message (see Section 2.5, p. 82-98). It should

also be acknowledged, that Grant et al's (ibid) study may lack ecological validity because it took place in a specific organisational setting (fast-food retail chain) and it only considered positive proactive behaviours, such as voicing ideas, rather than more challenging examples of voice such as speaking out against perceived injustice.

In another example of taking field research back into the laboratory, Grant et al (ibid) conducted a follow-up study involving 163 undergraduate students who were incentivised by course credits and by prizes awarded to the best performing teams, although there was no evidence to show that these incentives made any difference to group task performance. Students were randomly allocated into groups and, in each group, one student was randomly assigned the role of team leader, primed to act in an extroverted or introverted way by reading a passage extolling the value of each type of leadership style. There was evidence to show that these leaders behaved differently from each other when completing the task, but no evidence to suggest they were behaving in extroverted or introverted ways, so the effects of priming were unclear. The proactivity levels of each group were manipulated by the behaviour of confederates.

In a highly routinised task, they found that groups led by extroverted leaders performed significantly better when group members were passive and that groups led by introverted leaders performed significantly better when group members were proactive. They used Dominance Complementarity Theory (Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1983) to explain these findings, which says that high quality interactions will take place when dominance and assertiveness from one

party are complemented by compliance, obedience and submissiveness from the other.

This study is important because it is one of the few examples of empirical research to find a connection between leader traits, follower behaviour and performance. However, the findings have been framed in relation to employee voice when they could feasibly be re-framed in terms of power dynamics and a struggle for power between leaders and followers. Also, as mentioned earlier, the study only tested repetitive routine tasks and positive proactivity. The way in which extroversion was either self-reported (in the field study) or manipulated (in the laboratory study) is also questionable because of the problems of self-report (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) and the possible lack of clarity over the effects of priming.

Extroverted leaders, those who perform extroversion and those with low managerial self-efficacy may find it harder to listen to voice, but, according to McClean, Burriss and Detert (2013), a listening manager who doesn't have access to resources and who can't influence senior decision makers may unwittingly encourage silence and other forms of withdrawal too. These researchers explored the conditions under which voice leads to employee exit from the organisation. In an empirical cross-sectional field study within a large fast-food chain (part of an industry known for its high staff turnover rates), they measured the levels of promotive voice behaviour of staff and levels of access to resources, influence and change orientation of managers in 136 restaurants by analysing responses to survey data. They found significant relationships between exit behaviour and voice depending on whether managers could implement change and influence senior decision makers, and whether they were oriented to

change. Specifically, staff turnover rates were higher in restaurants where employee voice behaviour was high but access to resources, influence and change orientation were low. Conversely, staff turnover was lower in restaurants where voice behaviour was high and this was matched by high levels of access to resources, influence and change orientation.

The strength of this research was that it triangulated its data by using multiple sources of self-report data and real data on employee turnover. It also controlled carefully for other characteristics that are thought to affect staff turnover, such as tenure, ethnicity, job satisfaction and type of job. However, this restaurant chain suffered from 180% annual staff turnover (typical for the transitory nature of the work associated with the hospitality industry) so it's difficult to isolate reactions to voice as a reason for exit when, in such a volatile industry, so many staff leave anyway. Also it is worth questioning whether people would really quit their jobs because their manager did not take action on their ideas and opinions, or whether they would merely withdraw in more subtle ways, such as absenteeism, lowered commitment and not working beyond role. It may have been more instructive to look at exit interview data, if this information was available and/or accessible to the researchers, to find out why people left the organisation, although, anecdotally, people will not always tell the truth at exit interview (though the author is not aware of any empirical research undertaken to corroborate this).

Thus far voice has been conceptualised by the research cited in this chapter as offering suggestions, opinions and ideas from an employee to his or her direct line manager. This is not without its problems as it is a largely positivist conceptualisation, which assumes that voice is an entity which, if observed and

measured properly, can be predicted according to these research findings. It also makes possible certain types of research questions and not others, therefore those with an interest in voice are getting an incomplete view of it from the research. This conceptualisation is also no more than a theoretical assumption at present, although empirical research is starting to emerge in this field.

However, voice is not always confined to an exchange between an employee and his or her immediate boss. What of voice that is aimed at managers further up or down the hierarchy, or elsewhere in the organisation, and what of voice that is targeted at peers? It is not within the remit of the current thesis to explore this in any detail but it's interesting to observe that most research on voice focuses on exchanges between employee and immediate manager. This does not necessarily imply that voice towards others is not important, of course: exchanges with line managers are, however, likely to be the most immediate and, therefore, will assume more importance.

Some attempt, albeit limited, has been made in asking questions about voice beyond this dyad. For example, are perceptions of efficacy and safety influenced by where the voice target sits in the organisational chain? How well is voice received and what difference does it make to performance at team and unit levels? These broader questions around impact will be explored later in this chapter as part of a discussion of the organisational impact of voice (see Section 2.6, p. 98-102) but interesting research has been carried out by Detert and Trevino (2010) on leaders at all levels and how they influence voice. These researchers went beyond laboratory studies, with their attendant problems of ecological validity, into the real organisational world by conducting an empirical field study within a large technology company, where 50% of staff had said, in an

employee attitude survey, that it was not safe to speak up or challenge. They conducted 89 interviews with staff and managers across all levels in their manufacturing and research and development functions. They asked for examples of voice behaviour, reactions to this behaviour and general perceptions of how open various leaders were to voice. They then coded these data according to the level of leader, the nature of the exchange (such as information giving, persuasion and problem solving) and reactions to this exchange. Whilst these data seem interesting, they were not triangulated by using other sources of data asking the same questions, so it is possible that the responses were biased in some way, particularly as the researchers were brought in by the organisation in a consultancy capacity to try to understand and resolve the problems that had emerged from the staff survey. This demonstrates the importance of context whenever research is undertaken. In the author's own research, both quantitative and qualitative, data from both studies were triangulated so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in different ways. Moreover, he was not invited into an organisation as a consultant but, instead, established a relationship wherein he was an independent researcher, although this status, of course, still meant he was an outsider, whether as a consultant or researcher, and there may have been some suspicions about the nature of his research and what the data would be used for, in spite of his attempts to assuage any such fears.

These concerns notwithstanding, however, Detert and Trevino (ibid) found that the behaviour of immediate supervisors (open and empathic versus closed and unwilling to accept mistakes) strongly influenced perceptions of how welcomed voice would be, and staff were inclined to report that giving voice to these

supervisors was psychologically safe but often futile, which often led to them disengaging from giving voice. When describing interactions with skip-level leaders (two or more levels above the employee) however, staff reported many more instances where it was considered to be unsafe, rather than futile, to give voice, although around a half of participants were able to cite positive examples of such interactions. Some examples were given of skip-level leaders, who appeared to be more receptive to voice, but this was considered by some to be 'pseudo-participation' or, when genuine, it was often the case that the systems for voice were in place but the real decision-making processes ignored them. This study breaks new ground because, by going beyond the traditional employee/line manager dyad, it describes a more complex picture of multi-level leadership influences, which mirrors modern workflows. It is also one of the rare instances in voice research where the voice of staff is actually heard or at least appears to be heard. However, it is somewhat disappointing that rich and nuanced interview data was 'boxed' into categories of utterance for the purpose of content analysis, which carries the risk that the language used was not allowed to breathe properly. Although the researchers described this field research as an inductive study they, nevertheless, set the categories for classifying utterances. The researchers could have explored the data more freely and the second study for the current research project has done this by undertaking a semantic inductive thematic analysis on the data from the interviews that were conducted.

In spite of these shortcomings, Detert and Trevino (ibid) demonstrated the importance for managers at all levels to create opportunities for direct and



informal interactions with staff at many levels, and to act on these exchanges or at least show respect to the other party.

Another important consideration is to examine voice not as extra-role behaviour, which goes beyond the demands of the job, but as in-role behaviour, where opinions, suggestions and ideas are exchanged as a matter of course. What does voice look like in situations where coworkers and leaders have to communicate in order to get the job done? Edmonson (2003) studied Interdisciplinary Action Teams, where team members have to coordinate their actions in challenging and unpredictable situations, to find out what leaders do to promote voice and what difference, if any, this makes to team performance. Using a multiple case study design, this field research looked at 16 cardiac surgery teams who were introducing a new cardiac surgery technology, and interviewed 165 team members, including surgeons, anesthesiologists and nurses, about the quality of communications within their teams. Participants were asked questions about how their team worked together, how they were preparing for the introduction of new technology and who was involved at different stages of the process. Responses were coded into one of three options: examples of open and reciprocal communications between the team leader (surgeon) and staff, examples of respectful but guarded communications, and communications that were quite limited. According to the researchers this was an inductive coding process but, if that was the case, it is quite surprising that it led to so few categories of communication.

This research found there were specific leader behaviours that made it easier to voice. These were communicating a compelling rationale for change, downplaying power and status difference, and clearly inviting input from the

team. These behaviours were found to promote quicker and more successful implementation of the new cardiac surgery technology, which is a good and robust outcome measure as other variables which could have affected implementation success, such as management support and resource constraints in each hospital, were controlled. This was a sample working in an environment with a very specific focus. The interview data were also coded into one of three categories (so some of the richness of the data might have been lost), and the qualitative data were used to explain quantitative differences in the implementation of technological change in order to understand more about leadership influence on successful change which, although useful, is another example of a lost opportunity to analyse the interview data more fully.

However, it is one of the earliest attempts to introduce qualitative research into a study on leadership and voice and it produced a set of quite robust and impressive findings. Also the focus on Interdisciplinary Action Teams was challenging because differences in status, training and technical language could easily serve as an obstacle to good communications and shared understanding, yet when team leaders exhibited certain behaviours, (namely communicating a compelling rationale for change, downplaying power and status difference, and clearly inviting input from the team), these obstacles were largely removed. Additionally, it focused on voice as in-role behaviour rather than extra-role behaviour, which is an unusual focus of study. Finally, it makes explicit links between voice and successful change, so it makes an important contribution to the literature because it was one of the first studies to explicitly investigate the specific leader behaviours that lead to voice or silence among team members which, in turn, had an impact on the organisation by influencing the speed at which change was embedded.

From in-role to extra-role behaviour, from line managers to skip-level leaders, and from extrovert managers to those with low self-efficacy, this section has considered the behaviours of managers and how they impact on employee voice. Yet managers and employees do not exist in a vacuum: their behaviours are endorsed, rewarded and punished by the organisations for which they work. What may be deemed prized management behaviour in one organisation could be seen as a cause for concern and dealt with by punitive measures in another. The organisational context in which managers operate, therefore, should have a powerful impact, not just on managers but on voice behaviour in general, and so this review now turns its attention to organisational contextual factors as important antecedents of voice in order to present a fuller picture of the influences on the individual when he or she decides to give voice or remain silent at work.

#### **2.4.2 The Impact Of Organisational Context On Employee Voice**

Most empirical research on employee voice has taken place in single organisations. This has benefits because it allows the researcher to present an in-depth study of a particular setting and to control for a number of extraneous variables. It also recognises the impact of context on behaviour, although it is open to criticism, because of the difficulty in generalising findings beyond the host organisation. Put another way, however, it suggests that organisational context has an impact on voice behaviour and, therefore, is worthy of attention in its own right.

There are some obvious examples of organisational context, which are visible to any observer. For example, Kakabadse (1979) described the number of levels in the hierarchy, formal mechanisms for communications, the extent of

bureaucracy and the centralisation, or otherwise, of decision-making, and how these all help shape the way in which organisations operate. It is the argument of this current thesis that all of these structural features will have clear links to voice behaviour, and this is exemplified in the findings of Glauser (1984) and Nemeth (1997) who theorised about the importance of upward communications and divergent viewpoints for effective decision-making in organisations. There are also other contextual factors impinging on an organisation from the external environment in which it operates. These include the maturity and stability of the market in which the organisation operates, the local, national or global market occupied by the organisation, the competitiveness of the market and a focus on cost-control which may exist as a response to external forces (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

However, it is the climate of the organisation that may have more insidious effects on voice and this is the area in which most voice research has taken place, although this body of research is still quite limited (see, for example, Dutton et al, 1997; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith & Kamdar, 2011).

Organisational climate can be thought of as the shared and enduring perceptions of psychologically important aspects of a work environment. It includes perceptions about the culture of the organisation, for example supportive, inclusive and change-oriented versus unsupportive, exclusive and conservative. It incorporates other elements such as perceptions about justice and fairness, tolerance of dissent and how much value is placed on staff (Dutton et al, 1997). It also includes climate at the group level rather than the organisation as a whole, and group climate factors that are likely to impact on voice are the degree of autonomy and egalitarianism the group enjoys (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008a).

There could be, for example, a climate of silence in the workplace, which is defined as the "widely shared perceptions among employees that speaking up about problems or issues is futile and/or dangerous" (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), and this is an interesting proposition that has not, as yet, been empirically researched.

The point is that climate is likely to have a significant impact on voice behaviour, (although, to date, there hasn't been much empirical research to test this assumption), yet it is a reality that is constructed through collective sense making. Moreover, such collective sense making, including beliefs about voice and silence, might be contagious. According to Social Information Processing Theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) people's perceptions and attitudes towards their environment (in this case their organisation) are strongly influenced and largely determined by significant others such as colleagues. People look for social cues from their environment to guide them on which attitudes and behaviours are most appropriate. This means that fears of recrimination and a perception of the organisation as intolerant of criticism and dissent will quickly catch on with colleagues around the workplace. Social Information Processing Theory has received strong empirical support in the Organisational Behaviour research literature. For example, Bommer, Miles and Grover (2003) found that witnessing citizenship behaviour led to people engaging in such behaviour themselves; Jones and Skarlicki (2005) discovered that perceptions of leader fairness were shaped by what peers thought about that leader; and Ng and Feldman (2013) concluded that the depth of a supervisor's embeddedness in an organisation was directly linked to how embedded their staff were and this, in turn, was positively related to employee voice behaviour. Embeddedness refers

to a person's perceived compatibility with the organisation, the number of ties they have and the sacrifices they would have to make if they decided to leave. Apart from this last example, however, there has been little other empirical research using Social Information Processing Theory to explain voice and silence, so it remains an interesting proposition that deserves further empirical study within the voice and silence literature.

Stepping back from the possibility that voice and silence behaviours might be contagious, what are the more general features of an organisation's context that might influence voice? One of the first attempts to describe contextual factors and their impact on voice was carried out by Dutton et al (1997). The aim of this research was to understand how middle managers read the organisational context to decide whether to sell issues to senior managers. According to Kanter (1983), middle managers are said to be closer to customers and stakeholders than senior managers and, therefore, to have better knowledge of which strategic issues need attention. This is an unfounded assumption that has yet to be tested empirically. For Dutton et al (ibid), issue selling means directing senior managers' attention to such important issues and helping them to understand them, and is thought to be important for making quick and high quality decisions. The question posed by this research is how do managers read the organisational context to assess its favourability for raising these strategic issues? This is an interesting, if fairly obvious question to ask, as it was one of the first attempts to examine managers as people who not only receive voice but who give it too. It also investigated the salient features of organisational context and their impact on voice, instead of treating context as a generic term.

Using a mixed methods research design, these researchers first interviewed 30 middle managers who worked for a telecommunications company, a competitive environment in which information quickly became inaccurate or obsolete, which meant that issue selling was all the more important. These data revealed that a favourable context for issue selling was characterised by senior managers' willingness to listen, a supportive organisational culture, strong competitive and economic pressures, and a climate of change, which meant an opportunity to rethink everything. Conversely, features of an unfavourable context included a period of downsizing, uncertainty about the organisation's future, the conservativeness of its culture and threats to the positions of middle managers, which led them to fear damaging their reputations or images, or losing their jobs if they spoke out. There is nothing particularly surprising about these findings, although there seems to be some contradiction between a climate of change, which was perceived as a favourable condition, and a climate of uncertainty, which was perceived as unfavourable, whereas they could be two sides of the same coin depending on the perceptions of the participants.

In a follow-up study within the same organisation, a 30-item survey was completed by 115 middle managers, which specifically examined their perceptions about which factors posed the greatest risk to image loss in the context of issue selling. These items were drawn from the literature and from the results of the first set of interviews. The most important factor to emerge from these survey data was 'norm violation', which the researchers described as "stepping outside of the bounds of normal procedure" (p. 418): if the issue had already been rejected by senior management, if there were no data to support the issue and if there was no solution offered to the issue then middle managers

were unlikely to sell the issue (an eminently sensible thing to do). Secondly, 'political vulnerability' led to middle managers asking whether the issue implied criticism of senior management and change for the organisation, whether they had failed in previous attempts at selling this issue and if they were selling it on their own. These questions determined whether middle managers decided to issue sell or not. For example, a middle manager considering presenting a problem without a solution and without supporting data on an issue that implied criticism of senior management would be unlikely to sell this issue because of the perceived risk to his or her image from doing so. Finally, and of least statistical significance, middle managers questioned the extent and quality of their relationship with the targeted senior manager, what the researchers referred to as the distance in the seller-target relationship, which means that managers evaluate their rapport with, and previous exposure to, the target senior manager before deciding whether to issue sell or not.

This study suggested there might be an accepted way to present issues to senior managers and this needs to be understood, as it's risky to sell issues in any other way. This could, of course, be germane only within the host organisation so one could question its generalisability. It also suggests that telling senior managers what one thinks they want to hear is the easiest option and has fewer risks attached to it. It concludes overall that middle managers appraise the favourableness of the context in a rather broad and generic way, and that they are constrained by norms and recipes for successful issue selling, although this could simply be a by-product of the questions they were asked across both parts of the study. The scales used in the second study were untested and it was odd to look at just one theme from the qualitative study (image management) and



develop it further in the quantitative study. Again, the qualitative study appears subservient to the quantitative piece, which meant, of course, that rich data were wasted in an effort to produce quantifiable findings that are thought to have wider appeal (Briner, 2010). It could also have been extended beyond middle managers. However, this research is important because it was one of the first attempts to look at perceptions of organisational context and how they impact on voice.

If this research attempted to highlight the salient features of organisational context that impact on voice (in this case issue-selling), does context have an influence on a person's decision to remain silent?

This question was first raised by Morrison and Milliken (2000) in an influential paper that has become a cornerstone of the voice and silence literature and is cited by most research papers in this area. The aim of this paper was to present a contextual model of organisational silence and to show the implications of silence for organisations and individuals. This paper did not present any new empirical research, and drew on literature that was, itself, mainly scholarly conjecture. Instead, it attempted to lay the ground for future research into voice and silence but, although frequently cited, the questions they raised, namely what causes organisational silence, why do people perceive that speaking up is unwise and what implications does this have for organisations, and the model they proposed, namely that a climate of silence will emerge when people think that speaking up is not worth the effort and voicing opinions and concerns is dangerous, have not been empirically tested yet. Questions around these issues will be picked up in Study Two in the current research project.

This concern notwithstanding, however, Morrison and Milliken raise some interesting points that are worth exploring here as they could shape future research in the domain. They describe a climate of silence, which develops through the actions and beliefs of managers. There are two assumptions made. Firstly, managers feel threatened by negative feedback and therefore do their best to close it down. We may all fear negative feedback but, according to these researchers, this is particularly true for managers, who need to avoid embarrassment, threat and feelings of vulnerability and incompetence. This is a significant, unfounded assumption about managers in general, although Fast et al's (2014) empirical research did show that low managerial self-efficacy led to closing down voice opportunities for staff. However, it is surely erroneous to assume, without empirical evidence, that most managers feel threatened by negative feedback and that managers feel this more than staff.

The second assumption is that managers hold a set of implicit beliefs about organisational life, which leads them to resist voice, mainly from below but also from elsewhere in the hierarchy. These beliefs are:

- Employees are self-interested and untrustworthy
- Managers know best about most issues of importance
- Unity, agreement and consensus are signs of organisational health

Again, although they may have a certain anecdotal ring of truth about them, these are largely untested assumptions about managers and their beliefs.

Morrison and Milliken (ibid) proposed a direct link between these beliefs and a climate of silence within the organisation, namely that collective silence will ensue where these beliefs exist. Furthermore, they proposed that these beliefs would be more prevalent within an organisation when the following conditions

exist, because these conditions will lead to a strengthening of managers' beliefs about staff:

- The top management team is dominated by people with economics and finance backgrounds (because beliefs about self interest come from economic models of behaviour), especially when the team has been together for longer (because shared assumptions become more firmly embedded over time)
- The top management team includes people from high 'Power Distance' and 'Collectivist' cultures. Power Distance refers to the extent to which we accept unequal distribution of power (and managers from this type of culture will believe that they know best), and a Collectivist Culture is one where group members look after each other without question, so the management team will value unity and harmony (Hofstede, 1991)
- The top management team is different from the workforce in terms of gender, ethnicity and age, because these differences will lead to distrust through fear of the unknown
- The organisation has a focus on cost control and exists in a highly competitive market, because challenge and negative feedback will be perceived as more disruptive and threatening under such circumstances
- The organisation operates in a mature and stable sector, so it doesn't need to consider alternatives as readily as an organisation in a newer and more volatile market sector
- The organisation has many hierarchical levels and doesn't grow its own managers, because both lead to a greater distance between the top management team and the rest of the organisation

- The organisation relies heavily on contingent staff (those who are not full-time and permanent staff members), because this group might be seen as less well-informed and more self-interested than full-time, permanent staff

If these beliefs are common in the workplace, the organisation is likely to have centralised decision-making and little upward feedback, and its managers are more likely to reject voice from staff and less likely to informally solicit feedback. This theory follows the positivist paradigm of much research on voice and silence, where theoretical propositions are presented as real, measurable and able to be controlled. These propositions are argued coherently and persuasively, yet a cursory inspection of them reveals a number of assumptions, which include:

- Managers share common beliefs
- Staff share common characteristics
- Managers from economics and finance backgrounds are similar to each other and share common beliefs about voice
- National cultural differences (which could be construed as assumptions) will make a difference to how voice is received
- Organisations can be classified according to certain categories and, within these categories, they are very similar to each other
- The only voice behaviour worth studying is that between an employee and his or her own manager

Nevertheless, these researchers go on to describe how a climate of silence can develop under these conditions and this climate is characterised by two shared beliefs, namely that speaking up is not worth the effort and/or that voicing

opinions and concerns is dangerous. This proposition, namely around the futility and safety of voice, has shaped and framed a fair amount of research since (see, for example, Detert & Trevino, 2010; Edmonson, 2003; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008a). If voice is seen as unsafe and/or futile then, according to these researchers, silence will ensue. If a climate of silence exists then, say the researchers, certain negative outcomes will follow. For the organisation, these will include a lack of critical analysis of ideas and alternatives, a lack of negative feedback and a lack of variance in input. For the individual, these will include a feeling of being undervalued and perceiving a loss of control over one's work conditions. Again, these are attractive and intuitive, yet unfounded assumptions, which are persuasively argued but largely untested. Questions around these issues will be picked up in Study Two in the current research project.

Thus far, this section has discussed the importance of organisational context on employee voice but has been unable to unearth much empirical research of any worth to support or challenge this assumption. Some researchers have argued that it is the climate of the workgroup that has more impact than organisational climate on voice behaviour (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith & Kamdar, 2011; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008a). It is possible that this might be the case, and empirical research is starting to emerge which offers some limited support for this notion (see next paragraph), but it could be the case that group climate is influential in more day to day operational decisions, whereas the organisational climate has greater influence on strategic actions.

This review has already considered the impact of leader behaviour on voice behaviour within the team (Edmonson, 2003; Grant, Gino & Hofmann, 2011; Tost, Gino & Larrick, 2014), but what of the climate of voice that exists within the

team? Leader behaviour will, of course, influence this climate but some researchers have attempted to study team climate beyond the leader's influence. For example, Morrison, Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2011) conducted an empirical study into the impact of 'group voice climate' on voice behaviours within groups. They were the first to look at group-level beliefs, rather than individual attitudes, and their impact on voice. Group voice climate was referred to as shared beliefs about speaking up in groups, but the argument about the importance of group climate over organisational climate was not properly addressed in their research, as the focus was largely on how group voice behaviour was determined more by group level predictors than individual level predictors. Morrison et al (ibid) conceptualised group voice climate as comprising two dimensions: group voice safety beliefs (is speaking up safe or dangerous?) and group voice efficacy beliefs (are group members able to voice effectively?). This conceptualisation merely supports the existing literature (as embodied in Morrison & Milliken's paper, 2000) and it lacks empirical support. Group voice climate is another example of the positivist paradigm, which is a problem because it assumes that group voice climate is an entity that is real, that can be seen, measured and manipulated, and that will have an impact on the voice behaviour of group members.

This research posited that group voice climate would be a more powerful predictor of voice behaviour than individual levels of satisfaction and identification with the workgroup. Furthermore, there would be a stronger link between workgroup identification and voice, and satisfaction and voice in groups where voice climate was favourable. There was no obviously compelling

reason why these other indicators were used, as they have no proven links to voice.

Two hundred and fifty three engineers and group leaders in a large multinational Indian chemical company took part in the study. Forty two group leaders rated their group members' voice behaviour using a six-item scale (Van Dyne & Le Pine, 1998). The remaining engineers completed a five-item questionnaire on workgroup identification and a three-item scale on satisfaction, where the items were changed from job satisfaction to team satisfaction. In addition, all completed the Van Dyne and Le Pine scale about how safely and effectively they believed their group members could voice.

There is a risk of common method variance here (see Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). This methodology can also be critiqued for the fact that it was a cross-sectional snapshot that used self-report questionnaires, some of which were crudely altered to fit the needs of the research. There are well-documented issues around self-report and common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

There also has to be some doubt about how valid and free from bias the responses of group leaders were when answering questions about voice within their groups. Finally, as mentioned earlier, voice, satisfaction and identification are assumed to be real entities rather than possible constructs. With these reservations in mind, they found that group voice climate was strongly correlated with voice behaviour, and that there was a stronger link between workgroup identification and voice in groups where voice climate was favourable. No such link was found between satisfaction and voice. Put simply, if voice climate is favourable in their workgroup people will give voice and, in such situations, they will identify more strongly with their workgroup.

This research claims to be an early example of cross-level investigation, which means looking at the relative impact of both individual and group-level predictors of voice. It was also a study carried out in the field rather than the more artificial setting of a laboratory study. However, in addition to the aforementioned methodological concerns, it used a homogeneous sample of Indian engineers (thus potentially compromising the generalisability of its findings), it used self-report not actual behaviours, with all the well-documented problems of self-report measures (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), and it produced findings that are arguably obvious, even to the lay person.

In another attempt to examine the impact of workgroup climate on voice, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008a) looked at how perceptions of procedural justice and levels of workgroup identification and professional commitment within the group affected group members' voice behaviour. They proposed that a favourable procedural justice climate within the workgroup would strengthen workgroup identification, professional commitment and individual procedural justice perceptions, which would, in turn, inhibit employee silence. Workgroup identification and professional commitment were chosen as variables because they are thought to be related to employee commitment (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), and a lack of commitment would, in turn, link to feelings of disengagement which would make people question the value or futility of voicing their ideas, opinions and suggestions. Procedural justice perceptions were chosen because they are thought to be related to concerns about reprisals by one's immediate supervisor (Pinder & Harlos, 2001), which, in turn, would lead people to question the safety of speaking out. This is another example of



research pursuing Morrison and Milliken's (2000) notion of safety and futility as two primary predictors of voice.

The researchers thought of workgroup identification as a perception of oneness or belongingness with the workgroup (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), they described professional commitment as the psychological link between an employee and his or her profession that is based on an affective reaction to that profession (Lee, Carswell & Allen, 2000), and they thought that workgroup procedural justice climate was a group-level cognition held by its members together, about the fairness of organisational authorities (Naumann & Bennett, 2000).

This research took place in a large US hospital where front-line nurses completed a survey about how they communicated issues affecting patient safety. Eight hundred and fifty nurses were chosen and 606 took part, a good response rate of 72%. Nurses were specifically identified because of the importance of good communications for patient safety as, according to James (2013), 440,000 people die in the US each year from preventable medical errors in hospitals. Tangirala and Ramanujam (ibid) devised a survey which was a composite of items from existing scales measuring identification, professional commitment, procedural justice and employee silence, and hypothesised that employee silence would be negatively related to workgroup identification, professional commitment and individual procedural justice perceptions, and that all these relationships would be moderated by the group procedural justice climate. In other words, good workgroup identification, professional commitment and procedural justice perceptions would mean that people are not likely to stay silent and this is even more the case when there is a favourable procedural justice climate within the workgroup. All hypotheses were upheld:

high levels of workgroup identification, professional commitment and individual procedural justice perceptions were related to higher levels of voice behaviour within the workgroup, and the relationships were stronger when group procedural justice climate was favourable.

This research took place in a single organisational setting and used self-report questionnaires. Field research in single organisations is common and does bring with it a possible problem of generalising the findings beyond the host organisation. However, generalisability is potentially an empirical issue for much research and the impact of organisational context means that it is often a sensible strategy to run research on voice within a single setting (indeed Study Two of the current research project takes place within a single organisation).

The use of self-report can be criticised for threatening the validity of the findings (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986), although it would be difficult to imagine how to measure silence (a non-behaviour) in any direct way, as it is hard to observe. The researchers attempted to mitigate the effects of self-report in various ways to improve respondents' candidness, reduce their apprehension and decrease priming by having clarity about confidentiality and mixing up the order of questions. It is not clear whether, if at all, this made any difference.

This research tells us that organisations who try to improve voice by enhancing identification and professional commitment may fail in this endeavour if they don't also try to create a fair working environment. This seems plausible enough and reasonably obvious. This research, whatever its faults, was the first attempt to empirically examine the links between justice and voice, and therefore deserves credit.

This study, along with other examples presented in this section, demonstrates that research interest in the area of organisational context and climate is starting to grow, albeit slowly. Questions in this area will be raised in Study Two of the current research project. The literature suggests there are certain conditions that are conducive to voice, irrespective of the individual. In other words, people will speak out if the context is favourable, regardless of who they are. Yet are people all the same in this respect or are some more likely to speak up or remain silent because of who they are? It was noted earlier (Detert et al, 2010) that almost half of their respondents were never quiet about ideas and suggestions at work. Who are these people and do they share anything in common that leads them to behave in this way? This idea of individual factors and their impact on voice will now be taken up in the next section.

#### **2.4.3 The Impact Of Individual Factors On Employee Voice**

From the previous section it would appear that people at work are sensitive to organisational context and look for cues from their environment when deciding to give voice or remain silent, but are we all the same in this regard? Are some people more likely to speak out regardless of how favourable the conditions are for voice? In other words, to what extent do individual factors impact on voice behaviour? This is the focus of the current section. Research is quite patchy in this area, and can be organised into three main strands: the effects of attitudes, personal dispositions, and biographical and work-related factors on voice.

To begin with, what are the effects of work-related attitudes on voice? Burris, Detert and Chiaburu (2008) hypothesised that feelings of psychological attachment and detachment towards a work organisation would be linked to voice behaviour, and that this would be mediated by the quality of the

employee's relationship with their manager. In other words, having a poor relationship with one's boss would mean a greater likelihood of leaving one's job and, in advance of leaving, a withdrawal of discretionary behaviour, including voice. Conversely, having a good relationship with one's boss would mean one is less likely to leave and more likely to give voice. Burriss et al (ibid) carried out their field study in 269 branches of a national restaurant chain. Using a questionnaire-based cross sectional design, 499 shift and section managers (59%) answered questions about the quality of their relationship with their restaurant manager, and about their feelings of attachment and detachment towards their organisation. Restaurant managers were also asked about the voice behaviour of their managers and 234 (87%) took part. Responses were controlled for variables thought to have an impact on voice: these included tenure and perceptions of fairness, safety and futility. Although it can be commended for taking place in a real organisation rather than the laboratory, this research design can be criticised because it was cross sectional, so findings cannot imply causation, and because it relies on self-report, with its attendant problems (see Podsakoff & Organ 1986). There was also a significantly lower involvement from shift and section managers than from their own managers. Nevertheless, the researchers found a significant relationship between psychological detachment and voice, and this was moderated by the quality of the relationship the person enjoyed with their manager. There was, however, no such significant relationship found between attachment, leader behaviour and voice. This suggests that people might 'quit' before they leave: in other words people might invest less energy in voice, in advance of leaving, when the relationship with their manager is poor. The reverse was not found for

attachment, however, as it was not shown to predict voice nor was it a mediator between voice and relationships. This suggests that attachment and voice might interact in more complex ways. For example, a person may feel attachment to their organisation precisely because of the way it is, which means there would be little point in suggesting improvements.

It is difficult to speculate any more about these relationships because this research was quantitative in nature, so further insight into these findings remains elusive. This is another example of the positivist paradigm in action, where complex entities are presumed to be real and measurable. Another problem with this research is that the use of multiple questionnaires could have resulted in common method variance because measures of several variables (such as commitment and intention to leave) were collected from the same person, meaning that any defect in that source will contaminate all measures. Finally, there is a potential problem because validated scales were used but were interpreted differently from how they were originally intended: for example items on intention to leave were interpreted as measuring detachment and items on affective commitment were interpreted as measuring attachment. This notion of measuring variables by proxy could be seen to be problematic.

Looking beyond attachment and relationships and their connections with voice, Liang, Farh and Farh (2012) examined the potential links between other psychological antecedents and voice behaviour. They looked specifically at three possible antecedents of voice:

- Felt Obligation for Constructive Change (the extent to which people are committed to developing new processes and procedures and addressing problems at work)

- Psychological Safety (the extent to which people believe that their supervisor and colleagues will punish them for taking risks by, for example, speaking out)
- Organisational Based Self-Esteem (people's beliefs about their capabilities and worth at work)

Utilising a two-wave research design (involving the same measures completed by participants over a six week period) in a Chinese retail company, Liang et al (ibid) measured the correlations between these antecedents and promotive and prohibitive voice behaviour. Promotive voice refers to ideas for improving the overall functioning of the work unit or organisation, while prohibitive voice means expressing concerns about practices and behaviours that are harmful to the work unit or organisation. Intuitively these types of voice would seem to be capable of coexisting, even in a single utterance (one might, for example, point out one's concerns about an issue then offer ideas to address it), but these researchers developed questionnaire items around both constructs and, through factor analysis, were able to identify them as conceptually and empirically distinct. In their study 239 staff (70%) and 106 supervisors (93%) completed self-report questionnaires (about these antecedents and the two types of voice) across two points separated by a period of six weeks.

Their analysis, which controlled for education level, tenure, job satisfaction and position in the hierarchy, found that felt obligation for change was most strongly and uniquely related to promotive voice whereas psychological safety was most strongly and uniquely related to prohibitive voice, while organisation-based self-esteem was the least robust predictor of both sorts of voice. This suggests that

managers need to help improve these antecedents by being open to ideas and by reminding staff how valuable these ideas could be.

These findings are interesting, although somewhat intuitive, and the two-wave design helped avoid the common problems of cross-sectional design, by looking at the relationships between the same measures across time. The researchers also developed what appeared to be a robust measure of two distinct types of voice: promotive and prohibitive voice. Furthermore, they took their field study into a non-Western culture, which is unusual for research into voice.

However, the research suffered from the well-documented problems of self-report (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) and the results could be interpreted in the light of the national cultural context in which the research took place. In a culture where interpersonal harmony and reciprocation are thought to be valued, and where big differences in relative power are presumed to be tolerated, (Hofstede, 1991) it is perhaps no surprise that an obligation for constructive change should lead to promotive voice and feelings of psychological safety should lead to prohibitive voice. It would be instructive to take this study into another culture to see how it plays out there.

Further research into other psychological antecedents and voice behaviour was carried out by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008b). These researchers studied the possible links between personal control and voice behaviour at work. They hypothesised a u-shaped relationship between the two variables and predicted that this would be moderated by how much a person identified with their organisation. Personal control was defined as "an employee's belief that they have autonomy on the job as well as an impact on important work outcomes" (p. 1189) and organisational identification was defined as "the extent to which

employees feel oneness or belongingness with their organisation and include attributes of the organisation in their self-definition" (p. 1190).

They predicted that people who experienced low and high levels of personal control at work would speak out more than those with moderate levels of personal control, because a person with low control would be dissatisfied and be motivated to change the situation by speaking out, while someone with high control would speak out because they had an expectation that their voice could influence organisational outcomes. Furthermore, they anticipated that high levels of organisational identification would mediate the relationship between personal control and voice in two ways. Firstly, an employee who identified strongly with their organisation but who experienced low control would be more inclined to put their dissatisfaction to one side in the hope that things would get better of their own accord. Secondly, an employee who identified strongly with their organisation and who experienced high personal control would speak out more because their self-regard would be closely linked to the success of the organisation and, therefore, it would be in their best interests to give voice to improve how things were done. These are interesting and quite intuitive assumptions but, although the predicted relationships between voice, personal control and organisational identification were proven to be correct, there is no evidence to suggest that this was due to the reasons outlined here.

Tangirala and Ramanujam (*ibid*) conducted a field study in a large general hospital, where 850 front-line nurses were invited to complete a questionnaire, which comprised items on personal control, organisational identification and voice. All items were taken from previously validated scales. The survey was completed by 606 nurses, (72%) and, in addition, their supervisors were asked



to rate them on their voice behaviour based on their observations of the nurses who worked for them. These observations served as a useful antidote to the well-documented problems with self-report questionnaires (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

All hypotheses were supported. Specifically a greater degree of voice behaviour was observed in those nurses who reported low or high levels of personal control and this was moderated by how closely they identified with their workplace. The implication for managers and organisations is that they should promote high levels of personal control in order to encourage more engagement in voice. Conversely, any half-hearted attempt to initiate higher personal control could lead to a reduction in voice.

The positive aspects of this study are that it was carried out in an organisational setting where voice is particularly important because it could have consequences for patient care. It also used a large sample group and moved away, at least partly, from self-report with its attendant problems. However, as with much research into voice, it was a cross-sectional study whose findings might not easily transfer into other organisational settings. It also relied, at least in part, on self-report with its well-documented problems (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

Other research on attitudes as possible antecedents to voice, includes the study by Morrison et al (2011) which concluded that group identification and feelings of satisfaction with the group impacted on voice, but that the single biggest influence on voice behaviour was what the researchers referred to as group voice climate (shared beliefs about speaking up in groups). For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.2 of this chapter, p. 62-64.

In addition, Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008a) found that individual perceptions of fairness and justice had an impact on how readily employees gave voice.

Specifically, they concluded that a favourable procedural justice climate would strengthen an individual's professional commitment and workgroup

identification, which, in turn, would inhibit silence on the part of the employee.

For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.2 of this chapter, p. 64-66.

Beyond examining the impact on voice of this constellation of work attitudes, is

there anything about an individual's disposition that leads him or her to give

voice or keep silent more readily? Empirical research in this area is quite scant,

although one study is worthy of fuller consideration here. LePine and Van Dyne

(2001) hypothesised that there would be a relationship between certain

personality characteristics and voice, which they defined as "constructive

change-oriented communication intended to improve the situation" (p. 326).

They predicted that conscientiousness, extroversion and openness would be

positively correlated with voice and that neuroticism and agreeableness would

have a negative correlation with voice. They conceptualised voice as an example

of contextual performance, which means maintaining or improving the

"organisational, social or psychological environment necessary for the technical

core to function effectively and efficiently" (Motowidlo, Borman & Schmit, 1997,

p. 76). It is not clear why LePine and Van Dyne (ibid) conceptualised voice in this

way, as it is challenge-oriented behaviour whereas contextual performance

involves cooperative behaviour. They reasoned that if personality characteristics

impacted on voice in the same way as they influenced contextual performance

then the two constructs would be empirically linked and voice could be

reasonably argued to be an example of contextual performance. The logic behind this argument is questionable and, in the event, they found that personality did not impact on voice in all the ways they had predicted.

LePine and Van Dyne (ibid) conducted a laboratory study involving 276 students who were incentivised by course credits and cash prizes, and had already completed the NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992). These participants were allocated at random into groups of four, and within each group one person was randomly assigned the role of leader. The groups completed a computerised decision-making simulation task, wherein all communications took place via computerised messages. The task allowed participants to offer suggestions and opinions, and the number and nature of the computerised messages were analysed and classified according to whether they represented examples of voice behaviour.

Conscientiousness and extroversion were both found to be significantly positively correlated with voice, whereas neuroticism and agreeableness were negatively correlated. Extroversion had the strongest relationship with voice but they found no relationship between openness and voice. Agreeableness had been expected to correlate positively with voice, and the fact that it didn't meant the researchers could not conclude that voice was an example of contextual performance in the way they had hoped.

Although it is useful to have empirical data that demonstrate a link between personality characteristics and voice, this research, which was one of the first empirical studies of voice, can, nevertheless, be criticised on a number of levels. Firstly, it employed self-report when participants completed the NEO Personality Inventory (see Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Secondly, the study was set in the

laboratory, which was good for controlling extraneous variables, but can be critiqued because the short-term and temporary nature of the task and the groups meant that it was difficult to generalise these findings beyond the laboratory. Finally, although computerised messaging made it easier to accurately measure and categorise utterances, there is every possibility that face-to-face interactions might have been quite different.

If attitudes and personal dispositions seem to make a difference to voice behaviour (in the ways detailed above), what about other, non-psychological antecedents, such as biographical and work-related factors? Do gender and ethnicity influence voice behaviour? Does it make a difference whether someone is a full time or part time employee, whether they are new to the organisation, whether they are higher or lower in the organisational hierarchy and whether they are good at their job? Do any of these factors impact on how readily one gives voice in the workplace?

To begin with there has been very little empirical research investigating the impact of gender and ethnicity on voice. One study by Detert and Burris (2007) found that men engaged in more voice behaviour than women and that white employees gave voice more often at work than ethnic minority staff. These researchers did not set out to study the impact of such factors: they were merely controlled for when analysing the data. This research was primarily interested in the impact of leader openness on voice. In a field study in a 'casual-dining' restaurant chain, Detert and Burris (ibid) asked 3153 crew members (kitchen staff and waiting staff) to complete self-report questionnaires about their managers' openness, their perceptions of whether it was safe to speak out or not, and other issues such as overall satisfaction and the extent to which they had

ideas for improvement. There was a 63% response rate and the questionnaire items were drawn from previously validated scales, but there are potential problems in this methodology, such as self-report and common method variance (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Nevertheless, they found that leader openness was positively related to voice behaviour among crew members and this was mediated by perceptions of psychological safety. In other words an open management style signalled a safe climate in which to speak out which, in turn, led to more voice behaviour.

In a second study in the same organisation, Detert and Burris (*ibid*) received completed surveys from 270 shift managers who were asked the same questions as participants in the first study and, in addition, their own managers completed a two-item questionnaire about their overall performance and promotability. The analysis of these data produced a similar picture to the first study but the researchers also found that the impact of open leader behaviour was stronger for better performing shift managers, and they reasoned that better performers had higher self-esteem and, therefore, thought that their voice would be more welcomed.

Apart from the aforementioned methodological problems around self-report and common method variance, this research can be criticised for its overtly positivist stance (for example by presuming to be able to measure something as complex as psychological safety in three questionnaire items), and for a potential lack of generalisability. Although this is an issue for much field research into voice, and although it reflects the impact of organisational culture, there may be a specific problem here when conducting research into low skill high turnover organisations such as the host organisation for this research. Put simply, in such

workplaces, the effects of leader behaviour on voice behaviour might be weak because employees may not be that bothered about speaking out and possibly offending their manager as they can walk into another similar job quite easily. Beyond Detert and Burris' (ibid) research, the effects of gender and ethnicity on voice remain largely unexplored and Study Two of the current research thesis has tried to address this by asking participants about which types of people get heard more readily and whether gender and ethnicity play a part. This builds on the findings from Study One that women were more associated with the opinion that giving voice could be a risky endeavour.

Apart from this, what other biographical and work-related factors make a difference to a person's readiness to give voice at work? Length of service in an organisation seems to make a difference to voice, with more experienced staff reporting more voice behaviour than newer employees (Detert & Burris, 2007; Burris, Detert & Chiaburu, 2008). Study One of the current research thesis also found that older, more experienced employees were strongly associated with the viewpoint that giving voice was natural and their opinions counted for something. It also found that newer employees were more likely to believe that speaking out was risky, particularly if one's views were different from the majority, and that what seemed to matter was whether one belonged to the right group, suggesting that the voices of some people are more often and more readily heard at work than others.

Longer service may be linked to greater investment in the organisation, but the empirical data that support this are derived from field studies in restaurant chains where staff turnover is known to be high, so people don't tend to remain in the organisation that long anyway. Inexperienced staff may feel less safe in

giving voice because they may lack credibility and may not have properly understood the climate and the political landscape of the workplace, thus rendering speaking out a potentially riskier exercise. Again, robust empirical data are quite hard to find and Study Two of the current research thesis has attempted to address this gap by asking less experienced participants about their expectations of voice upon arrival in their new posts and their experiences of voice thereafter.

Other biographical, work-related factors that might make a difference to voice are employment status and seniority. The research by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008b) controlled for employment status and found that full-time workers gave voice more often than part-timers. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.3 of this chapter, p. 71-73.

Seniority would seem to link to voice intuitively because, presumably, concerns about the safety and futility of voice would be mitigated by one's position in the organisational hierarchy. However, this could be a naive assumption and some managers may well suffer from feeling their voice is unwelcome in much the same way as employees often do. Nevertheless, Morrison and Rothman (2009) proposed that managers exhibit different voice behaviour from staff and this is due to the impact that power has on those with power. According to these researchers, power may lead managers to be less open to input, thus rendering voice futile, or it may mean that they are more censorious in the way they behave towards others, resulting in a perception from staff that voice could be dangerous.

Morrison and Rothman (*ibid*) cited Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson's (2003) adaptation of the Behavioural Approach and Inhibition Systems (Gray, 1970) to

help explain why powerful people feel and behave differently to less powerful people. The Behavioural Approach System (BAS) is thought to be an internal set of processes that manages behaviour linked with desired outcomes. According to this model, when the BAS is active, people become goal driven and focussed on rewards: they value rewards more highly and feel good when they get them. The Behavioural Inhibition System (BIS) on the other hand, is an internal alarm system that is activated by threat, uncertainty and fear. When the BIS is triggered, people experience heightened anxiety, they worry about and plan for negative outcomes and they are generally more vigilant and wary. According to Keltner et al (ibid), feelings of power activate the BAS and inhibit the BIS, whereas feelings of powerlessness act in the opposite way, triggering the BIS and suppressing the BAS.

Keltner et al (ibid) went on to explain how the relationships between the BAS, BIS and power can impact on employee voice and silence. They argued that managers are more likely to have their BAS activated, which means they are more likely to perceive rewards and opportunities rather than risks and threats, they may have an overly positive assessment of their own performance and their future success and they are likely to be more optimistic and risk taking. As a result, they argued, managers are often over-confident and convey an impression of competence which means they won't, as a consequence, ask for, listen to or respond to ideas, feedback and concerns from staff. The end result is that staff believe that voice is futile and choose to remain silent.

If power activates the BAS it will also inhibit the BIS, which means that managers are less likely to monitor their behaviour and are more likely to act on impulses rather than accepted norms. This could mean that managers become unpleasant



and intimidating in their behaviour, which will lead staff to believe that voice is not only futile but also dangerous. This is exacerbated by the likelihood that staff will have their BIS activated, meaning they are attending more to punishment and threats rather than rewards, thus perceiving that voice is riskier than it actually might be. Regardless of managers' behaviour, it could be that staff are more likely to remain silent if they have low power because silence means they are less likely to draw attention to themselves. Irrespective of how open managers may be towards voice, in the face of dominant behaviour staff may simply be hoping to disappear, therefore decide to remain silent.

This is an interesting and elegant explanation of how power and powerlessness might impact on voice and silence but it is yet to be empirically tested so, at least for now, it must remain as an unfounded assumption. Nevertheless, a manager's experience of heightened power means they are often more dominant verbally (Tost, Gino & Larrick, 2014) and this could suppress staff communication and damage team performance. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.1 of this chapter, p. 37-38.

What seems clear, overall, is that managers have a powerful influence on the voice behaviour of their staff, but it should be remembered that managers are also managed by other managers so there is no reason to assume they don't suffer from feelings of safety and futility when giving voice to their ideas, opinions and suggestions. Study Two of the current research thesis was comprised of interviews with staff and managers in order to hear the voice of people across the organisational hierarchy.

A final work related factor that is thought to impact on voice is a person's performance history. Put in another way, do better performers speak out more

than worse performers? Detert and Burris (2007) found that better performers responded more positively to an open leadership style from their managers by speaking out more. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.3 of this chapter, p. 76-78. Whiting, Podsakoff and Pierce (2008) concluded that people who gave voice would be given better appraisal ratings particularly when their task performance and helping behaviour was also high. This suggests that we listen less to those who are perceived as worse performers. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.7 of this chapter, p. 104-105. Beyond these studies there is little else that links performance and voice. This section has discussed the impact of individual attitudinal, dispositional, biographical and work-related factors on voice. It would seem that there are certain types of people who will give voice more readily at work. However, this does not necessarily mean that their voice will be heard. Messages may need to be packaged in the right way to maximise their chances of being paid attention to. They may also need to be targeted at the right people. The next section in this chapter will look specifically at how packaging and targeting the message can have an impact on the effectiveness of voice.

## **2.5 The Impact Of Message And Targets On Effectiveness of Voice**

Thus far, this review has attempted to define voice, looked at how readily people give voice and studied the key antecedents of employee voice and silence, which are managers' behaviour, organisational context and individual factors. Research into these areas, although continuing, has characterised the earlier literature on voice and silence at work. More recently, attention has started to turn towards how people can voice more effectively when they do decide to give voice.

Specifically, how can a person package their message to make sure it's heard, and

who should they be targeting with their ideas, opinions and suggestions? This review will now turn its focus on to the impact of message and targets on the effectiveness of employee voice.

To begin with, is there any evidence to show that the effectiveness of voice is influenced by the way it is packaged and presented, or is this largely irrelevant to the chances of a message getting heard? This chapter has already discussed research that did not set out specifically to examine the issue of packaging, but that drew conclusions around this issue. These studies will be discussed briefly here, although they won't be critiqued again as that has already taken place earlier in the chapter when they were discussed in full. In Section 2.4.2 (p. 54-57), for example, the study by Dutton et al (1997) was discussed at length. These researchers suggested there might be an accepted way for middle managers to present issues to senior managers and this needs to be understood, as it's risky to do it any other way. An issue that is sold to senior managers will have the best chance of success if:

- It has not been previously rejected
- It is supported by data and it contains a solution to a problem
- It doesn't imply criticism of senior managers
- It doesn't imply change for the organisation
- The issue-seller is known to and has rapport with the senior manager

In other words, and perhaps stating the obvious, telling senior managers what one thinks they want to hear is the easiest option that will have the best chance of being heard although, of course, self-censoring in this way could mean losing the advantage middle managers have of knowing better than senior managers which strategic issues need attention (Kanter, 1983).

Other research that has already been discussed in depth (see p.39-41), explored the characteristics of leaders to see whether this had an impact on their propensity to invite voice and, once invited, whether this affected how voice was received. Fast et al (2014), for example, found that managers with low managerial self-efficacy were less likely to solicit voice, more likely to denigrate those who gave voice and less likely to implement ideas. This aversion to voice was thought to be a form of ego-defensiveness on the part of the manager because of their low managerial self-efficacy (caused by the gap between what they think they're capable of doing and what they should actually be doing). This research suggests that employees need to act in ways that authentically reduce the threat managers feel and this should improve that manager's response to voice. They can reduce this perceived threat by having conversations in private, engaging in flattery, using gratitude and sandwiching suggestions for improvement inside compliments. Questions in this area will be taken up as part of Study Two in the current research project.

Another example of previously discussed research that looked at the personal characteristics of the leader and the impact this had on receptivity to voice (see p. 41-44), was the study carried out by Grant et al (2011). This research found that proactive followers performed better with introverted leaders and passive followers performed better with extroverted leaders. These researchers cited Dominance Complementarity Theory (Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1983) as an explanation for this finding, which posits that high quality interactions will take place when dominance and assertiveness from one party are complemented by compliance, obedience and submissiveness from the other. The implications for voice are that staff shouldn't waste their time in expressing their ideas, opinions

and attitudes to their line manager if he or she is an extrovert. Conversely, introverted leaders are more welcoming to voice as they tend to give more space and listen more carefully to their staff, and this will, in turn, benefit them by enhancing group performance. Extroverted managers should, therefore, remember to be quieter and give more space to their staff when they are trying to give voice. Managers in general need to remember they don't know everything, should not feel threatened by challenging voice and should not promise things they can't deliver on.

Beyond reading the context and understanding the personal preferences around voice for particular types of leaders, can research shed any further light on how people can package their messages to give them a better chance of being heard? Two empirical studies have looked at the nature of the message being voiced, specifically how challenging that message is perceived to be, and examined whether the level of challenge is linked to the chances of the message being heard and acted upon.

The first study was carried out by Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011). Their aim was to demonstrate a link between voice and workgroup performance, in other words to find out what difference, if any, voice made to the sales, profitability and employee turnover of a work unit, in this case different branches of a fast food restaurant chain. The researchers hypothesised an inverted U-shaped relationship between voice, or what it described as "challenge-oriented organisational citizenship behaviour", and task performance at a work unit level. It proposed that voice would have a positive impact on workgroup task performance up to a point: beyond that point voice would have a deleterious influence on performance unless there were high levels of

'affiliation-oriented organisational citizenship behaviours' present, such as altruism and courtesy, as such behaviours were thought to ameliorate some of the potentially dysfunctional effects of voice.

In this field study, which was another example of research that took place in a national limited menu (or fast food) chain, 202 restaurant managers were invited to complete a questionnaire about the amount and nature of challenge-oriented and affiliation-oriented behaviour in their restaurants. Work unit performance was measured by company records, sales, profitability and staff turnover. The research project was controlled for other variables that might affect unit performance, such as each restaurant's previous year's sales and profitability, which could have an impact on the current year's performance. One hundred and fifty managers took part, which was a 75% response rate. The findings demonstrated the hypothesised relationship between voice and performance, and found a stronger link between voice and performance when other behaviours, such as altruism and courtesy were also high. In other words, a moderate level of voice should be encouraged but, beyond a certain level, voice will have a negative impact unless other affiliation-oriented behaviours are present.

However, caution must be exercised as this field research can be critiqued on a number of levels. Firstly it used self-report questionnaires, with their well-documented problems (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Secondly, it asked restaurant managers to answer questions about the amount and nature of various challenge and affiliation-oriented behaviours in their restaurants, rather than asking restaurant staff direct. It is possible that these managers may have presented a more positive perspective on their restaurants than might have been the case. It

is also feasible that they didn't know the true extent of such behaviours among their staff. Thirdly, it established an unproblematic link between sales, profitability and staff turnover, by proposing that turnover would be lower in restaurants where sales and profitability were higher, suggesting that good workgroup performance will have a direct impact on a person's decision to stay or leave the organisation, and this in a company where staff turnover was around 200% each year. Fourthly, it was a cross-sectional study so the suggestion that voice 'causes' better performance which, in turn, 'causes' lower staff turnover cannot be upheld, as cross-sectional studies cannot imply causation between variables: the best that can be said is that there is a relationship between them. Finally, in spite of the merits of research in a field setting as opposed to a laboratory setting, it may not be easy to transfer findings from a sample of routine, low-status jobs into other organisational settings.

A more methodologically robust research project into the nature of the message was undertaken by Burris (2012), who hypothesised that people who engaged in challenging voice, as opposed to supportive voice, would be viewed as worse performers, less loyal, more threatening and would have their ideas endorsed less by their managers. He also predicted that loyal employees would be rated as better performers and have their ideas endorsed more by managers, whereas the opposite would be true for employees who were perceived as threatening. Burris described challenging voice as being change-oriented, proactive and critical, whereas the aim of supportive voice was to stabilise relationships and preserve existing policies and processes. He theorised that challenging voice would be more likely to be met with resistance by managers because people

reject attempts at persuasion that are more distant from their own position and beliefs (Hovland, Harvey & Sherif, 1957).

This research took place across a field study and two laboratory studies. The field research took place in a national restaurant chain, where 281 restaurant managers completed a self-report questionnaire (Van Dyne & Le Pine, 1998) about how they voiced their ideas, opinions and suggestions to their district managers. Items on the questionnaire were grouped into two constructs: challenging voice and supportive voice, and factor analysis demonstrated these constructs were distinct from each other, so it was possible to develop a score on each of these types of voice for each manager (for problems with self-report see Podsakoff & Organ 1986).

District managers were then asked to provide one overall performance evaluation for each of the branch managers under their supervision. This was measured on a four-point scale from 1 (needs significant improvement) to 4 (outstanding). This seems a rather crude way to capture the subtleties of a person's performance, although it is common practice in performance appraisal. Burris (*ibid*) found a relationship between type of voice and performance rating: branch managers who engaged in challenging voice were perceived as worse performers by their district managers.

This research then moved into the laboratory to examine what else managers might think about those who use challenging voice and what they might do with such voice. It is a pity that these questions could not have been asked as part of the field research but one can only assume that the researcher tried to arrange this but was unsuccessful. In a vignette study in the laboratory a small sample of 45 MBA students and working professionals read scenarios and played the role



of a manager handling an employee who was using either challenging voice or supportive voice. The difference in realism between the field study and this laboratory study is stark.

The findings from the laboratory study were that employees who engaged in challenging voice were given lower performance ratings and were perceived as less loyal and more threatening than those who engaged in supportive voice, and that those who engaged in challenging voice were less likely to have their ideas endorsed. All of these relationships were statistically significant. In addition it was found that the perceived loyalty and threat posed by an employee made a difference to performance ratings and endorsement of their ideas. In other words, if a manager feels threatened by an employee's voice they may well not endorse their ideas because they are protecting themselves, but if they think challenge is coming from a loyal employee with the good of the organisation at heart, they may well endorse their ideas.

These are interesting findings that have clear implications for voice at work, but they are derived from a small number of students taking part in vignette studies, which, one could speculate, might compromise the external validity of the findings due to the low levels of psychological realism in the study.

The findings from the second study were tested in a third study, which was also laboratory based. In this study, 51 teams of 4 undergraduates (all financially incentivised and with an average age of 19.7 years) took part in a business simulation task. One person in each team was appointed team leader with complete decision-making power. A different person in each team was given additional information that was designed to lead to more challenging voice. All participants were rewarded with cash and the team with the lowest costs was

awarded an extra cash prize. Additionally, each team leader was asked to nominate one team member for 'promotion', which meant being entered into a lottery for a further cash incentive. All team meetings were filmed and the dialogue in each meeting was transcribed and carefully coded to produce robust frequencies of challenging and supportive voice. Results were controlled for gender as this might have influenced perceptions of certain behaviours including more assertive voice behaviours.

The results of the second study were endorsed in this third study, which found, additionally, that 'experts' (those with additional information) who challenged were tolerated more readily than non-experts. Although this study was carefully controlled it still suffered from the same potential problems as study two, as the results of business simulation tasks carried out by young undergraduates may well lack external validity when transferred to the world of work.

In spite of these concerns this research by Burriss (*ibid*) has filled a gap in the literature by showing that a manager's reaction to voice will depend on the type of voice used (challenging or supportive) and this will help determine whether that manager will endorse these ideas. It also suggests, similar to Dutton et al (1997), that managers might be more receptive to voice that is less proactive and may favour voice that is more incremental and less change-oriented. The limitations of this research, as acknowledged by Burriss (*ibid*), were that it didn't separate out voice that challenged organisational practices from voice that challenged one's manager, that it didn't look at style and tone of voice (just the content of the message as being either challenging or supportive), and that it didn't look at how challenge was bundled with other issues and whether this would have made a difference to manager reactions to voice. However, this

research has extended the voice literature to look at what managers actually might do with ideas and it showed how perceptions of loyalty can mediate performance ratings.

So far this review has examined the nature of the message and how this might impact on its chances of being heard. The focus of this research has been on communications between an employee and his or her immediate manager, but what of voice that is targeted elsewhere? What are the chances of success, for example, if an employee voices to their manager's manager, or to colleagues, or to subordinates? What happens to voice in these situations? Is it heard? Does it feel safe? Does it make any difference? These are the questions that will be addressed next by exploring empirical research that looks beyond the employee-supervisor dyad. This research is rather thin on the ground but there are two studies that are worthy of closer consideration.

Research by Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) looked at whether the flow of voice, either directly to leaders or between coworkers and around leaders, made a difference to organisational performance. In other words, is all voice useful and beneficial or does it depend on where it is targeted? They defined voice as "a challenging, prosocial organisational citizenship behaviour specifically intended to be instrumental in improving the organisation by changing existing practices" (p. 626), which has strong echoes of the definition by Morrison (2011) that guides the current research thesis. This was a two-part study where, unusually for voice research, the laboratory study preceded the field research. In the laboratory study, 117 MBA students (all of whom worked in professional or managerial roles and 84% of whom were male) were asked to complete an on-line survey wherein they provided 'rich explanations not short

phrases' to give instances of when they had spoken up to their direct boss, their coworkers and the manager of another unit in their organisation. The purpose of this study was to find out where voice flows in organisations.

It is unclear to what extent the researchers were actually provided with such rich responses: in an on-line survey there is no control over how much detail and richness respondents give, whereas in a face to face interview such responses can be encouraged more. Nevertheless, thematic analysis was undertaken on this survey data, which identified three main themes:

- Voice flows to those who have the ability to allocate the resources or make the decisions to address an issue: the main target in these instances was the direct manager
- Voice flows to those who can influence, champion or motivate others to address an issue: the main targets here were direct managers and other managers
- Voice flows differently according to the scope of the issue: the main targets here were direct managers for unit level scope, coworkers for narrower scope and other managers for broader scope

This study demonstrated that, according to the participants, voice flows around organisations in different ways for different purposes. The second study took place in 93 branches across 9 different regional credit unions. The purpose of this study was to find out how voice flows around unit leaders (branch managers) and whether this flow made a difference to unit (branch) performance. Detert et al (ibid) hypothesised that:

- Upward flow (improvement oriented ideas to unit leader) would improve unit performance, because these ideas are likely to be of good quality as people generally don't like to waste their managers' time
- Inbound flow (improvement oriented ideas directed at the unit leader from outside the unit) would improve unit performance because such ideas may offer a novel insight into the problems faced by the unit
- Lateral flow (improvement oriented ideas between coworkers in the same unit) would negatively affect unit performance because they will reinforce negative feelings about lacking the power to address these issues
- Outbound flow (improvement oriented ideas from unit staff directed at leaders outside the unit) would negatively affect unit performance because they take the staff away from their usual responsibilities

This study was carefully constructed and personalised so that participants could refer to voice flowing to particular individuals and positions within their own organisations, and was closely controlled for extraneous variables, such as branch size, leader performance and leader tenure. 92% of staff across the 93 branches participated in this study, a very high response rate due, in part, to the administration of the project where participants were allowed protected time to complete the survey. Unit performance was measured in surveys completed by senior executives who were asked to rate each branch on their performance, which is a softer measure than branch performance data which presumably existed but access to these data may have been denied to the researchers.

The data from this research supported the first three hypotheses, namely that upward and inward flow led to improved unit performance and lateral flow

negatively affected unit performance. However, the fourth hypothesis, that outbound flow of voice would also negatively affect unit performance, was not upheld. These findings suggest that, when voice flows directly to unit leaders, unit performance improves, and leaders who seek out voice from within and from outside their units will perform better. It would appear that leaders benefit when others approach them with ideas and information, especially input that challenges the status quo.

These are important findings that act as a riposte to the suggestion, made earlier, that voice needs to be packaged very carefully, in an almost anodyne fashion, to have a chance of being heard. However, it is questionable how much findings from the laboratory study can be generalised to other settings. On the other hand, work in credit unions is presumably not so routinised as work in fast food restaurants so the second study should be welcomed as being potentially more transferable to a broader range of organisational settings, although it would be interesting to extend this research into more 'knowledge intensive' work environments. However, self-report is problematic (Podsakoff & Organ 1986) and seemed ill suited to measuring unit performance, particularly when more robust measures were presumed to exist.

This research looked at the multi-directional flow of voice around organisations so was quite ambitious in its scope. An earlier study by Detert and Trevino (2010) had a sharper focus around voice targeting, as it looked specifically at the effectiveness of employee voice when targeted at the immediate supervisor and his or her own manager, what the researchers referred to as 'skip-level leaders'. The overall aim of their research was to examine how leaders at all levels impact on voice behaviour because, according to the researchers, it is not

a single layer of managers but a constellation of leaders at all levels who influence employee voice.

This research by Detert and Trevino (ibid) took place in a large technology company where 50% of staff had reported in an earlier attitude survey that it was not safe to speak up or to challenge traditional ways of working. The study was located within two manufacturing units and two research and development units, as these were believed to be critical to the company's success and thought to be quite different in how they communicated. Eighty nine interviews were conducted across these four units and, within each unit, across a broad spread of grades. Participants were asked to give detailed examples of occasions when they felt particularly able/unable and willing/unwilling to speak up. The interview data were content analysed and the analysis included only those data extracts that specifically referred to leaders, not general perceptions or individual predispositions towards voice. In addition, leaders had to either be identified by name or level for data extracts to be included. This is another vivid example of how the potential richness of qualitative data could have been compromised in the pursuit of more 'robust' quantitative conclusions, and one questions the number of data extracts that remained after this culling process had taken place.

Each data extract was then coded for each leader according to the number of levels separating the informant from the leader and whether that leader was supportive or inhibiting to voice in the situation described. The data were categorised further into different types of leader behaviour, such as "uses information to solve problems" and, for those leaders who inhibited voice, whether this was due to concerns about safety or futility from the staff member.

This is a further example of how a mechanistic analysis was applied to qualitative data, with the transcripts from 85 interviews reduced to a series of quantifiable categories although, to be fair, the published research article was quite rich with verbatim quotes to illustrate the main findings.

This research found that the biggest influence on voice behaviour came from the employee's immediate supervisor and the biggest concern when giving voice to one's direct line manager was that it would be a waste of time.

Immediate supervisors were thought to act as intermediaries between staff and skip-level leaders, but if this role was performed badly it might lead to a sense of futility from staff as their voice was not properly represented, or it might have implications for the safety of voice as the immediate manager failed to protect the employee from negative comments higher up the chain.

The research also found that skip-level leaders had a big influence on decisions to give voice. Although participants cited positive examples of speaking up to higher-ups, the main concern was that it would be unsafe to speak out because of the fear of recrimination or a public 'dressing down'. Voice to skip-level leaders was also considered to be futile: sometimes the leader was so senior that they engaged in 'pseudo-participation' and sometimes communications systems encouraged voice but real decision making in the organisation ignored them. This suggests, overall, that leaders must create opportunities for direct and informal interaction with staff at multiple levels, and that they must consistently welcome feedback, follow it up and take action where appropriate.

This study can be criticised in a number of ways. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the richness of the qualitative data was lost in an attempt to categorise voice behaviours and leader responses for quantitative analysis. Secondly, the



interview questions were quite specific and focused on certain defined interactions with leaders, so the potential nuances around voice climate and emotional reactions to leader behaviour were not drawn out. It may have been preferable and more instructive to explore the data more freely. Thirdly, the study was primarily to do with employees' perceptions about voice, not actual voice behaviour. Finally, the study took place in a single organisation although, as noted earlier, organisational context appears so important to voice that this is a problem worth living with.

This study completes the review of research on the impact of packaging and targeting voice for best effect. It suggests, overall, that there are certain conditions in which voice may be heard more readily:

- When employees tell managers what they think they want to hear
- When employees reduce the threat that managers feel from their voice
- When employees give voice to more introverted leaders
- When employees engage in moderate levels of voice
- When voice is less challenging and more supportive
- When employees are perceived as loyal, knowledgeable and having the organisation's best interests at heart
- When employees target their immediate manager to ensure their voice flows in the right direction for maximum impact
- When immediate managers mediate effectively between employees and skip-level leaders

It seems, from this list, that managers 'call the tune' when it comes to voice, as they appear to have the power of veto based on their perceptions of the person giving voice and the nature of the message being given. Yet voice has already

been defined as "the discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning" (Morrison, 2011, p. 375). Although there are, no doubt, other more self-serving reasons to give voice, it is likely that on most occasions people express their ideas, opinions and suggestions in order to improve how the organisation operates. This begs the question "What difference does voice actually make to organisations?" and this review now turns its attention to the impact of voice on organisational functioning, to see whether it does make a difference because, if such a link is found, it becomes even more puzzling that voice can be so unwelcome at times.

## **2.6 The Implications Of Voice And Silence For Organisations**

If the intention of employee voice is to improve the way the organisation functions, how successful is it in this endeavour? What difference does it make to the effectiveness of the organisation and, more generally, why do organisations bother to seek out the ideas, opinions and suggestions of their staff? This section will attempt to answer these questions by focusing on the implications of voice and silence for organisations.

In a useful summary of these implications, Morrison and Milliken (2000) theorised that silence, or failure to voice, would be detrimental to the quality of decisions made, would stifle innovation, would inhibit error detection and correction, and would compromise the organisation's ability to learn. These negative consequences would occur due to a lack of variance in informational input, a lack of critical analysis of ideas and alternatives, and a lack of negative internal feedback. They cited empirical research and theoretical models to support these claims.

For example, Bourgeois (1985) found that better decisions were made and company performance improved when multiple perspectives were taken into account, and Enz and Schweck (1991) found that a diversity of viewpoints was positively related to unit performance. In a similar vein, Nemeth and Wachter (1983) identified that exposure to minority viewpoints meant people were more inclined to find alternative solutions to a problem, and these solutions were invariably correct. Furthermore, March (1991) found that blocking negative feedback led to worse error detection and correction, and Argyris (1977) theorised that when voice is not expressed, organisations will find it difficult to engage in 'double-loop learning', which involves the organisation in questioning its systems and procedures rather than merely fine tuning these processes in response to feedback.

These earlier findings have largely been corroborated by more contemporary empirical field research into employee voice. All of these studies have been discussed in detail earlier in this chapter, so this section will only make passing reference to them. For example, in a field study in a fast food restaurant chain Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011) discovered a positive relationship between voice and work unit performance, and found this link was stronger when other behaviours, such as altruism and courtesy were also high. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.5 of this chapter, p. 85-87. In a similar vein, Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) looked at whether the flow of voice, either directly to leaders or between coworkers and around leaders, made a difference to organisational performance. In a two-part study, involving laboratory research with students and a field study in credit union companies, they found that upward and inward flow of voice led to improved

unit performance and lateral flow negatively affected unit performance. This suggests that voice targeted directly at unit leaders will lead to improved unit performance. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.5 of this chapter, p. 91-94.

A further example of the impact of voice on unit performance was the field research and laboratory study undertaken by Grant, Gino and Hofmann (2011), who proposed that unit performance would be influenced by employee voice. They hypothesised a positive relationship between voice and unit performance for introverted leaders and a negative relationship for extroverted leaders. In a cross-sectional field study set in a national pizza delivery company, they found empirical data that supported these hypotheses, and these findings were replicated in a subsequent laboratory study using undergraduate students and routinised tasks. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.1 of this chapter, p. 41-44.

A specific aspect of unit performance, staff turnover, was examined in a field study conducted by McClean, Burriss and Detert (2013). These researchers explored the possibility that voice, if not acted upon, could lead to employees leaving the organisation. In an empirical cross-sectional field study within a large fast-food chain (part of an industry known for its high staff turnover rates), they found that turnover rates were higher in restaurants where employee voice behaviour was high but where access to resources, influence and change orientation were low. Conversely, staff turnover was lower in restaurants where voice behaviour was high and where this was matched by high levels of access to resources, influence and change orientation. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.1 of this chapter, p. 44-45.

These studies looked at the impact of voice on unit performance, as measured by sales, profitability and turnover, but what about the impact of voice when organisations are planning to undertake a major change programme? In this context, voice has been shown to facilitate how quickly and effectively new initiatives are introduced. In a field study set in a chain of hospitals, Edmonson (2003) studied 16 cardiac surgery teams who were introducing a new cardiac surgery technology, and interviewed 165 team members about the quality of communications within their teams. This research found specific leader behaviours, (communicating a compelling rationale for change, downplaying power and status differences, and clearly inviting input from the team), which promoted quicker and more successful implementation of the new technology which, in turn, had positive implications for the unit as a whole. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.4.1 of this chapter, p. 49-50. It would appear that empirical research has identified relationships between voice and performance, if not at an organisational level then at least at work unit level, and one could hypothesise that improvements at unit level would lead to overall improvements for the organisation as a whole. It has also been shown that voice, if invited but not acted upon, can lead to employees leaving their jobs. What other potential impact might voice and silence have on the individuals who give voice effectively, who come up with ideas that are not taken up, or who are not invited to voice in the first place? These and other related questions will be addressed in the next section, which examines the impact of voice and silence on individuals working in organisations.

## **2.7 The Implications Of Voice And Silence For Individuals**

This chapter has identified ways in which employee voice has made a positive difference to organisational performance, primarily through its impact on the performance of the work unit, but what of the implications it has for the employees themselves? Does voice make any difference to the experience of those who give voice? If so, what difference does it make? This section will attempt to answer these questions by focusing on the impact of voice and silence on the individual.

In a useful summary of these implications, Morrison and Milliken (2000) theorised that silence, or failure to voice, would lead to employees feeling undervalued, and that they would perceive a lack of control and experience cognitive dissonance at work. They cited empirical research and theoretical models to support these claims.

For example, the Group-Value Model of Lind and Tyler (1988) predicted that opportunity for voice would be welcomed by staff, not just because it signals their contribution is valued, but also because it might influence decisions.

Conversely, denial of voice opportunity would be poorly received by people, particularly if they learn that others in the workplace have been given this opportunity. In addition, Eisenberger, Fasolo and Davis-LaMastro (1990) found that being valued by one's organisation was related to higher levels of conscientiousness, involvement, innovation and attachment on the part of employees, although most of the findings from this cross-sectional field study were based on self-report (see Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

Furthermore, Greenberger and Strasser (1986) developed a model of personal control in organisations, in which they postulated that people have a strong need

for control over their working environment and decisions that affect them, and that they gain this control in large part through the expression of voice.

Frustration of this desired control would lead to low motivation, dissatisfaction and stress related ailments. There is evidence to support the links between perceived control and these outcomes, but the role of voice in ameliorating such outcomes remains unclear.

In the same vein, Parker (1993) hypothesised that a lack of control would lead to dissent and exit from the organisation. In a cross sectional field study, 215 registered nurses completed self-report questionnaires (Podsakoff & Organ, *ibid*) about perceived control and its impact at work. She found that a perceived lack of control was associated with higher levels of dissent and a stronger intention to leave, and proposed that cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) on the part of employees might have something to do with this. Cognitive dissonance is an aversive state when there is a discrepancy between what people believe and how they behave. We are motivated to re-establish consistency between our beliefs and behaviour by changing one of them. However, if denied voice it may be difficult for us to change our behaviour, which means that cognitive dissonance will be more difficult to tackle.

These theories and empirical findings have emerged as part of research into the conditions of work and individual outcomes, but what of research that looks specifically at employee voice? Has this research been able to ascertain the impact of voice and silence on individuals at work? This chapter will now consider these possible connections by looking at three examples of contemporary research into the implications of voice and silence for people at work.

One of the earliest attempts to research these implications was carried out by Whiting, Podsakoff and Pierce (2008), who examined the impact of task performance, helping behaviour, voice and organisational loyalty on performance appraisal ratings. They hypothesised that all would have a positive effect on performance appraisal ratings. For example, voice would lead to better ratings because it helps organisations to adapt quickly, it helps managers to become more successful and because those who give voice would be seen as more committed to the organisation. As this chapter has already pointed out, however, voice is not always welcomed in this unproblematic way, as the perceived value of voice depends, among other things, on the way it is packaged and targeted (Burris, 2012; Detert et al, 2013; Detert & Trevino, 2010; Dutton et al, 1997), and the personality characteristics of the manager receiving the message (Fast et al, 2014; Grant et al, 2011; Tost et al, 2014).

Whiting, Podsakoff and Pierce (ibid) conducted a laboratory study in which 131 undergraduate students (who were incentivised by course credits) were asked to rate the performance of fictitious characters in a number of carefully constructed critical incident vignettes. There are three main problems with this research design, which led to a lack of psychological realism in this task. Firstly, although most of the participants had worked or were currently working full-time, there was nothing to suggest they had any experience of rating the performance of others at work. Secondly, they were rating performance based on written scenarios, and there are significant differences in the ratings of 'paper people' and direct observation of real behaviours (Murphy, Herr, Lockhart & Maguire, 1986). Finally, participants were only asked to rate people who were high or low performers, which does not chime well with real life.



With these reservations in mind, Whiting et al (ibid) found that task performance, helping behaviour, voice and organisational loyalty all had a positive impact on appraisal ratings and that voice had more of an impact when helping behaviour and task performance were high. This suggests that good performers and those who engage in helping behaviour are heard more readily and rated higher than those who don't contribute to the organisation in these ways. It would seem, therefore, that only the voices of certain types of employees are heard. This is an interesting finding, if a little obvious, and this study should be commended for taking research into voice further by breaking down organisational citizenship into discrete behaviours such as voice and helping. However, the lack of psychological realism, noted earlier, must be taken into account when considering the impact of this study.

Other research into the impact of voice on the individual has taken place in real organisational settings. Two further studies are worthy of mention here although both have already been discussed in some detail in this chapter so will only be referred to in passing in this section. Burriss (2012), hypothesised that people who engaged in challenging voice, as opposed to supportive voice, would be viewed as worse performers, less loyal, more threatening and would have their ideas endorsed less by their managers. He also predicted that loyal employees would be rated as better performers and have their ideas endorsed more by managers, whereas the opposite would be true for employees who were perceived as threatening. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.5 of this chapter, p. 87-91.

Across a field study and two laboratory studies, Burriss (ibid) found a relationship between type of voice and performance rating. In the field study,

branch managers who engaged in challenging voice were perceived as worse performers by their district managers. In the laboratory studies he found that employees who engaged in challenging voice were given lower performance ratings and were perceived as less loyal and more threatening than those who engaged in supportive voice, and that those who engaged in challenging voice were less likely to have their ideas endorsed. He also found that 'experts' (those with additional information) who challenged were tolerated more readily than non-experts.

A final study worth mentioning here was undertaken by McClean, Burris and Detert (2013) who explored the conditions under which voice leads to employee exit from the organisation. For a full discussion and critique of this research see Section 2.5 of this chapter, p. 44-45. In a cross-sectional field study in 136 restaurants within a large fast-food chain, they measured the levels of voice behaviour of staff, and levels of access to resources, influence and change orientation of restaurant managers. They found significant relationships between exit behaviour and voice depending on whether managers could implement change and influence senior decision makers, and whether they were oriented to change. In other words, staff turnover was higher in restaurants where employee voice behaviour was high but access to resources, influence and change orientation were low, and staff turnover was lower in restaurants where voice behaviour was high and where this was matched by high levels of access to resources, influence and change orientation by managers.

Empirical research into the impact of voice and silence on individuals has been quite limited to date. It has focused largely on specific work-related outcomes such as appraisal ratings and exit. There has been little, if any, research into the

implications of voice and silence for individuals on a more personal level and it is difficult to ascertain what it feels like when one's voice is welcomed or denied.

The second study of the current research project will attempt to address this gap by asking participants, among other things, about their felt experience of voice and silence at work.

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has been a detailed, comprehensive, contemporary and critical discussion of empirical research into the fields of employee voice and silence at work. Emphasis has been placed on research into voice as this is far more widespread, and it has been argued that voice and silence are opposite ends of the same continuum rather than separate constructs. A number of 'truths' about voice have been uncovered.

Firstly, managers have a critical role in voice at work. Managers who are approachable and open, who genuinely invite voice and who downplay status differences will encourage their staff to speak out, because they will feel safe in giving voice and will not think it a waste of time. However, managers who are more extroverted and verbally dominant, and who experience low self-efficacy will not welcome voice, especially if it's challenging.

Secondly, there are certain features of the workplace that will impact on voice behaviour. Hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations with centralised decision-making will not easily hear the voice of their staff. A climate of silence may develop which might quickly spread around the workplace. People will also be influenced by the climate of their workgroup, and how much they identify with that group, when deciding to give voice or remain silent.

Thirdly, certain types of people are more likely to give voice than others, irrespective of the climate or context of the organisations they work for. These include people who feel a strong attachment to and identification with the organisation, who experience a strong obligation for change and who report high (and low) levels of personal control at work. Conscientious and extroverted people are more likely to speak out, as are full-time, longer serving and more senior employees, along with better performers, who will give voice and be heard more readily than other staff.

Next, it has become apparent that, for voice to be heard, it needs to be packaged in the right way. People should engage in moderate levels of voice, and this shouldn't be too challenging, critical or change-oriented. Voice should contain a solution and should be given in private. It should also be directed where it has the best chance to be effective, not just to the line manager. Voice should flow around organisations in different ways for different purposes.

Finally, voice has been shown to have a positive impact on organisations and the individuals who work for them. Organisations who encourage employee voice will make better decisions, handle change more effectively, experience lower staff turnover and have work units who perform better. Staff who give voice will feel valued, be more conscientious, have a greater sense of control and be rated more positively by their managers, provided they are good performers and their voice isn't too challenging.

This is what we now know about employee voice and silence at work, and this knowledge has been gained through theoretical modelling, hypothesis testing and empirical research. It would be remiss of the author, however, not to cast a critical eye over the way the literature on voice and silence has developed and

how these empirical findings have come about. Epistemologically, research in the field of voice and silence is steeped in the traditions of positivism, which is a problem because it assumes that voice is an entity, which, if observed and measured properly, can be predicted according to these research findings. It also makes possible certain types of research questions and not others, therefore those with an interest in voice are getting an incomplete view of it from the research. There are also numerous untested propositions and unfounded assumptions within the literature: voice is thought to be good for organisations and individuals but empirical data, which address these assumptions, are only now starting to emerge.

The positivist perspective has also impacted on the methodology employed in empirical research in this field. Typically, research has favoured a cross sectional design, using self-report on questionnaires that are composites of key questions from previously validated scales, which is problematic because causality can't be implied, because of the documented issues with self-report and because of the real risk of common method variance (see Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Qualitative data, where used, are often subservient to quantitative data and subjected to sometimes rudimentary content and frequency analyses so that, ironically, the language people use to talk about voice may be lost.

Early research into voice and silence was, typically, laboratory based, using students who were incentivised to take part in tasks and exercises that employed priming, vignette studies and paper people, which meant they lacked psychological realism and, as a result, although carefully controlled, the findings lacked generalisability to real world settings. More recently, empirical research has moved into work organisations, although this field research is often

subsequently validated by laboratory studies. Field studies have largely taken place in US based companies, with a couple of notable exceptions in countries such as China and India. Most field research has taken place in single organisations and, although this compromises the ease with which findings can be generalised to other settings, organisational context appears so important to voice that this is a problem worth living with. Some field research has occurred in organisational settings such as credit unions, hospitals and technology companies, but a surprising number of studies have taken place in fast-food restaurant chains, which could be described as atypical settings because of the routinised nature of the work, low status occupations and high staff turnover rates. Voice behaviour in such settings could be very different from that which occurs in more stable and knowledge intensive work environments.

The current research thesis has attempted to address some of these problems by, for example, adopting a critical realist rather than a positivist perspective, which assumes that voice is a real phenomenon but one that is experienced and interpreted by culture (organisational and national), political interests and the language we use. Bearing in mind the very personal nature of voice and silence, this perspective would appear to offer a richer interpretation of these phenomena.

The current research thesis is cross sectional in nature, as field research in organisations is rarely longitudinal, but the author has resisted the temptation to draw causal inferences from his findings. In addition the current study has adopted an authentic sequential mixed methods strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One, which used Q Methodology, informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, which used Thematic

Analysis, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions are asked of different groups in different ways. Participants in Study One were drawn from a wide range of organisations, whereas Study Two was carried out in a single organisation, a trade union and professional body, where it was assumed that, because of their remit to listen to and represent their members, the issue of employee voice would be high on the organisational agenda.

Finally, the author believes that the current thesis has been the first UK mixed methods study of employee voice and, as well as looking at the antecedents of voice, it has looked beyond this into how the message is packaged, who it is targeted at, and what difference, if any, voice makes to organisations and the people who work for them. This account will now turn to Chapter Three, which will be a detailed rationale for the research methodology employed across the current research project.

## **Chapter 3: Rationale For The Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction To The Methodology**

The main research question addressed by the current research project was "How do employees talk about voice and under what conditions will they give voice or remain silent?" The research project was carried out over two studies. Study One used Thematic Analysis to interpret the data from six interviews to form the concourse for a Q Survey, where 80 working adults rank ordered a set of 50 statements about voice and silence at work. The data from this study were analysed using Q Method. Study Two used Semantic Inductive Thematic Analysis to interpret the data from 15 interviews with staff working for a trade union and professional body.

The current research project adopted an Authentic Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in various different ways. The researcher adopted a Critical Realist Position, as he assumed a pre-social reality existed but this could only be partially known because it sat behind the subjective and socially located knowledge he could access through his participants.

This chapter will now discuss the research paradigm, and then describe the research setting and sampling strategy employed. It will then provide a rationale for using a Mixed Methods approach (see Section 3.5) and, beyond that, an explanation and justification for the use of Q Method and Thematic Analysis (see Section 3.6). It will go on to describe how the data were analysed across the



research project, before assessing the quality of the overall research project against robust criteria and discussing ethical considerations.

### **3.2 The Research Paradigm**

When thinking about research paradigms, the first issue to consider is the nature of knowledge itself. How can something be known? It is known because it is somehow correct, a fact that has been proven in some way. Yet there are many things that are known but that cannot be seen or proven in this pure sense. Take the strategic vision of any organisation as an example: it cannot be touched or seen, except in its printed form as part of a mission statement, but it remains something that organisational members know and may act in accordance with. Is it possible, therefore, to know something without being able to prove it?

Many would argue that there are set ways of knowing things, and these are referred to as paradigms. For example, a crude distinction can be made in psychology between two research paradigms: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative researchers would argue that everything one does can be measured, interpreted and analysed in some way. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, might be more inclined to accept multiple truths. For example, what does knowledge in organisations look like? A quantitative approach to this question would seek to establish, define and measure the systems, policies and strategies for capturing and sharing organisational knowledge, whereas a qualitative perspective would be more inclined to explore gossip, rumours, myths and hearsay. An approach that combines the two is known as a Mixed Methods Design. This was the research design employed by the present study and it will be discussed in greater depth as a potentially useful approach in Section 3.5 of this chapter.

According to Willig (2013), one can start to think of knowledge about the world in epistemological terms as existing on a continuum, with the stances of realism and positivism at one end (where everything is real and can be measured) to constructionism and relativism at the other extreme, where there is no one truth but, instead, the way events are constructed, and the language used to describe these events, shapes and drives behaviour and creates realities. Another way to position these epistemological stances is within paradigms, which are ways of looking at the world comprised of, among other things, philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), the value a person places on reality (axiology), an understanding of how people go about finding knowledge (methodology) and, of course, their epistemological positions themselves.

Morgan (2007, p.49) describes paradigms as “the consensual sets of beliefs and practices that guide a field” and says that we must view any research approach within the context of the dominant paradigm at that time. He advocates the use of paradigms as epistemological stances, which affect how research questions are asked and answered. He writes of important paradigm shifts in social research, including the shift from the dominance of quantitative research (positivist paradigm) in the 1960s and 1970s to a renewed attention on qualitative research (metaphysical paradigm) from the 1980s onwards. He proposes that, for such a paradigm shift to occur, there must be certain essential conditions in place, including a clear sense of a dominant paradigm coupled with a growing frustration with that paradigm, supported by the emergence of a new paradigm and an accompanying belief that this new paradigm will somehow resolve the problems inherent in the existing one.

He further posits that the metaphysical paradigm is exhausted in its usefulness, mainly due to its reliance on the notion of incommensurability (the belief that it's impossible to create correspondence or translate research between two different paradigms). This, he argues, has led to an unhelpful entrenchment between different approaches to research, in this case quantitative and qualitative approaches. Thus, he argues the need for a new shift towards a pragmatic approach, which does not look towards external systems to explain people's beliefs but, rather, adopts the appropriate lines of action to understand human behaviour and endeavour. The current research study has adopted a pragmatic approach and this is explained and justified in more detail below.

The epistemological paradigm best represented by the current study was the Critical Realist Paradigm, which sits somewhere between the Relativist and Realist Paradigms. Relativism argues that reality is wholly dependent on the ways we come to know it, that there are multiple constructed realities and the researcher can never get beyond these constructions. Realism, on the other hand, assumes the existence of a knowable world and a single truth, which can be accessed by using the right research techniques. Critical Realism assumes a pre-social reality exists but we can only ever partially know it because it sits behind the subjective and socially located knowledge we can access.

This research adopted a pragmatic approach (Morgan, *ibid*) where issues about research and methodology are placed centre stage, rather than epistemological considerations. The pragmatic approach encourages researchers to make choices about what is important and appropriate to research and how to study it. This approach recommends taking the best features of quantitative and qualitative methodologies and working back and forth between them. The current research

project achieved this by carefully choosing the methodologies employed and then triangulating the data from both studies were so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in various different ways. The current research project was not driven purely by theory or data and it is recognised that it is not possible to be wholly objective or subjective. Instead, the pragmatic approach says that methodology is at the centre of research and that the methodology chosen will be the one that is most likely to work, without adhering to any particular epistemological or paradigmatic position.

By adopting a Critical Realist Approach an attempt was made to understand what is really going on when people choose to speak out or keep quiet at work, while accepting that the data acquired might not give clear access to that reality. The researcher assumed a discovery orientation (Willig, *ibid*) wherein he recognised that what was found did not necessarily hold a mirror up to what was going on but, instead, that these data needed to be interpreted to see what, if anything, might lay behind the reported experiences.

### **3.3 The Research Setting**

The research for the current study took place in three phases.

#### **3.3.1 The Pilot Study For Study One**

The pilot study for the quantitative study (Study One) was carried out to form the concourse for the subsequent Q Survey. It involved conducting six one-to-one semi-structured interviews with volunteer participants between December 2012 and March 2013. The questions for the pilot study were broad and general, and based on the main factors from the research literature that were thought to influence voice and silence at work, such as line managers and organisational voice mechanisms. There was also an emphasis in the questions on exploring the

participants' felt experience of voice and silence at work. The questions devised for these pilot interviews can be found in Appendix 1 Interview Questions for Pilot Study. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, and took place in quiet, private settings at the interviewees' workplaces or homes. Length of interviews ranged from 35 to 60 minutes.

The researcher transcribed all interviews within two weeks of them taking place. The Jefferson-Lite Transcription Convention (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) was chosen as the preferred method for transcribing the interviews as this properly captured the conversations without giving undue weight to emphases, intonations and length and number of pauses. All utterances, pauses, hesitations and laughter were transcribed, and all speech was punctuated. Any identifying data, such as names of participants and work organisations, were amended to preserve anonymity. All lines in the transcripts were numbered for ease of reference when later drawing out illustrative examples of key points and themes. When each transcript was completed it was checked back against the original recording for accuracy and changes were made accordingly. All participants were offered the opportunity to read their completed interview transcripts but all declined this offer.

### **3.3.2 Study One (Quantitative Study)**

At the end of the pilot study the researcher was able to produce a concise set of statements for the Q Study, which consisted of 50 statements. For a detailed account of how this final set of 50 statements was arrived at see Section 3.7.1.1 below. Study One was conducted between October and November 2013 using a multiple participant design 50 statement on-line Q Survey (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In the Q Study participants were asked to rank order a set of statements on voice and

silence at work according to how much importance each statement had for them. In October 2013 the researcher devised an on-line Q Method study, using the PoetQ software platform. PCQ software was used to run Q Sort Analysis on the quantitative data and employee voice and silence factors were drawn out and labelled appropriately.

This original study can be found at <http://uel.poetq.com/voicework/>. The software was populated with 50 Q statements, along with requests for biographical data from the participants, such as their gender, age, length of service and job type, as these were all issues that could be thought likely to influence their viewpoints in some way. Instructions were written to explain the nature of the research and the procedure to be followed to complete the study. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage. These instructions can be found in Appendix 2 PoetQ Survey Instructions for On-Line Q Survey. For full details of the procedure that was followed for administering the Q Survey see Section 3.7.1.2 later in this chapter.

### **3.3.3 Study Two (Qualitative Study)**

Study Two of the current research project was a qualitative study, which addressed the main research question "How do employees talk about voice and under what conditions will they give voice or remain silent?" It also addressed a number of subsidiary questions which were drawn from gaps in the current literature and from the findings from Study One. These were:

"What impact does organisational context and climate have on employee voice?"

"What types of people get heard more readily at work?"

"Is it safe to give voice at work and does it make any difference?"

"Does the way voice is packaged make a difference to whether it is heard?"

"What is the impact on organisations when voice is welcomed or not welcomed?"

"What does it feel like when voice is welcomed or not welcomed and how do these feelings influence employee behaviour?"

Fifteen one-to-one semi-structured interviews were carried out face-to-face between June and August 2015. Eighteen people came forward expressing an interest in the research, but it was not possible to set up interviews with three of these people in the time available, because of their holiday and work commitments. Length of interviews ranged from 45 to 65 minutes. All participants volunteered to be interviewed, and all worked at various levels for a large trade union and professional body, which represents health professionals. All interviews took place in private meeting rooms at the organisation's London Headquarters.

An invitation was prepared by the researcher and sent to all London-based staff (around 350 people) by the Director of Human Resources (see Appendix 3 Letter of Invitation). Staff were asked to contact the researcher directly by email if they were interested in taking part, thus preserving their anonymity because nobody, apart from the participants and the researcher, knew of their desire to take part in this research. The researcher had previously booked meeting rooms for six separate days from June to August, and participants were invited to choose an interview slot that suited them.

Staff who expressed an interest in taking part in the research were sent an invitation and consent form by the researcher (see Appendix 4 Consent to Participate in a Qualitative Research Study). They were issued with a hard copy of this form at the start of the interviews and were asked to read and sign the form if they wished to continue with the interview. The researcher checked their

understanding and handled any questions they had on the day. All participants agreed and signed the consent form.

The questions were drawn explicitly from gaps in the current literature, from the guiding definition and model of voice (Morrison, 2011) and from the findings from Study One (see Appendix 5 Interview Questions for Qualitative Study). For example, the question "What types of people get listened to here?" was devised to find out more about any biographical differences and personal dispositions that impacted on how loudly the voices of certain people were heard. The research literature in this area was quite patchy and had considered conscientiousness and extroversion, along with seniority and length of service as possible antecedents of voice. The findings from Study One revealed that certain groups of people, such as women and newer employees shared some common viewpoints. To address these gaps and findings, this question was designed to shed some more light on the impact of individual differences on voice. All interview questions were compiled with similar considerations in mind.

The interview questions were carefully constructed by the researcher and checked for coverage and clarity with his supervisory team. The researcher then carried out two pilot interviews with academic colleagues to check for any possible ambiguities and sensitivities, but none were evident so the researcher felt able to proceed with his interviews.

The researcher transcribed all interviews within four weeks. He used the Jefferson-Lite Transcription Convention (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) as this properly captured the conversations without giving undue weight to emphases, intonations and length and number of pauses. All utterances, pauses, hesitations and laughter were transcribed, but speech was not punctuated as this risked the



researcher imposing his own meaning on the transcripts before analysis had taken place. Any identifying data, such as names of participants and work organisations, were amended to preserve anonymity. All lines in the transcripts were numbered for ease of reference when later drawing out illustrative examples of key points and themes. When each transcript was completed it was checked back against the original recording for accuracy and changes were made accordingly. All participants were sent their individual interview transcripts to read. Twelve participants responded, some asking for identifying information, such as their department, to be removed, but most agreeing the transcripts without changes. Three participants did not respond.

### **3.4 Selection Of The Research Participants**

#### **3.4.1 The Sampling Strategy**

Teddlie and Yu (2007) formulated a typology of five different Mixed Methods sampling strategies, ranging from basic strategies to sampling using multiple Mixed Methods sampling strategies. When engaged in Mixed Methods research, the sampling technique employed should increase the potential generalisability of the findings, and enhance their transferability. What this means in practice is that the researcher should describe the research context, the participants and the circumstances of the study in enough detail that the reader is able to decide if their circumstances and settings are similar enough to the researcher's to warrant a safe transfer of findings.

The current research project adopted a Sequential Mixed Methods Sampling Strategy, the most commonly used strategy in Mixed Methods research in the Behavioural Sciences. This strategy uses probability and purposive sampling in sequence to answer the research question or, as Kemper, Stringfield and Teddlie

(2003, p.284) describe it: "In sequential mixed models studies, information from the first sample (typically derived from a probability sampling procedure) is often required to draw the second sample (typically derived from a purposive sampling procedure)".

The current research project used data drawn from Study One, a Q Study involving a probability sample of 80 working adults, to develop the questions and the sample for Study Two, a Thematic Analysis of the data from interviews with a purposive sample of 15 adults who worked at different levels in the same organisation. The decision to conduct the research for Study Two with participants from the same organisation was driven, in part, by opportunity and convenience, but also because organisational and departmental context and climate are believed to have a significant impact on voice and silence and the researcher wanted, among other things, to explore the impact of context and climate on attitudes to voice and silence.

In Study One of the current research project purposive sampling was initially used to gather a sample of 6 participants who took part in pilot interviews.

Verbatim statements from these interviews were then used to populate the Q Survey used in the quantitative study. Stratified probability sampling was used to gather participants for the quantitative study. Eighty participants were drawn at random from the Adults Working for UK Organisations Group held by Respondi, a consumer and market research company. These participants were stratified as they were divided into two groups, each of 40 members (those who managed people and those who did not), for the purposes of data analysis.

In Study Two, purposive sampling was used to generate the 15 participants for the one to one interviews, which formed the qualitative part of the overall

research study. Further details of these three groups of participants can be found in Section 3.4.2 below.

### **3.4.2 The Sample**

Three samples of participants were used for the different phases of the current research project:

#### **The Pilot Study For Study One**

The pilot study for the quantitative study (Study One) involved conducting 6 one-to-one semi-structured interviews with volunteer participants between December 2012 and March 2013. Participants for this study were recruited through the researcher's professional network. Six people were invited and all agreed to take part. This group was a purposeful sample of working adults, known to the researcher through his professional network, and reasonably homogeneous although differing in terms of seniority and the organisations they worked for.

The sample was equally split between men and women. Two of the women occupied senior management positions. The remaining participants worked at various middle management and junior officer levels. The age of the sample ranged from 36 to 54. Although they all worked for different organisations in different sectors and industries, these organisations were quite homogenous in the sense that most were large and long-established institutions, which could have had an impact on how their voice was heard at work. There was no incentive offered to these participants for taking part in this research.

### **Study One (Quantitative Study)**

The quantitative study involved 80 members of a consumer group called 'Adults Working for UK Organisations' completing a 50 item Q Survey in November 2013.

It follows from this that Q Method does not need to undertake the normal data checks on skewness and kurtosis, because it looks at correlations between people rather than between variables. Q Method involves collecting data from participants in the form of Q Sorts and then carrying out a by-person factor analysis of these Q Sorts. When people take part in a Q Survey they are asked to rank order items according to how much psychological significance they have, and their responses are forced into a normal distribution curve (see Figure 3.1, Section 3.7.1.1 below). Beyond this, Q Method is not interested in how the data reflect the assumptions of the normal distribution curve. What Q Method is interested in is identifying groups of people who hold similar views about issues, in this case about voice and silence at work.

All participants were incentivised for taking part in this research by ResponDi, the market research group that held this database of participants. Half of this participant group managed people while the other half did not. This sample was not known to the researcher, although certain biographical data were gathered upon completion of the Q Study (see Table 3.1 below).

**Table 3.1 Biographical Details of Participants in Q Study**

**Age**

| 16-25   | 26-35    | 36-45    | 46-55    | 56+      |
|---------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 9 (11%) | 14 (18%) | 18 (23%) | 17 (21%) | 22 (27%) |

**Years Employed by Organisation**

| 0-2      | 2-4      | 4-6     | 6-8      | 9+       |
|----------|----------|---------|----------|----------|
| 16 (20%) | 15 (19%) | 8 (10%) | 12 (15%) | 29 (36%) |

**Type of Organisation**

| Private Sector | Public Sector | Third Sector | Other  |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|--------|
| 51 (64%)       | 21 (26%)      | 3 (4%)       | 5 (6%) |

**Gender**

| Male     | Female   |
|----------|----------|
| 41 (51%) | 39 (49%) |

**Job Level**

| Staff    | Technical | Professional | Supervisor | Manager  | Senior Manager | Other    |
|----------|-----------|--------------|------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| 15 (19%) | 4 (5%)    | 13 (16%)     | 8 (10%)    | 19 (24%) | 10 (12%)       | 11 (14%) |

**Nature of Employment**

| Full Time Permanent | Part Time Permanent | Freelance | Contractor |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| 61 (76%)            | 9 (11%)             | 9 (11%)   | 1 (2%)     |

**Study Two (Qualitative Study)**

The qualitative study involved 15 participants taking part in one-to-one semi-structured interviews, which were carried out face-to-face between June and August 2015. All participants worked at various levels for the same organisation, which is a large trade union and professional body representing health professionals in the UK. The researcher had never met any of the participants before these interviews, except one participant who had attended a training

course, which the researcher had led around three years earlier. Biographical data were not gathered, in order to assure anonymity for the participants. However, the researcher was able to make some qualified statements about this sample as a result of meeting them and transcribing their interviews. More than two thirds of the sample group were women, and this broadly reflects the make up of the workforce in this organisation. There was an imbalance in terms of ethnicity, as all but one of the participants were white. All participants were employed on full-time permanent contracts and there was a roughly equal split between managers and non-managers. The interview transcripts suggest that just under half of the participants had joined the organisation within the previous three years. There was no incentive offered to these participants for taking part in this research.

### **3.5 Rationale For The Research Design**

As stated earlier, the current research project adopted a Mixed Methods approach, utilising a Sequential Explanatory Design. In Study One, experiences of voice and silence at work were initially investigated through a pilot study involving semi-structured one-to-one interviews, the results of which formed the basis of the quantitative study. The factors that were identified by the quantitative study were then combined with a range of questions that had yet to be properly answered by the extant empirical research literature. Together, these two sources formed a set of questions, which were asked in Study Two, the qualitative study.

Mixed Methods approaches are quite rare in occupational psychology (Cassell & Symon, 2011) and, therefore, deserve fuller elaboration in this section.

According to Cresswell and Plano-Clark (2007, p.5), a Mixed Methods approach

“...focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.” By accepting the pragmatic approach as a way of researching human endeavour, the researcher recognised that the best line of action is the one that will work. This opened the gate for mixed methods as a legitimate approach to the current research project, as it does not subscribe to any one paradigm.

There are two main types of mixed methods design: sequential and concurrent. Sequential research designs typically comprise a quantitative study and a qualitative study both conducted separately, one after the other, whereas for concurrent designs these studies take place at the same time. In sequential designs, the results from the first study may influence the conduct of the second study or the two studies can be carried out wholly independently of each other. The current study adopted a sequential design where data from the pilot study were used to develop the quantitative study (Study One), the results of which, in turn, informed the questions asked in Study Two, the qualitative study.

There are three main types of sequential design. An explanatory design would look first at quantitative data then use qualitative data to try to explain an aspect of the quantitative data. An exploratory design would look to investigate something qualitatively then refine the findings by using a quantitative method to explore some aspect of the original qualitative data. According to Bryman (2006) the most common methodologies used here would be a combination of questionnaire and semi-structured interview. These designs suggest a greater degree of comfort for the researcher in either quantitative or qualitative

research, with one seeking to explain the initial findings of the other. The third type of sequential design is the transformative design, which goes further than this and will often use an advocacy lens, which views data from a particular perspective, such as a feminist or a political perspective. In this design there is no obvious sovereignty of one approach over the other: qualitative and quantitative approaches are used in partnership to bring about a greater understanding of the subject, and either approach can come first.

The current study adopted an authentic sequential explanatory mixed methods strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One, which used Q Method, informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, which used Semantic Inductive Thematic Analysis, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in various different ways.

Issues and feelings around mixed methods designs run deeper, however, than the apparently straightforward choice of approaches presented above. Moran-Ellis et al. (2006) argue that proper integration of methods is important, rather than merely combining methods to suit one's own perspective and comfort zone. They argue that the use of mixed methods in social research has a long history because it benefits the research process in many ways. For example, triangulation, which helps to validate data by cross-referencing between multiple data sources, can assist in confirming or disconfirming the accuracy of the original measurement, expose the differences in different measures, and explain phenomena that exist at both macro and micro levels, such as globalisation and religious fundamentalism, as a single method approach would be unlikely of itself to have such explanatory powers.



Moran-Ellis et al (ibid) go on to describe three ways in which integration can take place. The first is a proper integration of methods rather than the sometimes casual and arbitrary combinations that may occur in research. They talk of the importance of integrating methods to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts. They also describe the importance of preserving the paradigmatic identities of the different methods so that, as with Morgan (ibid), the various methodologies will come together to help the researcher know more. The second way in which integration can take place is to have separate methods and integrated analysis of the data. For example, the researcher could use mixed methods to create several data sets, then return to the original research questions, select a theme and see how it plays out across the various data sets. The third option would be to keep the empirical work apart by having separate methods for data collection and analysing data separately, then bringing the analyses together to form an explanation (informed by the different data sets and their explanations) to produce a coherent account of the phenomena in question. The current research study adopted this third approach.

Moran-Ellis et al (ibid) also warn against the opportunistic and expedient combining of methods in order to “flesh out” the findings from the data and make them appear more robust. It follows, therefore, that proper integration of methods is much more than merely bolting them together to get a bigger data set. It means, instead, thinking about and explaining how the mixed data set can be properly combined and understood in an interdependent fashion, where each type of data retains its own characteristics. The current research study adopted a pragmatic approach and carefully selected methodologies that would best

combine to answer the research question, while at the same time allowing the data derived from each study to retain their original characteristics.

So much for the words of caution about arbitrarily combining quantitative and qualitative methods for a fuller data set, is it possible to go beyond mixed methods into multi-dimensional research strategies which produce richer explanations of phenomena beyond the more robust, yet still relatively simple, explanations offered by mixing quantitative and qualitative research methodologies? According to Mason (2006) this is indeed possible and desirable and, if adhered to, will significantly increase the usefulness of mixed methods as a research technique, although such a path is not without its difficulties. She urges caution against believing that the mixed methods approach is inherently a good thing, and says that any technique should be judged by what it allows the researcher to ask and how the chosen mix of methods hangs together logically. She proposes a qualitatively driven approach to mixed methods that will benefit from the richness of qualitative research while recognising its limitations as a stand-alone technique. She further posits that researchers should adopt “qualitative thinking” to help consider and reflect on the usefulness of multi-dimensional strategies for research beyond the qualitative-quantitative divide. Mason (ibid) presents a persuasive case for mixing methods in this way and starts her argument by describing the main foundations for mixed methodologies. Firstly she argues that social experience and lived realities are so rich that they cannot be measured along a single dimension so, for example, something relatively narrow such as employee voice and silence can be viewed in many ways, from the impoverished state of communication processes, through the prevailing leadership style to a more subtle withdrawal of support,

involvement and citizenship by employees for a multitude of reasons. The second foundation for mixed methods is that lives are lived simultaneously at macro and micro levels, so what is required is an approach that is capable of being sensitive to both of these levels. In summary, all social researchers need methodologies that match up to the complexities of lived experience.

According to Mason (ibid) there are three main reasons why mixed methods can help to address such complex lived experiences. Firstly, a mixed methods approach encourages researchers to think more imaginatively about their research. If the chosen epistemological position helps to shape the approach to research it has to be conceded that this also works in reverse, because what one sees is, in turn, influenced by how one chooses to look at it. Mixed methods should help address this because it should open the researcher's eyes, figuratively and literally, as it will encourage them to develop a menu, or palette, of standard and more innovative qualitative and quantitative methods from which to draw. This will, of course, require care from the researcher not to just pick from the menu at will but, rather, for there to be a compelling logic to this choice, which is ultimately driven by the research question. The current research study used a standard method (Thematic Analysis) and a more innovative method (Q Method) as a preferred combination of approaches to best answer the research question.

The second reason why mixed methods can help address this multi-dimensionality of experience is that they can help researchers to think outside of the macro-micro divide. Macro theories, for example, may be contradicted by qualitative research, which may run the risk of exposing the complex nature of real experience while, at the same time, failing to produce any alternative

theories on the same scale. This is to be expected, though, as it follows a tradition of macro theories being viewed through a micro lens so that big change is charted through the lives of everyday people, but it doesn't necessarily help researchers to make proper sense of what they see. It should be acknowledged that macro and micro theorists actually depend on each other because each needs the lens of the other to help them make sense of what they see, yet most theorists position themselves on one side or other of the macro-micro divide. A mixed methods approach can help break this down, especially if it goes beyond the standard qualitative and quantitative approach. The current research study attempted to cross this divide by examining macro theories of voice and silence through the individual perspectives of the participants, which were given due emphasis through the use of Q Method and Thematic Analysis.

Thirdly, Mason (ibid) argues, qualitative explanations can be enhanced and improved by mixed methods. Quantitative research can say a lot about trends, variables and averages but is weaker at explaining what they mean. Qualitative research is often better at explaining, and mixing these methods can help further. For example, when comparing cases qualitatively it doesn't mean using standardised units of measurement, but a mixed methods approach will find room for this and other ways of drawing comparisons, rather than rejecting standardised measurement as somehow being too quantitative. Qualitative research is also good at understanding context and using it as a means of explanation. Sometimes that may render such explanations too localised to be of much use outside of that context, so mixed methods will help to extend the external reach of qualitative ideas beyond the immediate context. Study One of the current research study used Q Method to identify communities of opinion

which were then examined further, along with other issues from the research literature, in Study Two, the Thematic Analysis of the interview data.

The aforementioned reasons for using mixed methods are quite powerful and persuasive but the problem in advocating mixed methods is to work out how to bring together the disparate epistemologies and ontologies represented by the various methodological preferences, and how to integrate these different world-views. Morgan (ibid) would argue, of course, that the pragmatic approach sees the chosen methodology as sovereign and that no other consideration, epistemological or ontological or otherwise, should be addressed. Yet life is not always as simple as that, and Mason (ibid) has some interesting things to say about how to integrate these different views.

Firstly, if using mixed methods to triangulate or get data to corroborate each other then one might argue that a mixed methods approach gives a fuller picture by looking at the same thing through different lenses or looking at different parts of the same picture to create a better understanding. This, however, would need one over-arching world-view to show how the pieces fit together and this is potentially difficult, so it follows that epistemological differences will have to be downplayed. The current research study did this by adopting a pragmatic approach where epistemological considerations were subservient to decisions about which methodologies would be most appropriate for addressing the research question.

On the other hand, a different way of thinking about mixed methods might help. For example, instead of integrating data it may be instructive to try thinking of loosely meshing and linking data and methods, although this is relativist thinking where there are so many potential truths that the picture may become obscured.

The best solution, therefore, would be to advocate multi-dimensional explanations for social experiences and lived realities. After all, why advocate multi-dimensional research and expect it to produce one simple explanation? Multi-dimensional explanations for complex phenomena are likely to be richer, more satisfying and sit relatively more comfortably with the various epistemological positions available to the researcher. The current research study, by adopting a Mixed Methods approach and triangulating the data across the project, has produced richer and multi-dimensional explanations for what it found (see Chapter 6: Discussion).

Mason (ibid) crystallises this thinking into five underlying principles of mixing methods:

- Taking a questioning and reflexive approach to research
- Recognising the legitimacy of other approaches
- Extending creativity and innovation in research practice
- Celebrating richness and complexity rather than attempting to contain it
- Using data from many sources and seeing many things, such as behaviour, discourse and practice, as representing data

This thoughtful work characterises the care and attention that has been paid to the potential difficulties inherent in using mixed methods approaches. Bryman (ibid) adds to this by arguing that the use of mixed methods has reached a level of maturity, eclecticism and richness such that it is time to set out some challenges for the development of the use of mixed methods beyond its current remit. He asks why mixed methods should merely be about mixing qualitative and quantitative research methods but, instead, about mixing various qualitative methods within a single piece of research. He wants to extend practitioner

thinking about what can and cannot be mixed beyond triangulation and the narrow range of mixes currently employed. He wants to convince qualitative researchers that mixing methods can be done in a way that doesn't forfeit the essence of qualitative research. Finally, he asks whether we should be bolder and think about mixing styles and approaches as well as methods. The current research study mixed quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and did not employ a range of qualitative techniques or different styles and approaches, but managed to maintain the essence of its qualitative research data.

### **3.6 Rationale For The Research Methods**

#### **3.6.1 Rationale For Q Method**

Q Method was chosen as the preferred approach for the quantitative study.

Developed by Stephenson in 1935, as a reaction to his growing frustration with Factor Analysis, Q Method inverts Factor Analysis to help define each participant in a holistic way, and looks at correlations between people rather than between variables.

Q Method involves collecting data from participants in the form of Q Sorts and then carrying out a by-person factor analysis of these Q Sorts. When people take part in a Q Survey they are asked to rank order items according to how much psychological significance they have. When analysing the completed Q Sorts the researcher was able to look at the level of agreement or disagreement between groups of people based on how they organised the statements, and this afforded a glimpse of groups who had ranked the statements in a similar fashion. The factors that were extracted from this Q Sort, therefore, helped identify groups of people who held similar views about voice and silence at work.

For the current research, Q Method was considered to be the most appropriate method as it allowed the researcher to look at different representations of a construct, in this case employee voice and silence in the workplace which are believed to be opposite ends of the same construct (Morrison, 2011). In Q Method the viewpoints of participants are considered to be of great importance and should help to shine a light on the findings and conclusions from the extant research literature. Q Method assumes an exploratory focus as, in this study, it attempted to discover and understand the issue of voice and silence at work. The end result is holistic data that captures the story of where voice and silence come from, what they look like, what functions they serve for the individual and what impact they have on their relationship with the organisation.

Reference to the four main concepts around which Q Method was built lends greater weight to the decision to use this method (Stephenson, reported in Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 24-44). The first concept, known as Operant Subjectivity, decrees that participants will engage in active reflection by completing the Q Survey and making decisions on a set of statements by ranking them according to their point of view. By capturing a person's point of view in this way, the researcher is able to make good empirical discoveries. Secondly, the concept of Self-Reference means that participants, when ranking statements, will be projecting feeling onto the statements according to themselves and without reference to others. This means that responses to a Q Survey should be more authentic and better able to capture the essence of an individual's viewpoint. Thirdly, Concourse Theory says that the overall group of statements from which the Q Survey is derived, should represent common knowledge on the subject matter at hand. The concourse for the Q Study was derived from the verbatim



statements of people who were interviewed as part of a pilot study to develop the discourse. This helped to discipline the researcher to avoid his own assumptions on the subject of voice and silence when constructing the final statements for the Q Survey. Finally, the concept of Abduction linked very well with the discovery and exploratory orientation of the current study.

Overall, the choice of Q Method was driven by the pragmatic approach preferred by the researcher and set within his Critical Realist Paradigm, and by the way in which this methodology tries to facilitate and support the expression of individual points of view, rather than testing how different groups feel about the subject matter. This idiographic approach was felt to be especially pertinent to the current study by getting to the heart of individual feelings about, and experiences of, voice and silence at work.

### **3.6.2 Rationale For Thematic Analysis**

Thematic Analysis was selected as the preferred qualitative approach because it looks at themes and patterns in what different people say about an issue and it looks at commonality and difference across participants. Thematic Analysis is a "form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 4). Its aim is to recognise and make sense of patterns in qualitative data, both in terms of content and meaning. In Thematic Analysis the role of the researcher is to process qualitative data to identify threads of meaning, then to group these threads into 'categories of meaning', finally clustering these categories into higher order themes. According to Willig (2013) a theme may be thought of as a pattern of meanings that exists within the data in a meaningful way, and captures something important and relevant to the research question.

Thematic Analysis was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, it exists largely independently of theory and epistemological considerations so it matched the researcher's Critical Realist and pragmatic approach very well. Secondly, following on from this point, this flexibility allowed the researcher to keep a focus on the reality of the data corpus while, at the same time, recognising that people make meaning of their experience and that these meanings are influenced by the social context in which they are developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thirdly, Thematic Analysis was used because it was the most appropriate approach in a sequential design, as the outputs from the pilot study fed directly into the creation of statements for the quantitative study (Study One) which, in turn, informed the subsequent analysis of the data gathered from Study Two, the qualitative study.

Beyond the decision to employ this methodology, the researcher also needed to decide whether to adopt an inductive or deductive approach. Inductive Thematic Analysis takes a bottom-up approach by interpreting and coding data without trying to shoehorn it into any preconceptions or ready-made coding frame.

Deductive Thematic Analysis is theory-driven, where the researcher codes data against an explicit theoretical stance. In keeping with the Critical Realist Paradigm and the Discovery Orientation employed by the researcher, this study used Inductive Thematic Analysis as its preferred approach.

The final decision for the researcher to make was around the nature of the themes that were drawn from the data corpus. Here the choice was between identifying semantic or latent themes. Semantic themes are drawn directly from the data and use the explicit surface meanings of that data, whereas the latent approach burrows beneath the semantic content to explore any ideas and

ideologies that give shape to the data. The current research study looked for semantic themes in the data as the researcher wanted the codes to map more or less directly onto what the participants had said by mirroring their language and the concepts they used.

### **3.7 An Approach To Data Analysis**

The data gathered from both phases of the current research project were analysed differently according to the nature of the data and the methodologies employed by the researcher. Thematic Analysis was used twice in this research project, once in the pilot study (Study One) and once in the analysis of the data from the 15 interviews carried out for Study Two. To avoid repetition and duplication, this account will only consider the Thematic Analysis of the data gathered for Study Two, and this can be found in Section 3.7.2 of this chapter.

#### **3.7.1 Analysis Of The Data From Study One: Q Study**

##### **3.7.1.1 Q-Set Design And Content**

The quantitative study was carried out using a multiple participant design 50 statement on-line Q Survey. The Q-Set comprised 50 Q Statements that were derived from conducting a Thematic Analysis on the six transcribed interviews that made up the pilot research for Study One (see Appendix 6 Randomly Ordered Q Statements for Quantitative Research Study). Of these 50 statements, 17 were judged to be positive, 16 were negative and 17 were neutral. All statements were randomly ordered when presented in the on-line Q Survey. The Thematic Analysis of the pilot research had produced 151 statements that were thought to be relevant to the felt experience of voice and silence at work. Where possible, these statements were developed using verbatim quotations from the six interviewees, because the researcher did not think it appropriate to

impose his own interpretation on the quotations by redrafting them in his own words. Changing these quotations meant the researcher would be assuming the exact meaning of each statement, whereas this was better achieved by asking the participants to impose their own meaning through how they sorted the statements in the Q Survey. Therefore, the statements could best be considered as "suggestions rather than statements with determinate meaning" (Watts & Stenner, *ibid*, p. 64).

To reduce this original number to a set of statements that was unambiguous and represented the themes and sub-themes from the qualitative study, the researcher went through the following stages:

- Every statement was checked to see if it made sense regardless of the context in which it was first uttered
- Statements that were ambiguous or duplicated other statements were discarded
- The remaining statements were grouped by similarity in meaning, according to the themes identified in the pilot study
- Within these themes each statement was assessed for relevance, ambiguity and duplication. Ambiguous and duplicating statements were discarded, while irrelevant statements were removed and checked for relevance against other themes, then either added to another theme or discarded
- All remaining statements were then mapped against the sub-themes for each theme. Statements that didn't belong to any of the sub-themes were discarded

- Each theme and sub-theme was then checked to see if it had a reasonable representation of statements. The intention here was not to ensure an equal number of statements in category but, instead, to produce an unstructured Q-Set comprising a final list of statements that was broadly representative of the concourse (the population of opinions expressed in the pilot study) and that had balance as the statements chosen were not value-laden or biased towards the researcher's point of view

The final list of 50 statements was then piloted with the researcher's original supervisory team along with a Q Method expert. As a result of this pilot study 10 statements were amended, either to enhance clarity or to remove negatively phrased statements, because disagreeing with such statements involved a double negative. For example, the statement 'I don't keep quiet at work if I feel strongly enough about something' was changed to 'I speak up at work if I feel strongly enough about something'. Here the meaning of the statement remained unaffected but respondents should find it easier to process.

The Q Sort Matrix was devised using a 9-point distribution, from -4 to +4, where -4 is 'agree least' and +4 is 'agree most' (see Figure 3.1 below).

**Figure 3.1: Q Sort Matrix Using a 9-Point Distribution**

| -4 | -3 | -2 | -1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|---|
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |
|    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |   |

According to Brown (1980) the shape of the Q Sort Matrix should not make participants feel unnecessarily restricted or, conversely, overwhelmed with decisions. He suggests an 11-point distribution (from -5 to +5) for anywhere between 40 and 60 statements. The current study opted, however, for a 9-point distribution (from -4 to +4) because this fitted the final set of 50 statements, and because all participants would be expected to have some experience and knowledge of voice and silence at work, without being considered expert. It was anticipated, therefore, that this steeper distribution would help participants to sort statements more effectively by offering more options in and around the neutral column.

A broader distribution, such as an 11 or 13-point grid, would have called for participants to produce finer gradations of meaning and the researcher did not want to risk participants dropping out because the task was too complex,

particularly as he used an on-line survey which meant that he was not on hand to help participants as they were completing the survey. Conversely, the researcher believed that a narrower distribution, such as a 7 or 5-point grid, risked frustrating the participants, as they might have been unable to differentially rank the statements because of the narrower range of options available to them. The researcher did not want to risk participants dropping out because the task was too frustrating, particularly as he was not on hand to offer guidance.

Participants were also asked to describe their thinking around how they sorted the statements, by completing a free text box explaining why they placed certain statements in the 'agree least' and 'agree most' boxes (-4 and +4) at opposite ends of the matrix.

### **3.7.1.2 Procedure**

The quantitative study was carried out using a multiple participant design 50 statement on-line Q Survey. In October 2013 the researcher devised an on-line Q Method study, using the PoetQ software platform. This study can be found at <http://uel.poetq.com/voiceatwork/>. An on-line Q Survey was employed in favour of a paper and pencil version. This was done in order to maximise the reach of the Q Survey to a large sample of participants who were unknown to the researcher. The software platform chosen for this research was PoetQ, because of its clarity of presentation, intuitive nature and ease of use.

The software was populated with 50 Q statements, along with requests for biographical data from the participants. Instructions were written to explain the nature of the research and the procedure to be followed to complete the study.

Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage. These instructions can be found in Appendix 2 PoetQ Survey Instructions for

On-Line Q Survey.

In October and November 2013 a pilot study was run with 8 participants, including the researcher's supervisory team, the PoetQ software developer and members of Respondi, the consumer and market research company that would be hosting the study. All were asked to complete the study as if they were taking part in the research. Feedback from this group was very positive around layout and ease of completion, although there were some recommendations that the study instructions should be enriched to better contextualise the research, and to explain more fully what it was about. These recommendations were noted and the instructions were re-written accordingly.

In November 2013 the study was handed over to Respondi, who launched it to their consumer group called 'Adults Working for UK Organisations'. Between 25th and 29th November 2013, 80 members of this group completed the study. As part of the biographical data requested, respondents were asked if they managed other people. This was set up as a filter that separated the respondents into two groups: managers and non-managers. The intention was to amass a participant group of 40 managers and 40 non-managers, as it was believed that these two groups of people might have different viewpoints about voice and silence at work (an assumption that was borne out, at least in part, by the factors that were eventually extracted from the data). When the limit had been reached for each of these groups the study closed.

All participants were given full information about the research design and procedures in order that they could make informed decisions about whether to take part or not (see Appendix 7 Consent to Participate in a Quantitative Research Study) and all offered their free and full consent to take part in the



research. Participants were not given the unabridged version of this document but, instead, were shown survey instructions (see Appendix 2 PoetQ Survey Instructions for On-Line Q Survey) that gave enough details about the nature of the research and their right to withdraw for them to be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to take part. Data were gathered, stored and destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act (1998). The researcher also respected the privacy and anonymity of all participants and was clear on issues of confidentiality, ensuring that data collected were properly anonymised and could not be traced back to the originator.

### **3.7.1.3 Transition Of Data From Q Sorts To Factor Interpretations**

To analyse the data from the Q Method three methodological transitions were applied to the data. The first stage was to transition the data from Q sorts to factors, which involved the researcher collecting data from the participants in the form of Q sorts and then carrying out a by-person factor analysis of these Q sorts. The factors that were extracted in this way helped identify groups of people who held similar views about voice and silence at work.

The second stage was to transition the data from factors to factor arrays, which involved the researcher exploring the meaning of the identified factors by attempting to reproduce the original Q Sort Grid for each of the 5 factors. This reproduction is known as a factor array. A factor is a shared viewpoint and a factor array is an ideal-typical Q sort for each factor.

The final stage was to transition the data from factor arrays to factor interpretations, which involved the researcher undertaking a holistic inspection of the patterns of Q statements that were evident for each of the five identified factors in order to produce a full and meaningful interpretation of each factor.

Chapter 4 will provide a full account of how the researcher explored the patterns of agreement and disagreement between Q sorts and the way they ranked the 50 statements, how he examined these shared viewpoints and how he applied a holistic inspection of this data to fully interpret and explain the stories behind these viewpoints.

### **3.7.2 Analysis Of The Data From Study Two: Interviews**

Thematic Analysis was the approach employed by the researcher to analyse the data from the interviews that formed Study Two, the qualitative study of the current research project. This approach has already been described and justified in detail in Section 3.6.2 of this chapter. The discussion will now turn to how this approach was used to make sense of the data gathered from the interviews that were conducted. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a straightforward guide to using Thematic Analysis in qualitative research that follows six phases. The current research followed this step-by-step approach, and this chapter covers Steps 1 to 5 in depth. Step 6 is the production of the report itself, which will be presented in detail in Chapter 5, although Step 5 will give detail of the approach the researcher took and the criteria he followed as he wrote the report.

#### **3.7.2.1 Step 1: Familiarising Yourself With The Data**

This step involved the researcher transcribing the data, reading and re-reading the data, and noting down initial ideas. The researcher transcribed all interviews within four weeks of them taking place (see Appendix 8 Example of a Coded Interview Transcript). He chose the Jefferson-Lite Transcription Convention (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) as this properly captured the conversations without giving undue weight to emphases, intonations and length and number of pauses.

All interviews were transcribed personally by the researcher, as this allowed him to immerse himself more fully in the data. When each transcript was complete it was checked back against the original recording for accuracy and changes were made accordingly. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts actively and critically in an attempt to look for early meanings and patterns that might be evident in the data. During the first readings he noted down things of interest. As he read, he asked questions about how the participants were making sense of their experiences, how he would feel in that situation and what kind of world was being revealed through their accounts.

For example, after the first reading of Transcript 1 the researcher noted that the participant felt that she was being held back in her career because she was, in her words, so good at her job, that she expressed a strong need for appreciation and recognition which wasn't forthcoming, and that she was quite dismissive of the managers for whom she worked. This participant seemed to perceive work as a place of conflict and unhappiness, and voice as a waste of time.

Conversely, after the first reading of Transcript 11 the researcher noted that the participant felt passionate about being heard, that she believed in the value of a positive 'can-do' attitude and that she despaired of the "moaners and whingers" around her. This participant seemed to perceive work as a place of opportunity, and voice as a right that was freely available to those with the right attitude.

### **3.7.2.2 Step 2: Generating Initial Codes**

This step involved the researcher coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and collating data relevant to each code. The researcher used complete coding rather than selective coding, which

meant he identified anything and everything of relevance to his research question, becoming more selective as he moved into Step 3 (see below). The initial codes reflected features of the transcripts that held interest for the researcher and helped to organise the entire data set into more meaningful configurations. Coding was driven by the data, without reference to any overarching theoretical considerations. Each individual data item was given equal weighting in this process: no individual interview held sovereignty over the others. This initial coding helped to form the foundation for any repeated patterns across the data set which were subsequently developed. Some data extracts were coded in more than one way, and the researcher resisted trying to smooth out any inconsistencies that seemed apparent, preferring, instead, to sit with any tensions that emerged in the data corpus.

The initial codes used were brief phrases that captured why he believed a particular data extract might be useful. For example, Anavi talked about being heard outside her own team and said: "...when you try and progress those ideas let's say upwards to gain support from your own sort of your own head your own director your own (...) there are challenges and sometimes sideways so depending on the relationships you have or don't have it can often get stilted and so it you know it sometimes feels like you're not cross-working or inter-department working" (Transcript 2, 54-59). The initial codes for this extract were 'impact of hierarchy' and 'importance of being networked'. These are good examples of data-derived or semantic codes, which used the participant's concepts without searching for hidden meaning and trying to interpret her utterances in that way.

The researcher systematically worked through each of the 15 interview transcripts, noting chunks of data that addressed his research questions and ignoring data that weren't relevant to the research questions. Where he was uncertain about the relevance of data he included and coded them, and made a decision later on whether to keep them or discard them. As he coded each relevant data extract he decided whether he could apply an existing code or whether a new code was required.

Once he had completed an initial coding of the entire data set the researcher revisited each of the 15 coded transcripts again and reviewed each coded data extract. This was important because his coding had developed as he worked through each transcript the first time round, and it meant that some data extracts were re-coded as a result of this second review. It was at this point that the researcher decided that the data had reached saturation point and he was able to be reasonably confident that no further interviews would produce any different codes that hadn't already been used. The idea of saturation is quite contentious because every additional participant has the potential to say something novel. However, the researcher made a pragmatic decision after he had coded and reviewed all 15 transcripts that he was unlikely to find anything new from further interviews, so he drew a line there.

At the end of this review the researcher collated all the coded data. He did this by using 'post-it' notes of different colours, each different colour representing each of the 15 participants. Colour coding was important because it allowed the researcher to easily locate each data extract in each transcript, and it showed how many participants shared a viewpoint when he came to collating the codes into candidate themes (see Step 3). Each transcript was reviewed and each initial

code was written on a coloured 'post-it' note, along with the line numbers of the transcript where the coded data extract could be found. All 'post-it' notes were then laid out on a large floor space. Where codes were identical they were placed together.

### **3.7.2.3 Step 3: Searching For Candidate Themes**

This step involved the researcher collating codes into potential themes, and gathering all data relevant to each of these candidate themes. It meant looking for larger patterns across the data set and deciding whether they captured something meaningful. This decision was not just based on how frequently a code appeared but also how salient to the research question that code was thought to be. Candidate themes had to be present in a proportion of the data but did not need to be found in every transcript or even in most of them. The most important question was whether the themes told the researcher something important and meaningful about his research question.

Codes were systematically reviewed to identify similarity and overlap. The researcher looked for issues and topics that different codes related to and which could be used as a central organising concept for a candidate theme. A central organising concept is an "idea or concept that captures a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data, and provides a succinct answer to the research question" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 328). A good candidate theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents a patterned response within the data set. Some codes did not fit easily anywhere but they were not discarded as the researcher chose, instead, to set up a 'miscellaneous' theme, which was revisited later once the candidate themes had been identified.

The researcher was an active participant in the process of developing candidate themes. As he was organising and clustering the codes he was making decisions about how he shaped the data in front of him. It is important to acknowledge this as the candidate themes in no sense 'emerged' from the data. The main guiding principles employed in this phase were internal homogeneity (coherence) and external heterogeneity (distinctiveness) (Patton, 1990). This meant that the data within themes had to hang together and there had to be clear light between the different themes.

While developing the candidate themes, the researcher was mindful of a number of key issues. Firstly, the themes needed to be of good quality and the central organising concept of each theme needed to tell him something meaningful about patterns in the data in relation to his research question. Secondly, the themes needed to be distinctive and boundaried, in other words it had to be clear what each theme included and excluded. Thirdly, the themes needed to be supported by sufficient data to avoid being too thin, but could not have too much going on in them so they lacked coherence. Where this occurred, the researcher either reorganised the themes or developed sub-themes within each theme to organise the data, which, although distinctive, would have lacked coherence without this treatment. Finally, the themes needed to relate to other themes in a way that told the overall story the researcher was trying to tell to address his research question.

An example of the active and iterative process involved in searching for candidate themes can be found in the way in which the data were shaped into what became known as the themes 'Barges and Rafts' and 'Boatmen and Landlubbers'. To begin with, the researcher organised his codes into one

candidate theme, which told the story of who got heard more readily within the organisation. There was a large, coherent and distinctive set of codes that formed a pattern of meaning about the winners and losers in terms of being heard at work. However, as other codes were added to this candidate theme, it became apparent that a lot of participants were describing how a certain type of message was less welcomed within the workplace regardless of who was delivering it. This meant the candidate theme was becoming too full and was lacking coherence.

The researcher then attempted to resolve this issue by breaking the theme down into sub-themes, but this still proved to be unwieldy because there were too many sub-themes. It became clear to the researcher that he was trying to shoehorn too many disparate ideas into one theme, which, although distinctive, lacked internal homogeneity or coherence. As a consequence, he reshaped the candidate theme into two themes, 'Barges and Rafts', which described what sorts of voices got heard, and 'Boatmen and Landlubbers', that described the people whose voice got heard more readily.

Within the candidate theme 'Barges and Rafts' there were two sub-themes: 'Sugaring the Pill' which talked about the importance of packaging voice carefully, and 'The Too Difficult Box' which described how messages with certain characteristics were never heard, regardless of how skilfully they were packaged. Within the candidate theme 'Boatmen and Landlubbers' there were three sub-themes: 'The Pecking Order' which described position in the hierarchy as having an impact on who got heard, 'Tenure' which discussed the impact of length of service on voice heard, and 'It's Not Who You Know, It's Who You Are'



which talked about biographical differences and personal dispositions and their impact on how voice was heard.

#### **3.7.2.4 Step 4: Reviewing And Revising Candidate Themes**

This step involved the researcher checking that the themes 'worked' in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, and generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. This step involved two separate stages. In the first stage the researcher returned to his coded and collated data and questioned whether the candidate themes covered most of the data and whether anything different was suggested. In this stage he reviewed the 'miscellaneous' theme and drew out some codes, which now fitted with the candidate themes. He also re-examined the codes in his themes and sub-themes and made decisions on whether they remained where they sat or were moved or redistributed.

For example, the theme 'Flows and Eddies', which describes how voice moves around the organisation, originally comprised two sub-themes: 'Mechanisms' and 'Connectedness'. However, upon returning to his coded and collated data, the researcher decided to split the sub-theme 'Connectedness' by adding two more sub-themes 'The Team' and 'The Top Table'. This was because the original sub-theme was characterised by how people positioned themselves with key players around the organisation in order to get their voice heard, but it became apparent that there was a distinctive set of codes that looked specifically at how difficult it was to get voice heard outside of one's work team, and how the original message was often compromised if it left the team. The researcher decided to split the original sub-theme to properly capture the coded data that referred to the difficult journey that voice had to undertake if it was to find its

way up the hierarchy. In the next stage of review these two new sub-themes were ultimately collapsed into one new sub-theme 'The Journey of an Idea'.

The other movements that took place in this first stage were as follows:

The coded data on member focus were moved from the sub-theme 'Climate' to the sub-theme 'Context'.

The coded data on management responsibility were moved from the sub-theme 'Key Players' to the sub-theme 'Mechanisms'.

The coded data on advocacy were moved from the sub-theme 'Key Players' to the sub-theme 'The Journey of an Idea'.

The coded data on lack of management influence were moved from the sub-theme 'Key Players' to the sub-theme 'The Pecking Order'.

The coded data on sensitivity were moved from the sub-theme 'Key Players' to the sub-theme 'Dispositions and Emotions'.

The coded data on the 9-5 mentality and staff responsibility for voice were moved from the sub-theme 'Sugaring the Pill' to the sub-theme 'Key Players'.

The coded data on challenge, change and new ideas were moved from the sub-themes 'Dispositions and Emotions' and 'Tenure' to the sub-theme 'The Too Difficult Box'.

In the second stage the researcher reviewed his candidate themes by re-reading all of his transcripts to determine whether the candidate themes captured the meaning of the data set in relation to his research question. A number of key decisions were taken which affected 4 of the 5 candidate themes as follows:

In the candidate theme 'Barriers and Facilitators' the sub-theme 'Context and Culture' was split into two sub-themes 'Context' and 'Culture'.

In the candidate theme 'How Voice Moves Around', two sub-themes 'The Team' and 'The Top Table' were collapsed into one sub-theme 'The Journey of an Idea'.

In the candidate theme 'What Gets Heard' the original sub-themes 'Packaging' and 'Language' were collapsed into one sub-theme 'Sugaring the Pill', and a new sub-theme 'The Too Difficult Box' was added.

In the candidate theme 'Outcomes' the two sub-themes 'Voice Heard' and 'Voice Unheard' were collapsed so this candidate theme was no longer comprised of any sub-themes.

Once these steps had been completed, the researcher discussed the candidate themes at length with his principal supervisor. As a result of these decisions, discussions and movements, the researcher was left with a set of distinctive and coherent themes, and a strong sense of how they fitted together and told the story of the data. For a full description of these themes and sub themes see Table 5.1 in Chapter 5.

#### **3.7.2.5 Step 5: Defining And Naming Themes And Writing The Report**

This step involved the researcher engaging in an analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis told, generating clear definitions and names for each theme, and preparing to write the report. In qualitative analysis the process of analysing the data is writing about it: one cannot undertake the analysis and then write it up afterwards.

The researcher began by defining each theme and its focus and boundaries, and tried to define it in a few short sentences. Each of the five themes was subsequently renamed and this is described later on in this section.

Theme 1 was originally called 'Barriers and Facilitators' and captured the barriers and facilitators in place, which served to encourage and inhibit the flow

of voice around the organisation. These include contextual factors, climate, key players and important dispositions and emotional states.

Theme 2 was originally called 'Streams and Eddies' and captured what actually happened to voice as it began its journey. Mechanisms were in place to encourage voice but these were often ineffectual. Voice was helped along its way by how well connected the person was around the organisation, but sometimes it got stuck in certain places or it changed shape as it progressed.

Theme 3 was originally called 'What Gets Heard' and captured how certain types of voice were welcomed and heard more than others and had a better chance of surviving their journey. When voice was packaged carefully it was able to travel further, but critical, challenging and change-oriented voice often sank without trace.

Theme 4 was originally called 'Who Gets Heard' and captured the shared belief that some types of people were heard more readily than others irrespective of the message they were giving. Voice was welcomed differently according to the grade and tenure of the person, and certain biographical differences and individual dispositions impacted on how voice was heard.

Theme 5 was originally called 'The End of the Road' and this captured the overall impact of voice welcomed and not welcomed on organisations and the people who work for them. For individuals it captured how it felt when voice was heard or unheard, and what impact this had on their behaviour.

The researcher then chose extracts of coded and collated data to reflect the various facets of each theme and wrote a narrative around these extracts, which told the story of each theme in a plausible and persuasive way. In this process he

was careful to draw his extracts from across the data corpus rather than relying on only the more articulate participants.

When writing the report he adopted a semantic and illustrative approach, which was intended to let the extracts speak for themselves rather than making interpretative claims for these extracts. This did not mean simply paraphrasing the data but, instead, analysing the chosen data extracts in order to persuade the reader of what was interesting about them and why they were interesting. There had to be sufficient narrative around these extracts, so that if they were removed the narrative still made sense. The aim was to achieve a roughly equal split between narrative and data extracts.

When writing the report the researcher tried to connect his analysis to the research question, the guiding model of voice and silence, and the existing research literature. These reference points were threaded throughout the analysis but the researcher decided to present a fuller discussion of the analysis in a separate chapter (see Chapter 6), which discusses the findings of both the quantitative and qualitative studies (Study One and Study Two) of the current research project.

When undertaking the analysis and writing the report the researcher became increasingly aware of a recurring contradiction between the mechanisms the organisation had put in place to encourage voice and the shared belief that these processes were not particularly effective. The organisation was trying to encourage the flow of voice from its employees but these same people were describing how their voice simply didn't flow in the way intended. As a consequence of this apparent tension the researcher decided to reconceptualise voice as water, because water is essential for the survival and growth of living

organisms, and employee voice is believed to be important for organisations to survive and flourish. The flow of water in a river is not steady, predictable or continuous. Similarly, the flow of voice within organisations is unpredictable and subjected to many barriers and challenges. Water flows downstream and this mirrors the flow of voice in many organisations, where downstream flow is easier than voice flowing upwards. Some vessels and some people have a better chance of surviving the journey.

This reimagining of employee voice as water had implications for how the researcher named and, to a lesser extent, defined the five main themes and the sub-themes therein. These themes and sub-themes were re-named and redefined as follows (a full, detailed and analytical account of these themes is given in Chapter 5):

### **Theme 1: Dams And Aqueducts**

This theme captures the barriers and facilitators in place, which serve to encourage and inhibit the flow of voice around the organisation. These include contextual factors, climate, key players and important dispositions and emotional states. The central point of this theme is to highlight how the nature of the organisation, its employees and its psychological climate, serve to unwittingly challenge and undermine the efficacy of the mechanisms and processes that the organisation has put in place to encourage the flow of voice.

Theme 1: Dams and Aqueducts has four sub-themes:

1. Context (hierarchy, bureaucracy, size and complexity, member focus and busyness as usual)
2. Climate (organisational climate, departmental climate and national culture)

3. Key Players (the senior team, middle managers, staff and the old guard)
4. Dispositions and Emotions (sensitivity, fear and futility)

### **Theme 2: Flows And Eddies**

This theme captures what actually happens to voice as it begins its journey.

Mechanisms are in place to encourage voice, but these are often described as ineffectual. Voice is helped along its way by how well connected the person is around the organisation, but sometimes it gets stuck in certain places or it changes shape as it progresses. Like water, voice does not travel in a steady and predictable fashion around the organisation.

Theme 2: Flows and Eddies has three sub-themes:

1. Mechanisms (the flow of information, grand gestures, downward flow, pseudo consultation and a system is only as good as its people)
2. Connectedness (understanding the landscape, friends in high places and sidestepping the line)
3. The Journey of an Idea (warm in the team, filtering the message and room at the top table)

### **Theme 3: Barges And Rafts**

Certain types of voice are considered more buoyant than others and have a better chance of surviving their journey. When voice is packaged carefully it is able to travel further, but critical, challenging and change-oriented voice often sinks without trace.

Theme 3: Barges and Rafts has two sub-themes:

1. Sugaring the Pill (positivity, tuning in to your audience, learning the language, evidence based business cases and iron fists in velvet gloves)

2. The Too Difficult Box (new ideas and different thinking, challenge and change)

#### **Theme 4: Boatmen And Landlubbers**

The central organising concept for this theme is that some people are better equipped than others to survive the journey, irrespective of the vessel they are using. Voice is welcomed differently according to the grade and tenure of the person, and certain biographical differences and individual dispositions also impact on how voice is heard.

Theme 4: Boatmen and Landlubbers has three sub-themes:

1. The Pecking Order (senior managers, middle managers and junior grades)
2. Tenure (the newbies and the old guard)
3. It's Not Who You Know It's Who You Are (biographical differences and personal dispositions)

#### **Theme 5: All At Sea**

This final theme imagines the end point of the journey as the sea or, in organisational terms, the overall impact of voice on organisations and the people who work for them. It discusses the positive and negative impact of voice heard and unheard. For individuals it describes how it feels when voice is heard or unheard, and what impact this has on their behaviour.

Theme 5: All At Sea has no sub-themes and is organised according to whether voice is welcomed or not welcomed, and the impact this has on the organisation and the individual.



### **3.8 Validity And Reliability Issues**

The criteria of validity and reliability are useful and credible ways to measure the value of quantitative research but sit awkwardly with qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Goodman, 2008; Yardley, 2008). Study One of the current research project used Q Method, which has been referred to as a "qualiquantological" approach (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990), which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative element refers to the by-person factor analysis and the normal distribution curve of a Q Sort. The qualitative element refers to the researcher's abductive approach when undertaking the methodological transition of the data from Q Sorts to factor interpretations via factors and factor arrays (see Chapter 4).

Furthermore, Watts and Stenner (2012) argue that reliability and validity are not applicable to Q Method. When considering reliability, for example, these researchers argue that "repeated administration of a Q Sort to a single participant actually tells you more about the reliability, or otherwise, of the participant's viewpoint than it does about the reliability of the method" (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 51). When considering validity in Q Method, Brown (1980) states "the concept of validity has very little status (relative to Q Method) since there is no outside criterion for a person's own point of view" (Brown, 1980, p. 174-5).

As a consequence of the inappropriateness of validity and reliability as criteria for Q Method, but in the absence of an alternative, these criteria will be reinterpreted in ways that are more suited to the methodology to measure the quality of Study One, and these will be discussed in Section 3.8.1 below. Different criteria will be applied to measure the value of Study Two, the qualitative study,

and these will be discussed in Section 3.8.2 below. This section will conclude with an evaluation of the quality of the mixed methods strategy for the overall research project (see Section 3.8.3).

### **3.8.1 Measuring The Quality of Study One**

According to Webler, Danielson and Tuler (2009) the validity of Q Method can best be measured by the degree to which the research achieves what it sets out to achieve. The emphasis here is on the care with which the statements for the Q Survey were developed, and the extent to which participants were able to express their opinion.

The analysis of the pilot research for Study One produced 151 statements that were thought by the researcher to be relevant to the felt experience of voice and silence at work. To reduce this original number to a set of statements that was unambiguous and represented the themes and sub-themes from the qualitative study, the researcher checked the statements for ambiguity and duplication, and each statement had to make sense regardless of the context in which it was first uttered. Each theme and sub-theme was then checked to see if it had a reasonable representation of statements, and the overall set of statements was checked to ensure it was broadly representative of the opinions expressed in the pilot study and were not value-laden or biased towards the researcher's point of view.

The final list of 50 statements was then piloted with the researcher's original supervisory team along with a Q Method expert. As a result of this pilot study 10 statements were amended, either to enhance clarity or to remove negatively phrased statements, because disagreeing with such statements involved a double negative. The end result of this process was a set of statements that had coverage

of the domain and that had face validity for the participants because the statements used words that had been uttered by participants in the pilot study. Beyond the minor changes made to remove double negatives, the statements in the Q Survey were a largely faithful representation of the original utterances. In this way it was believed that participants in the Q Survey were able to express their opinions against statements with high face validity.

The validity of Q Method can also be compromised by researcher bias, although this methodology does not suffer from the social desirability effect that can be present in face-to-face interviews. Beyond the selection of statements, Webler, Danielson and Tuler (ibid) also say that validity can be threatened by the researcher's choice of who completes the Q Survey and how the data analysis is carried out.

The researcher selected a stratified probability sample of 80 working adults from UK organisations. This sample was deliberately chosen as the researcher believed that these people would represent a group that would be likely to have had experience of voice and silence at work and would potentially have something interesting to say on the subject. Eighty participants were chosen and this is somewhat in excess of the standard sample size for Q Method of between 40 and 60 participants. However, the researcher was essentially looking for two groups of 40 people, one group comprised of managers and the other comprised of those who did not manage others, because he believed that these two groups might have different beliefs about voice and silence at work. In the event, this expectation was only partly borne out by the data analysis which revealed that those who didn't manage others were over-represented in groups that believed that you needed to belong to the 'right group' to get heard at work.

The data were analysed using Centroid Factor Analysis because the researcher believed this approach was better suited to investigating the data in an abductive way, allowing him to explore its possibilities through factor rotation in order to find the best solution. He then applied the Varimax Rotation Method to orthogonally rotate the factors that had been identified through Centroid Factor Analysis. Factor Rotation was used because it allowed the researcher to 'map' the co-ordinates of the viewpoints of all the completed Q sorts against the extracted factors.

According to Haslam and McGarty (2003) the reliability of quantitative research can be thought of in terms of the extent to which its findings will be consistently reproduced. In other words, will consistent results be found from the same research study when repeated again? This refers to test-retest reliability and one can only speculate on the answer to this question, because the Q Sort for the current research project was carried out once. A completed Q Sort can be viewed as a snapshot of that participant's viewpoint at that particular point in time.

It is possible to return to the original group of participants at a later point and ask them to complete the same Q Survey again, but this was not done in the current research project because the participant group consisted of members of a database held by a market research company and it would have been difficult, and expensive, to get the same group of incentivised participants to complete the same survey twice.

Limited attempts have been made to measure the test-retest reliability of Q Method. For example, Akhater-Danesh, Baumann and Cordingley (2008) were able to claim correlation coefficients of 0.80 when they asked the same group of participants to complete the same Q Survey on a number of different occasions.

Generally speaking, however, test-retest reliability is rarely considered because of the aforementioned snapshot approach to gathering data from the people who take part.

### **3.8.2 Measuring The Quality Of Study Two**

As mentioned earlier in this section, the quality criteria of reliability and validity do not sit comfortably with qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Goodman, 2008; Yardley, 2008). This section will present more appropriate quality criteria for qualitative research and will judge Study Two of the current research project against these criteria. Braun and Clarke (ibid) note that the standard quality criteria for quantitative research are not always appropriate for qualitative work. These standard criteria are reliability, validity, generalisability and transferability.

According to these authors, reliability is wholly inappropriate for qualitative research because it means the same results should be found when the same measures are carried out by different researchers with different participants. The intention here is to minimise sources of error or bias, one of which is the researcher, yet the qualitative researcher inevitably influences the research through actively engaging with the participants. Things said at interview will depend on the questions asked and the participants' viewpoint, but will also depend on the presence of the researcher. Furthermore, in qualitative data analysis the researcher does not impassively allow the themes to emerge and take shape but, instead, actively shapes and crafts the analysis.

Validity is also problematic as a criterion for qualitative research because it questions whether the research shows what it claims to show or, more specifically, whether it captures reality in some way. This is a real challenge for

most qualitative research, which assumes the existence of multiple realities and truths. According to Braun and Clarke (ibid), of the main forms of validity applied to quantitative research, only ecological validity is really appropriate for qualitative work. The ecological validity of qualitative research can be assessed by the extent to which its findings can be generalised to other settings, by considering how closely the methods, materials and setting of the study reflect the world it is trying to examine. Qualitative research usually stands up well to the ecological validity criterion because it tries to gather data in ways that mirror real experience by talking to people about things of importance.

Braun and Clarke (ibid) propose that the most appropriate criteria to measure the quality of qualitative research are ecological validity, generalisability, transferability, member checking and triangulation. Study Two of the current research project will now be measured against these criteria.

### **3.8.2.1 Ecological Validity**

The ecological validity of Study Two, the qualitative study of the current research project, can be assessed by the extent to which its findings can be generalised to other settings, by considering how closely the methods, materials and setting of the study reflect the world it is trying to examine. Overall, the ecological validity of Study Two is considered to be sound as great care was taken to ensure the methods, materials and setting were as natural and close as possible to the conversations the participants might have in the workplace. However, it would be naive to think that the researcher did not influence the process in some quite significant ways, and these will be explored in more detail in Section 3.9 'Ethical Considerations' later in this chapter.

## **Methods**

The method chosen for Study Two was individual, face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Fifteen participants volunteered to take part in interviews, which took place between June and August 2015. The duration of these interviews ranged from 45 to 65 minutes. Individual interviews were chosen over focus group interviews because the area of enquiry was considered as being potentially too sensitive for group discussion. In-depth interviews were chosen in order to discover shared understandings of a particular group (DiCocco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In this case the group was a purposive sample of working adults, who worked at various levels for a large trade union and professional body who represent healthcare professionals in the UK.

The semi-structured format meant that the researcher could move beyond a set of pre-determined questions and prompt questions (see Appendix 5 Interview Questions for Qualitative Study) to explore different issues through the use of follow up questions that emerged as the interviews progressed. Face to face interviews were preferred to telephone interviews because they allowed the researcher to observe any non-verbal nuances that might reflect underlying emotions being experienced by participants.

Most of the meetings followed the four stages of rapport building in qualitative interviews (Spradley, 1979). The apprehension stage is characterised by uncertainty about the context and situation, and the researcher used open-ended, non-threatening questions to make the participants feel at ease, such as "Why were you interested in taking part in this research?" and "What is it like to work at (name of organisation)?" The exploration stage allowed the researcher to ask more in-depth questions, such as "What advice would you give your

manager to encourage you to speak out more at work?" and "How would you describe the culture of (name of organisation)?" In the co-operative stage, the participant experiences comfort and satisfaction and the researcher can ask more sensitive questions, such as "Is it safe to express yourself at work?" and "What happens if you're too challenging?" Finally the participative stage occurs when the participant begins to guide the researcher. This happened on a number of occasions, for example when Sandra began to talk about how younger people communicate with each other (Transcript 5, 490-507) and when Michael talked about Englishness and its influence on voice (Transcript 12, 562-596).

### **Materials**

The materials used for Study Two were a set of pre-determined and prompt questions and a small battery operated voice recorder. The interview questions were carefully constructed by the researcher and checked for coverage and clarity with his supervisory team. The questions were drawn explicitly from gaps in the current literature, from the guiding definition and model of voice (Morrison, 2011) and from the findings from Study One (see Appendix 5 Interview Questions for Qualitative Study).

The researcher recognises that "...the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data" (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). By adopting a discovery orientation the researcher aimed to approach this research with an open mind, although his own experiences of voice and silence at work played a part in formulating the research question in the first place, and helped to shape the research as it progressed.



The researcher accepts that he may have invoked certain responses to his questions by the words he used. For example, by asking interviewees to describe how it felt when they chose to remain silent, he invoked a response involving emotion. In other words, he may have helped the interviewees to construct the meanings they attributed to such experiences. Moreover, although all interviews used a standard set of questions, the semi-structured format meant that the researcher could ask follow-up and subsidiary questions, based on the responses given by the interviewees. It is possible that the researcher started to form the seeds of possible themes in his mind after the first couple of interviews, and his follow-up questions in later interviews may have been influenced by his search for information to support these fledgling themes.

### **Setting**

All interviews took place in private meeting rooms at the headquarters of the host organisation. All the participants worked in this building. The researcher was given permission to book these meeting rooms and to arrange the interviews directly with the participants. In this way it was hoped that the interviewees felt comfortable in the setting, knowing that their attendance at the interviews had been kept as confidential as possible. The researcher had never met any of the participants before these interviews, except one participant who had attended a training course, which the researcher had led around 3 years earlier.

### **3.8.2.2 Generalisability**

Generalisability refers to the extent to which the findings from Study Two can be assumed to hold for other populations beyond the sample of participants who took part in the research. Ecological validity can contribute to this, as the data

were gathered in a way that was relatively meaningful to real life. However, an interview with a researcher is not an everyday event so it must be conceded that, in spite of the researcher's best efforts, the ecological validity of Study Two was compromised by the very nature of the research conducted and the possible power differences present in the meeting room (see Section 3.9 below).

Braun and Clarke (*ibid*) refer to horizontal generalisability, which is an important criterion for this research and means the extent to which research findings can be generalised across different organisations and different cultures. Here the research runs into some difficulty because of the influence of organisational and departmental climate on attitudes to voice and silence. It is clear from the Thematic Analysis detailed in Chapter 5, that participants' experiences of voice and silence were influenced by the climate of the organisation and the department they worked for. In fact, climate is drawn out as a separate sub-theme under Theme 1: Dams and Aqueducts. In truth, this is no different from a great deal of empirical research into voice and silence at work, much of which has taken place in specific organisational settings and, as such, represent organisational case studies.

What sets Study Two apart from much of the extant research is that it was set in a knowledge intensive work environment based in the UK, rather than in US work organisations, often with low skill, routinised and low status roles in industries with notoriously transient workforces. What this means is that one can start to generalise findings from the current research project into other similar organisations in the UK, albeit tentatively because of the aforementioned influence of climate. The generalisability of Study Two can be thought to be reasonably robust, although the impact of climate is clearly significant.

### **3.8.2.3 Transferability**

Transferability is another important criterion for measuring the quality of qualitative research and is closely linked to generalisability, because it means the extent to which findings can be transferred to other groups of people and contexts. The difference here is that the onus for transferability is placed on the reader, who has to decide whether their circumstances are similar enough to the research setting that they can safely transfer the findings to their own situation. The researcher's responsibility in all of this is to describe the context, participants and circumstances of the research in enough detail so that the reader can make a properly informed decision about its relevance to their circumstances. The transferability of Study Two is high because of the level of detail given about the context, participants and circumstances of the research that took place.

### **3.8.2.4 Member Checking**

Member checking involves checking the analysis of the data with the participants who took part in the research. This can be undertaken by presenting a report of the findings, and asking the participants to comment on its trustworthiness and authenticity. It is not clear how much Study Two engaged in member checking, beyond asking participants to comment on the accuracy of the interview transcripts. This is because the research was sponsored by the Director of Human Resources of the host organisation, and the researcher was simply asked to submit an executive summary of the data analysis to the sponsor. Although the sponsor expressed interest in the analysis, the researcher did not have access to the original participants once the research had been concluded. Thus, the

researcher is currently unaware of what happened to the executive summary and whether it was disseminated to the participants or to the wider organisation.

### **3.8.2.5 Triangulation**

Triangulation involves using two or more methods of data collection to study the same phenomenon, and is at the heart of good mixed methods research. The current research project adopted an authentic sequential mixed methods strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One, which used Q Method, informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, which used Semantic Inductive Thematic Analysis, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in different ways.

As an illustration of this, the main findings from Study One, the quantitative study, were as follows:

- 'Older workers with longer employment service were more positive and optimistic about voice'. Participants in Study Two were asked what types of people got listened to in their workplace and what the barriers were to giving voice. Long servers were frequently cited as having more voice, and also as barriers to the expression of voice, particularly change-oriented voice.
- 'Younger women with less employment service were more likely to remain silent'. Participants in Study Two were asked about how women were heard and whether everyone had an equal chance to be heard. Gender did not seem to be an issue, but younger and newer staff were often thought to be marginalised.

- 'Newer staff thought their voice wouldn't be heard, particularly if their views were different, and would tend to keep their thoughts to themselves and conform to the majority view, perhaps because their status in the workplace was less secure'. Participants in Study Two were asked what types of people got listened to at work and what they did if they thought differently to those around them. Newer staff were believed to have less voice and new ideas and different thinking were not welcomed as they were thought to be too challenging.
- 'Managers gave voice more readily than staff and were less open to input from below'. Participants in Study Two were asked what types of people got listened to at work, and senior managers (but not middle managers) were often cited as having more voice. Participants were also asked what advice they would give to their managers to encourage them to speak out more at work and greater openness was one of the clear recommendations.
- 'Managers downgraded the value of staff input as they didn't want to risk wasting resources by pursuing these contributions'. Participants in Study Two were asked whether managers were interested in what they had to say and, if not, why not. There was a general consensus of opinion that managers expressed interest in employee voice but that this was rarely translated into action by advocating this voice outside of the team.

Triangulation can be said to be good across the current research project as the qualitative study asked questions at interview drawn directly from the quantitative study, although both studies used different participants.

### **3.8.3 Measuring The Quality Of The Overall Research Project**

Good mixed methods research does not arbitrarily bolt together quantitative and qualitative research. The current research project adopted an authentic sequential mixed methods strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One, which used Q Method, informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, which used Semantic Inductive Thematic Analysis, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in different ways. It is important, therefore, to consider the quality of the overall mixed methods strategy. The mixed methods approach used for the overall research project will be measured against the Open-Ended, Flexible Quality Principles espoused by Yardley (2008), which are sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance.

#### **3.8.3.1 Sensitivity To Context**

The current research project demonstrated sensitivity to context by positioning the research within the relevant theoretical and empirical literature. It was also sensitive to the perspectives of participants by asking open-ended questions, which encouraged participants to talk about issues of importance to them. It was also sensitive to ethical issues (see Section 3.9 below) and was sensitive to the data by, as far as possible, being open to alternative interpretations of the data and sitting with any inconsistencies that were apparent.

#### **3.8.3.2 Commitment And Rigour**

The current research project demonstrated commitment and rigour by the thoroughness of the data collection. Quantitative data were collected from 80 participants who took part in the Q Study. This sample size went beyond the

usual requirements for between 40 and 60 participants. Qualitative data were collected systematically from 15 participants for the Thematic Analysis, and data collection stopped when it had reached saturation point. Data from both studies were analysed and interpreted competently and carefully, and the chosen methodologies were explained and justified. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis the researcher engaged deeply and authentically in the data.

### **3.8.3.3 Transparency And Coherence**

The current research project demonstrated transparency and coherence by presenting a persuasive and convincing interpretation of the data and by showing an explicit fit between the research question, the theoretical framework and the methods used for data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the researcher presented a full and transparent account of how the data were collected, factor analysed, coded and interpreted, and this was intended to help the reader decide on the transferability of his findings. The researcher has also been candid throughout about how he and his choice of methods helped to shape the research.

### **3.8.3.4 Impact And Importance**

The current research project demonstrated impact and importance through its practical impact for practitioners in the fields of occupational psychology, human resource management and communications. It had theoretical impact by increasing understanding of voice and silence at work, and the conditions under which people will speak out or remain silent. It also had socio-cultural impact by helping organisations to properly encourage the voice of their employees and, by doing so, helping to improve the experience and wellbeing of people at work.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

This research adhered to the principles embodied in the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (Oates, Kwiatkowski & Morrison, 2010). This code posits four core principles of ethical research: respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, scientific value, social responsibility and maximising benefit and minimising harm.

This research respected the autonomy and dignity of persons by respecting individual, cultural and role differences in participants. To this end the researcher fully explained the nature of the research to all participants and accepted their right to withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice. Full consent was sought and obtained from all participants and there was no attempt at influencing or coercing people into signing up for the research. The participants in Study One, the quantitative study, were all incentivised by Respondi for taking part. Respondi is a consumer and market research company that creates direct relationships with consumers for the market research and marketing industries. The incentive was in the form of 'loyalty points', which were collected by survey respondents. These loyalty points are given routinely by Respondi to their consumer groups whenever they take part in market research of any kind, so no special incentive was given that might have influenced the participants to engage in the research. The participants in Study Two all worked for the same organisation, and all volunteered to take part in the research without incentives.

All participants were given full information about the research design and procedures in order that they could make informed decisions about whether to take part or not (see Appendix 7 Consent to Participate in a Quantitative



Research Study and Appendix 4 Consent to Participate in a Qualitative Research Study) and all offered their free and full consent to take part in the research.

Participants in the on-line Q Survey for the quantitative study were not given the unabridged versions of these documents but, instead, were shown survey instructions (see Appendix 2 PoetQ Survey Instructions for On-Line Q Survey) that gave enough details about the nature of the research and their right to withdraw for them to be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to take part. All data were gathered, stored and destroyed in line with the Data Protection Act (1998). The researcher also respected the privacy and anonymity of all participants and was clear on issues of confidentiality, ensuring that data collected were properly anonymised and could not be traced back to the originator.

This research subscribed to the principle of scientific value as it was carefully and rigorously designed according to sound principles of good research design. It used a Mixed Methods design in order to reflect the multi-dimensional nature of voice and silence at work. Q Method and Thematic Analysis were carefully chosen, against clear criteria, as the preferred methodological approaches for the quantitative and qualitative studies respectively. The studies were carried out by a researcher who is an occupational psychologist with significant experience of occupational psychology issues, supervised by two chartered psychologists with extensive experience of supervising research at doctorate level.

This research conformed to the principle of social responsibility because it investigated the experience and nature of employee voice and silence, the latter of which is generally assumed to be a negative experience by most commentators. This research has thrown light on the nature of this phenomenon

in order to help organisations to properly encourage involvement and voice in their employees. In other words, this research was designed to help improve the experience and wellbeing of people at work.

This research reflected the principle of maximising benefit and minimising harm by not exposing participants to the risk of harm, by recognising and minimising power differences between researcher and participants and by undertaking beneficial research, which should contribute to the wellbeing of workers and improved relationships in the workplace.

Power differences between the researcher and participants were less of an issue for the quantitative study (although the researcher did set the questions for the Q Survey) but are worth commenting on for the qualitative interviews that were undertaken as the pilot for Study One and as the chosen methodology for Study Two. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), there are a number of power characteristics of the interview, which are often neglected when considering the ethics of qualitative research.

The asymmetrical power relation of the interview refers to how the researcher has scientific competence and defines the interview situation by setting the topic, asking the questions, following up on the answers and ending the conversation. This rings true for the interviews in the current research project. The researcher took great care in devising the questions, especially for Study Two, and did not allow the participants to set the agenda, except for asking them if there was anything else they wished to talk about that hadn't been covered. The researcher also presented himself as an occupational psychologist and this could have exacerbated the power differences for some participants. The researcher was an outsider to the organisation, although he had undertaken consultancy work

there in the past. The organisation in question is used to bringing in external expertise to address some of its issues so it is reasonable to imagine that some participants saw the researcher as an external expert, brought in to investigate the problem of voice and silence, in spite of his clear assertions that he was conducting the interviews for his thesis.

There were other ethical challenges present in the interviews and their interpretation. For instance, the questioning was invariably one-way and participants rarely questioned the researcher. The interviews were also not ends in themselves, unlike good conversations, as the researcher was seeking descriptions of experiences, which he could then interpret according to his research interests. Finally the researcher held a monopoly of interpretation over the participants' statements, and this was not addressed by member checking (see Section 3.8.2.4 above).

### **3.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a full and critical account of the research methodology employed across the current research project. It described and justified the choice of a Critical Realist and pragmatic approach to the research question. It gave a full and detailed account of what happened across the three phases of the research (the pilot interviews and Q Method for Study One and the Thematic Analysis of one to one interviews for Study Two). It then went on to describe the overall sampling strategy, giving details of the three samples used at different points in the research.

A Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods design was used for this research project and this was explained and justified. The issues and controversies around mixed methods research were critically explored and the lack of

penetration of this methodology in behavioural science, especially occupational psychology, was noted. The chapter went on to describe and justify the use of Q Method and Thematic Analysis in the current research project, and then gave a detailed account of how the data were gathered and analysed at the various stages of Study One and Study Two.

A detailed and critical account of the quality of the current research project was then given. It was noted that validity and reliability were not considered particularly appropriate measures for Q Method but the researcher, nevertheless, made some statements about them. There were some issues around the reliability of the Q Study, but its validity was believed to be acceptable because of the care taken in forming the statements for the Q Survey, because of the choice of participants, and because of the choice of the method for data analysis.

The qualitative research for Study Two was measured against more appropriate criteria and it was noted that its ecological validity was sound, its generalisability was reasonably robust and its transferability was high. It was noted that member checking was compromised by the requirements of the organisation's sponsor, but that triangulation was strong.

The overall quality of the mixed methods research for the current research project was then measured against different and more appropriate criteria. The research project scored well in terms of its sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and its impact and importance.

The chapter concluded with a critical account of the ethical issues surrounding the current research project. Respect for the autonomy and dignity of participants had been upheld, and the research was believed to demonstrate

good scientific value with a good level of social responsibility. The research scored generally well on how it maximised benefit and minimised harm for the participants, but the researcher noted how power differences could have impacted on the qualitative interviews that were carried out in both studies of the current research project.

## **Chapter 4: Q Method**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes in detail the analysis of the data from 80 participants who were asked to rank order a set of 50 statements about voice and silence at work in whichever way they chose. The main research question addressed by the current research project was "How do employees talk about voice and under what conditions will they give voice or remain silent?" The main objective of this part of the research project (Study One) was to investigate whether there were communities of opinion and shared viewpoints about the experience of voice and silence at work, and the conditions under which people would give voice or keep quiet. The findings from Study One were anticipated to be of interest in their own right but were also explored further by Study Two, the qualitative study, which addressed the main research question and a number of subsidiary questions which were drawn from gaps in the current literature and from the findings from Study One.

Chapter 3 described Study One in detail: the methodology chosen, the sampling strategy used, how the Q Set was designed and the procedure that was followed when participants completed the Q Survey. The current chapter will explore in depth the five factors that were extracted from the data analysis, by detailing the three methodological transitions that the researcher applied, which moved the data from Q Sorts to factor interpretations.

### **4.2 Results**

Eighty participants completed the on-line survey between 25th and 29th November 2013. In keeping with traditional reporting customs in Q Method

these participants will hereafter be known as Q sorts. This section will describe, in depth, three methodological transitions that were applied to the data:

- The transition from Q sorts to factors
- The transition from factors to factor arrays
- The transition from factor arrays to factor interpretations

This will provide a full account of how the researcher explored the patterns of agreement and disagreement between Q sorts and the way they ranked the 50 statements, how he examined these shared viewpoints and how he applied a holistic inspection of this data to fully interpret and explain the stories behind these viewpoints.

#### **4.2.1 The Transition from Q Sorts to Factors**

Q Method involves, in the first instance, collecting data from participants in the form of Q sorts and then carrying out a by-person factor analysis of these Q sorts. Each person who completed the study was asked to state how much, within the confines of a 9-point distribution, they agreed or disagreed with each of the 50 statements that comprised the study. Conducting a by-person factor analysis on these data meant the researcher could examine the level of agreement between groups of people based on how they had organised these statements. The factors that were extracted in this way helped identify groups of people who held similar views about voice and silence at work.

A total of 80 Q sorts were intercorrelated and factor-analysed using PQMethod Version 2.33, a software package specifically designed for Q Method data analysis (available at <http://schmolk.userweb.mwn.de/qmethod/>). All data were imported direct from the PoetQ study site into PQMethod Version 2.33. The researcher used Centroid Factor Analysis, rather than Principle Components

Analysis, to factor-analyse his data because it was better suited to investigating the data in an abductive way, allowing him to explore its possibilities through factor rotation in order to find the best solution. According to Watts and Stenner (2012) the two methods will produce similar results, but most Q Methodologists believe that Centroid Factor Analysis is a genuinely factor analytic approach which is more likely to offer a more meaningful solution and interpretation of the data.

The researcher then used PQMethod to apply the Varimax Rotation Method to orthogonally rotate the factors that had been identified through Centroid Factor Analysis. Factor Rotation was used because it allowed the researcher to 'map' the co-ordinates of the viewpoints of all the Q sorts against the extracted factors. Five factors were extracted and rotated which, when combined, were able to explain 48% of the common variance in this study. Common variance means the proportion of meaning and variability held in common by the group of 80 Q sorts.

Fifty-one of the 80 Q sorts were 'Defining Q Sorts' which meant they loaded significantly on one or other of these 5 factors. Table 4.1 (below) shows how each of the 80 Q sorts loaded onto each of the 5 rotated factors that were extracted from the data. PQ Method identified these defining Q Sorts and automatically marked them with an X. Eigenvalues and Variance are shown at the foot of the table.



**Table 4.1: Rotated Factor Loadings for Q Sorts**

| Q Sort      | Factors |         |         |         |         |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|             | 1       | 2       | 3       | 4       | 5       |
| 1 ASHRV638  | -0.1477 | 0.2774  | 0.7063X | 0.2574  | 0.0251  |
| 2 ISRPOWAP  | 0.3028  | 0.2904  | 0.5148X | 0.1009  | 0.1572  |
| 3 R7LZT0J1  | 0.6091X | -0.0764 | 0.2248  | 0.1452  | 0.3600  |
| 4 LQIDHRT3  | 0.7713X | 0.1335  | 0.0244  | 0.2016  | -0.0747 |
| 5 BYPG7KTJ  | 0.0952  | 0.0733  | 0.6722X | 0.0397  | 0.1049  |
| 6 SSGIQ2KB  | 0.2526  | 0.3635  | 0.3651  | 0.2109  | 0.1537  |
| 7 AFVNRKUJH | 0.5355  | -0.1502 | -0.1154 | 0.4769  | 0.1296  |
| 8 0J239VMP  | 0.2860  | 0.0107  | 0.1434  | -0.0640 | 0.4914X |
| 9 HMUQZEIO  | 0.2432  | 0.5031X | -0.0342 | 0.3604  | 0.0432  |
| 10 SARYD6BT | 0.6949X | -0.0370 | 0.0711  | 0.2779  | -0.0579 |
| 11 BBHTXUW8 | 0.0815  | 0.6360X | -0.0251 | 0.0559  | -0.1795 |
| 12 H6XDN0FL | -0.1644 | 0.5109  | 0.1470  | 0.2617  | -0.3760 |
| 13 AHAVVYMV | 0.3068  | 0.4190  | 0.1615  | -0.0738 | 0.0684  |
| 14 URYK2SOV | -0.1525 | 0.0636  | -0.0135 | 0.0896  | -0.1534 |
| 15 VBMVTAEC | -0.1237 | 0.5049  | 0.2226  | 0.5371  | 0.0599  |
| 16 AXVHUTPK | 0.7877X | 0.0363  | -0.2661 | 0.0147  | 0.0215  |
| 17 I91PVNYO | 0.1783  | -0.0212 | 0.6029X | -0.0504 | -0.0954 |
| 18 8MDYVQCT | 0.1401  | 0.6477X | 0.1132  | -0.1014 | -0.2504 |
| 19 WMBR7VEU | 0.4981  | -0.0173 | 0.4591  | 0.0116  | 0.1642  |
| 20 PKQVD0J8 | 0.4995  | 0.0703  | 0.1235  | 0.0885  | -0.2385 |
| 21 LUIREDZZ | 0.0030  | 0.6272X | 0.5635  | -0.0137 | 0.0294  |
| 22 COAPSXEG | 0.6909X | 0.1717  | 0.1239  | 0.1813  | -0.1348 |
| 23 PXQM60TH | -0.1201 | 0.4214  | 0.5933X | 0.0898  | -0.0817 |
| 24 T9HVPXAF | 0.5447X | 0.3813  | 0.1231  | 0.1226  | -0.2002 |
| 25 SIPBCGVI | 0.7525X | -0.0387 | 0.0109  | 0.0502  | 0.0776  |
| 26 ZVN238MX | 0.4070  | 0.4205  | 0.3731  | 0.1507  | -0.1483 |
| 27 YBKMST5V | 0.8308X | -0.1212 | 0.1349  | 0.0348  | 0.2042  |
| 28 ZS0010X3 | -0.4214 | 0.5635X | 0.0805  | -0.0363 | 0.2247  |
| 29 3QFBASIG | 0.6289X | 0.0673  | 0.1981  | 0.3730  | 0.0256  |
| 30 PK0AJRYC | 0.2995  | 0.1526  | 0.6568X | 0.1255  | -0.0855 |
| 31 27F8QMOS | 0.2968  | 0.2562  | 0.2503  | 0.3569  | 0.2891  |
| 32 JHMIQ8FI | 0.6039X | 0.1629  | -0.0952 | 0.2791  | -0.0509 |
| 33 ZRES6F2T | 0.1021  | 0.7169X | 0.2070  | -0.1624 | 0.2225  |
| 34 LKAEBQHU | -0.3092 | 0.6604X | 0.2119  | 0.0454  | -0.0944 |
| 35 IWYUW2SE | 0.3056  | 0.4288  | -0.0945 | 0.3869  | -0.3312 |
| 36 E6JQW5OK | 0.6758X | 0.0432  | 0.1163  | 0.1314  | -0.0590 |
| 37 Z14YH5DQ | 0.7030X | -0.2184 | 0.1139  | 0.1224  | 0.1641  |
| 38 AXCIHBDS | 0.4234  | -0.1660 | 0.1945  | 0.2912  | -0.1911 |
| 39 YDZW6JAM | -0.5064 | 0.4981  | 0.3037  | -0.0150 | 0.0668  |
| 40 WISFBA2H | 0.7236X | -0.2295 | 0.0976  | 0.0539  | 0.0017  |
| 41 GLPA41VC | 0.4885  | -0.1367 | 0.0447  | 0.2146  | 0.2727  |
| 42 JWRCX1PO | 0.7138X | 0.0740  | 0.1111  | 0.0522  | 0.1201  |
| 43 CAS2C0OM | 0.2809  | 0.3998  | -0.0441 | 0.0783  | -0.0132 |
| 44 SEJV72YA | 0.1998  | 0.1766  | 0.1662  | 0.4860X | -0.1206 |
| 45 DGFVZR9X | 0.1597  | -0.0157 | 0.0012  | -0.0082 | 0.2512  |
| 46 I2ZSXOUE | 0.3350  | 0.3669  | 0.1652  | 0.1079  | 0.1066  |
| 47 7EKUXYDA | 0.6551X | -0.3615 | 0.0557  | 0.0685  | -0.0411 |
| 48 DLPCL7JS | 0.4235X | -0.0354 | 0.1013  | -0.1549 | 0.1375  |

|                     |             |            |            |            |            |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 49 KQTMOQH7         | 0.5793X     | 0.0716     | 0.1330     | 0.0600     | -0.1175    |
| 50 FORIL2E3         | 0.7302X     | -0.0379    | 0.2902     | 0.0065     | 0.2389     |
| 51 ZR8XUAMG         | 0.3366      | 0.2793     | 0.3502     | 0.1860     | 0.1519     |
| 52 BFVSN52Q         | 0.5772X     | -0.2824    | 0.2573     | 0.0760     | 0.3155     |
| 53 SWKKBKQRC        | 0.4563      | -0.2256    | 0.3788     | -0.2355    | -0.0070    |
| 54 BREVYXS9         | -0.1168     | 0.5645X    | -0.0578    | 0.0691     | 0.0116     |
| 55 NU3YH17Z         | 0.7799X     | -0.2216    | 0.1021     | -0.0310    | -0.0582    |
| 56 S5RDONQO         | 0.4925X     | 0.2721     | 0.1488     | 0.1105     | -0.0094    |
| 57 ZCN219X8         | 0.4551      | 0.0901     | 0.3072     | 0.2290     | 0.1274     |
| 58 J6DFCM1H         | 0.0667      | 0.3977     | 0.0309     | 0.0199     | -0.3186    |
| 59 NSM2I6WK         | -0.1778     | 0.7041X    | 0.0991     | 0.0228     | -0.1608    |
| 60 TYOQ63SX         | -0.5792X    | 0.5461     | 0.0669     | 0.0625     | -0.0534    |
| 61 NEAWWYPU         | 0.7423X     | -0.0912    | 0.0582     | -0.0679    | -0.0266    |
| 62 YB9KPU7K         | 0.5188      | 0.2803     | 0.3942     | 0.1156     | 0.1466     |
| 63 UCTDMGK6         | 0.3776      | 0.0108     | -0.0591    | 0.1827     | 0.4125     |
| 64 S9MBFR06         | -0.1107     | 0.6951X    | 0.0787     | 0.2361     | -0.0333    |
| 65 VTUROVW6         | 0.3201      | 0.2081     | 0.2881     | 0.0411     | -0.0259    |
| 66 JLVEDUJT         | 0.5137      | -0.3999    | 0.2920     | 0.2445     | 0.0645     |
| 67 RKQTJSAY         | -0.5582     | 0.5246     | 0.2070     | 0.0545     | -0.1637    |
| 68 LS06LPYC         | 0.2742      | 0.0471     | 0.0410     | 0.5239X    | 0.1310     |
| 69 EJOAWQDN         | 0.5019X     | 0.1618     | 0.0381     | 0.2962     | 0.0221     |
| 70 QTHYJGCO         | 0.0437      | 0.3155     | 0.1479     | 0.3637     | -0.0283    |
| 71 NJZ72QWP         | 0.2395      | 0.5543X    | 0.3689     | -0.1273    | -0.1595    |
| 72 UH97JNVE         | 0.0837      | -0.1667    | 0.2290     | 0.2882     | -0.0294    |
| 73 BS5PXYCQ         | -0.2927     | 0.6888X    | -0.0201    | 0.0607     | 0.1610     |
| 74 IOMKUOCT         | -0.2690     | 0.2805     | 0.3279     | -0.0319    | -0.0721    |
| 75 TAX9YRCG         | 0.7294X     | 0.2397     | 0.0242     | -0.0027    | 0.0240     |
| 76 QSVWD7IO         | 0.6533X     | -0.2917    | -0.1192    | 0.1810     | 0.2634     |
| 77 NOH2AHMI         | 0.3780      | 0.1448     | -0.0028    | -0.0182    | -0.4612X   |
| 78 9EBOXTCP         | 0.7652X     | -0.1447    | 0.0298     | 0.1037     | 0.2379     |
| 79 M85LE6OB         | 0.5922X     | -0.1091    | 0.2166     | 0.3453     | 0.1358     |
| 80 EYAUJCVW         | -0.1660     | 0.5521X    | 0.2357     | -0.0352    | 0.1888     |
| <b>Eigenvalue</b>   | <b>17.6</b> | <b>9.6</b> | <b>5.6</b> | <b>3.2</b> | <b>2.4</b> |
| <b>Variance (%)</b> | <b>22</b>   | <b>12</b>  | <b>7</b>   | <b>4</b>   | <b>3</b>   |

Eigenvalues show how much of the variance in a particular factor is common variance that is accounted for by the factor. The general rule is to keep factors with Eigenvalues of 1.0 or more as they are statistically significant, and this is known as the Kaiser-Guttman Criterion (Watts & Stenner, p.106). This cut-off point is agreed upon because a factor with an Eigenvalue of less than 1.0 accounts for less variance than a single Q Sort. However, as Eigenvalues are determined, in part, by the number of Q sorts, they are less helpful in Q studies

with large numbers of participants. They can also lead to too many factors being extracted.

There is no single answer to how many factors a study should have in Q Method. Brown (1980) suggests that the researcher applies experience and that 7 is generally suitable, but that the researcher must rely on their own feel and experience. As the researcher in the current study was new to Q Method he could not rely on his experience or feel, so decided instead to use a scree test as it used Eigenvalues to show all significant factors, but he didn't arbitrarily retain all factors with an Eigenvalue of 1.0 or more. The researcher looked at the point at which the line on the scree plot changed shape and established his cut-off point at 5 factors.

He then checked his initial decision against the variance values for each of the five factors to see whether the cut-off point had been located correctly.

According to Watts and Stenner (*ibid*) the researcher should hope that a minimum of 35-40% of common variance is explained by the extracted factors. Overall, 48% of the common variance in the current research was explained by the 5 rotated factors, and 51 of the 80 Q sorts loaded significantly on to at least one of these factors. The Q sorts that loaded significantly on to a particular factor did so because they showed a similar sorting pattern, which indicated that they might demonstrate similar viewpoints about the issue in question. The researcher was thus satisfied that the right number of factors had been extracted from the data.

The next transition involved understanding more about the nature of the factors that were highlighted as a result of factor analysis.

#### **4.2.2 The Transition from Factors to Factor Arrays**

The second transition involved the researcher exploring the meaning of the identified factors by attempting to reproduce the Q Sort Grid for each of the 5 factors. This reproduction is known as a factor array. A factor is a shared viewpoint and a factor array is an ideal-typical Q sort for each factor. Factor arrays place the most representative items in rank order according to the views of those Q sorts who loaded significantly onto that factor. In other words, by looking at the defining Q sorts for each factor, then weighting their responses according to how significantly each Q sort loaded on to that factor, the researcher was able to look at a single, ideal-typical Q sort that best exemplified the factor in question. Table 4.2 (below) is a summary of how each of the 50 Q statements loaded on to each of the 5 factors. The values in the right-hand columns describe where each statement would sit against each factor in an ideal-typical Q sort. The Q Sort Matrix that was used in this study was devised using a 9-point distribution, from -4 to +4, where -4 is 'agree least' and +4 is 'agree most' (see Figure 3.1 in Chapter 3, p. 142). This means that those statements that load on to a factor at +4 or -4 are the strongest representatives of that factor.

**Table 4.2: Factor Arrays for the Five Factors**

|  | Factor Arrays |    |    |    |    |
|--|---------------|----|----|----|----|
|  | 1             | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 1 You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work    | -1            | 2  | 2  | 0  | 2  |
| 2 It's easy to share information where I work                                  | 0             | -4 | 1  | -1 | 0  |
| 3 If I have a good idea at work I know what to do with it                      | 1             | -1 | 0  | 0  | 1  |
| 4 Managers will make better decisions if they take staff opinions on board     | 3             | 2  | 3  | -1 | 4  |
| 5 I can be myself at work  | 1             | -3 | -1 | 0  | 1  |
| 6 People should discuss things face to face more often at work                 | 2             | 2  | 1  | 2  | 3  |
| 7 It's easier to say what you think if you're a manager                        | -1            | 0  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
| 8 It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told        | 0             | 2  | 4  | 1  | -2 |
| 9 Messages can easily get distorted where I work                               | -2            | 3  | 0  | 2  | -2 |
| 10 Choosing to stay silent can send out a powerful message                     | -3            | -2 | -1 | -2 | 0  |
| 11 People where I work are interested in what you're thinking                  | 0             | -1 | 1  | -1 | 0  |
| 12 It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said            | 4             | 4  | 3  | 4  | -2 |
| 13 If you prefer to keep quiet at work that's up to you                        | -1            | 0  | 1  | 1  | -3 |
| 14 I will keep quiet at work if I think I don't know enough about the subject  | -1            | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  |
| 15 It's really frustrating to have to keep quiet about things at work          | -1            | 1  | 0  | -4 | -4 |
| 16 I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work                              | 4             | 1  | -3 | 1  | 1  |
| 17 There is an open style of management where I work                           | 0             | -4 | -2 | 3  | 1  |
| 18 My manager likes hearing my ideas   | 0             | -2 | 0  | -1 | 1  |
| 19 I feel that my opinion matters at work                                      | 3             | -1 | -1 | 0  | 0  |
| 20 You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind      | -1            | 1  | 4  | -4 | 3  |
| 21 I can ask my manager about anything I want                                  | 0             | -3 | -1 | 2  | -1 |
| 22 I speak up at work if I feel strongly enough about something                | 2             | 3  | 0  | 3  | -1 |
| 23 We talk about the same problems all the time at work without resolving them | -2            | 4  | -1 | -2 | -3 |
| 24 Keeping quiet is a good way to protect yourself at work                     | -2            | 1  | -1 | -2 | 1  |
| 25 It feels completely natural to say what I think at work                     | 3             | -1 | -1 | -1 | 0  |
| 26 Creativity is valued where I work   | 2             | -2 | 0  | -2 | 2  |
| 27 Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful                    | 0             | 0  | -1 | 0  | -4 |

|   |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| 28 You get credit for your ideas and suggestions where I work                             | 1  | -3 | -2 | -3 | 0  |
| 29 There are always people who will see the downside<br>in something                      | 0  | 3  | 2  | 4  | 2  |
| 30 It's boring if you can't share your ideas at work                                      | 0  | 1  | 0  | 2  | -2 |
| 31 We are encouraged to learn from each other where I work                                | 3  | -1 | 2  | -2 | 0  |
| 32 It takes more than words to change people's attitudes                                  | 1  | 3  | 1  | 0  | -2 |
| 33 It's hard to speak up at work if your views are different                              | -2 | 0  | 1  | -2 | -3 |
| 34 Everyone at work has something useful to say: it doesn't<br>matter who they are        | 2  | 0  | 2  | 0  | -1 |
| 35 If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get<br>away with murder          | -1 | 1  | -3 | 1  | 0  |
| 36 I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can                                      | -2 | 0  | 3  | 3  | 2  |
| 37 Speaking your mind at work will help people to understand<br>your situation            | 2  | 0  | 1  | 1  | -1 |
| 38 Where I work there is always someone to talk to if you<br>need to                      | 2  | -2 | 0  | 2  | -2 |
| 39 People should just get on with their jobs and not worry<br>about giving their opinions | -4 | -2 | -4 | -1 | 3  |
| 40 If you speak up at work you'll be labelled as a troublemaker                           | -3 | 2  | -3 | -4 | -1 |
| 41 Nobody gains anything from complaining at work   | -3 | -1 | -3 | -3 | -1 |
| 42 Speaking your mind at work could damage your career                                    | -2 | 1  | 1  | -1 | -1 |
| 43 I feel empowered when I speak my mind at work  | 1  | -1 | 0  | -1 | 0  |
| 44 Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss                                 | -4 | -1 | -4 | -3 | -1 |
| 45 You need to be outgoing and open to speak up at work                                   | -1 | 0  | -2 | 0  | 3  |
| 46 My organisation takes action on what we say  | 0  | -2 | -2 | 1  | 4  |
| 47 I tend to keep quiet for an easy life  | -3 | 0  | 0  | 2  | 2  |
| 48 If you've got something to say at work then say it                                     | 1  | 0  | -2 | -1 | 2  |
| 49 There are lots of ways I can have my say at work                                       | 1  | -3 | -2 | 0  | 0  |
| 50 Bottling things up at work is bad for your health                                      | 1  | 2  | 2  | -1 | -3 |

Table 4.2 gives an indication of which Q statements sat against which factors in an ideal-typical Q sort. For example, Factor 1 had the following statements ranked at +4 (agree most):

*12. It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said*

*16. I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work*

The same factor had the following statements ranked at -4 (agree least):

*39. People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions*

*44. Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss*

From these four statements the researcher was able to get a flavour of the factor, namely that it might represent a viewpoint that people have a responsibility to speak out at work and that to do so is a positive thing. This, however, was a very crude and early interpretation of a factor that had to be unpacked in much greater depth. Further inspection of the data within the various factors revealed that there were certain statements that each factor ranked in a significantly different way from other statements when compared to how other factors had ranked those same statements. The following tables explore these distinguishing statements for each factor. In each table the Q sort value is given for each of the 5 factors. This shows how distinguishing statements for one factor scored against the other 4 factors. Note that there was one 'consensus statement' in the study; Item 6 'People should discuss things face to face more often at work'. This item's rankings did not distinguish between any pairs of factors or, to put it another way, all of the 5 factors ranked this item in a similar way.

**Table 4.3: Distinguishing Statements for Factor 1**

| Statement   | Factors |    |    |    |    |
|---|---------|----|----|----|----|
|   | 1       | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 16 I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work                             | 4       | 1  | -3 | 1  | 1  |
| 19 I feel that my opinion matters at work                                     | 3       | -1 | -1 | 0  | 0  |
| 25 It feels completely natural to say what I think at work                    | 3       | -1 | -1 | -1 | 0  |
| 49 There are lots of ways I can have my say at work                           | 1       | -3 | -2 | 0  | 0  |
| 28 You get credit for your ideas and suggestions where I work                 | 1       | -3 | -2 | -3 | 0  |
| 43 I feel empowered when I speak my mind at work                              | 1       | -1 | 0  | -1 | 0  |
| 15 It's really frustrating to keep quiet about things at work                 | -1      | 1  | 0  | -4 | -4 |
| 7 It's easier to say what you think if you're a manager                       | -1      | 0  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
| 14 I will keep quiet at work if I think I don't know enough about the subject | -1      | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  |
| 35 If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder | -1      | 1  | -3 | 1  | 0  |
| 20 You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind     | -1      | 1  | 4  | -4 | 3  |
| 1 You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work   | -1      | 2  | 2  | 0  | 2  |
| 36 I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can                          | -2      | 0  | 3  | 3  | 2  |
| 42 Speaking your mind at work could damage your career                        | -2      | 1  | 1  | -1 | -1 |
| 47 I tend to keep quiet for an easy life                                      | -3      | 0  | 0  | 2  | 2  |

**Table 4.4: Distinguishing Statements for Factor 2**

| Statement  | Factors |    |    |    |    |
|--|---------|----|----|----|----|
|  | 2       | 1  | 3  | 4  | 5  |
| 23 We talk about the same problems all the time at work without resolving them         | 4       | -2 | -1 | -2 | -3 |
| 32 It takes more than words to change people's attitudes                               | 3       | 1  | 1  | 0  | -2 |
| 8 It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told                | 2       | 0  | 4  | 1  | -2 |
| 40 If you speak up at work you'll be labelled as a troublemaker                        | 2       | -3 | -3 | -4 | -1 |
| 20 You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind              | 1       | -1 | 4  | -4 | 3  |
| 36 I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can                                   | 0       | -2 | 3  | 3  | 2  |
| 47 I tend to keep quiet for an easy life   | 0       | -3 | 0  | 2  | 2  |
| 3 If I have a good idea at work I know what to do with it                              | -1      | 1  | 0  | 0  | 1  |
| 39 People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions | -2      | -4 | -4 | -1 | 3  |
| 18 My manager likes hearing my ideas   | -2      | 0  | 0  | -1 | 1  |
| 5 I can be myself at work  | -3      | 1  | -1 | 0  | 1  |
| 49 There are lots of ways I can have my say at work                                    | -3      | 1  | -2 | 0  | 0  |
| 21 I can ask my manager about anything I want  | -3      | 0  | -1 | 2  | -1 |
| 17 There is an open style of management where I work                                   | -4      | 0  | -2 | 3  | 1  |
| 2 It's easy to share information where I work  | -4      | 0  | 1  | -1 | 0  |



**Table 4.5: Distinguishing Statements for Factor 3**

| Statement   | Factors |    |    |    |    |
|---|---------|----|----|----|----|
|   | 3       | 1  | 2  | 4  | 5  |
| 8 It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told       | 4       | 0  | 2  | 1  | -2 |
| 47 I tend to keep quiet for an easy life                                      | 0       | -3 | 0  | 2  | 2  |
| 9 Messages can easily get distorted where I work                              | 0       | -2 | 3  | 2  | -2 |
| 5 I can be myself at work   | -1      | 1  | -3 | 0  | 1  |
| 49 There are lots of ways I can have my say at work                           | -2      | 1  | -3 | 0  | 0  |
| 17 There is an open style of management where I work                          | -2      | 0  | -4 | 3  | 1  |
| 45 You need to be outgoing and open to speak up at work                       | -2      | -1 | 0  | 0  | 3  |
| 48 If you've got something to say at work then say it                         | -2      | 1  | 0  | -1 | 2  |
| 16 I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work                             | -3      | 4  | 1  | 1  | 1  |
| 35 If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder | -3      | -1 | 1  | 1  | 0  |

**Table 4.6: Distinguishing Statements for Factor 4**

| Statement  | Factors |    |    |    |    |
|--|---------|----|----|----|----|
|  | 4       | 1  | 2  | 3  | 5  |
| 29 There are always people who will see the downside in something                      | 4       | 0  | 3  | 2  | 2  |
| 17 There is an open style of management where I work                                   | 3       | 0  | -4 | -2 | 1  |
| 1 You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work            | 0       | -1 | 2  | 2  | 2  |
| 39 People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions | -1      | -4 | -2 | -4 | 3  |
| 48 If you've got something to say at work then say it                                  | -1      | 1  | 0  | -2 | 2  |
| 50 Bottling things up at work is bad for your health                                   | -1      | 1  | 2  | 2  | -3 |
| 4 Managers will make better decisions if they take staff opinions on board             | -1      | 3  | 2  | 3  | 4  |
| 20 You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind              | -4      | -1 | 1  | 4  | 3  |

**Table 4.7: Distinguishing Statements for Factor 5**

| Statement  | Factors |    |    |    |   |
|--|---------|----|----|----|---|
|  | 5       | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4 |
| 46 My organisation takes action on what we say   | 4       | 0  | -2 | -2 | 1 |
| 45 You need to be outgoing and open to speak up at work                                | 3       | -1 | 0  | -2 | 0 |
| 39 People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions | 3       | -4 | -2 | -4 | 1 |
| 37 Speaking your mind at work will help people to understand your situation            | -1      | 2  | 0  | 1  | 1 |
| 32 It takes more than words to change people's attitudes                               | -2      | 1  | 3  | 1  | 0 |
| 30 It's boring if you can't share your ideas at work                                   | -2      | 0  | 1  | 0  | 2 |
| 12 It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said                    | -2      | 4  | 4  | 3  | 4 |
| 8 It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told                | -2      | 0  | 2  | 4  | 1 |
| 13 If you prefer to keep quiet at work that's up to you                                | -3      | -1 | 0  | 1  | 1 |
| 50 Bottling things up at work is bad for your health                                   | -3      | 1  | 2  | 2  | 1 |
| 27 Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful                            | -4      | 0  | 0  | -1 | 0 |

### **4.2.3 The Transition from Factor Arrays to Factor Interpretations**

The final transition in the analysis of the data involved the researcher undertaking a holistic inspection of the patterns of Q statements that were evident for each of the five identified factors in order to produce a full and meaningful interpretation of each factor. In this stage he used the information from the factor arrays and the distinguishing statements for each factor to try to explain the viewpoint that best represented that factor.

The key method for achieving this was to produce a 'crib sheet' for each factor (see Tables 4.8 to 4.12 below). Each crib sheet contained the statements that were the strongest representatives of the factor in question (distilled from the factor arrays) along with the distinguishing statements for each factor (the statements that each factor ranked in a significantly different way from other statements when compared to how other factors had ranked those same statements). In addition, each crib sheet contained other statements that were ranked higher or lower in that factor array than in any other arrays.

By working through this process the researcher was left with a set of Q statements that reflected the shared viewpoint this factor represented and that allowed him to interpret and explain each factor. The 5 factors are interpreted below. For each factor a completed crib sheet is presented, followed by a full interpretation of that factor. Each interpretation includes, as appropriate, relevant demographic details of the Q sorts who loaded significantly on the factor. Each interpretation also includes the rankings of the relevant items. For example, in 'Factor 1: It's Good To Talk' the opening sentence says 'Giving voice to your ideas and opinions at work is a natural thing to do (25: +3)' which means that this idea was derived from Item 25, which was ranked at +3 in Factor 1.

**Table 4.8: Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 1**

**Items Ranked at +4**

- 12. It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said (+4)
- 16. I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work (+4)

**Items Ranked Higher in Factor 1 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 3. If I have a good idea at work I know what to do with it (+1)
- 5. I can be myself at work (+1)
- 19. I feel that my opinion matters at work (+3)
- 25. It feels completely natural to say what I think at work (+3)
- 26. Creativity is valued where I work (+2)
- 27. Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful (0)
- 28. You get credit for your ideas and suggestions where I work (+1)
- 31. We are encouraged to learn from each other where I work (+3)
- 34. Everyone at work has something useful to say: it doesn't matter who they are (+2)
- 37. Speaking your mind at work will help people to understand your situation (+2)
- 38. Where I work there is always someone to talk to if you need to (+2)
- 43. I feel empowered when I speak my mind at work (+1)
- 49. There are lots of ways I can have my say at work (+1)

**Items Ranked Lower in Factor 1 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 1. You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work (-1)
- 7. It's easier to say what you think if you're a manager (-1)
- 9. Messages can easily get distorted where I work (-2)
- 10. Choosing to stay silent can send out a powerful message (-3)
- 14. I will keep quiet at work if I think I don't know enough about the subject (-1)
- 24. Keeping quiet is a good way to protect yourself at work (-2)
- 29. There are always people who will see the downside in something (0)
- 36. I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can (-2)
- 41. Nobody gains anything from complaining at work (-3)
- 42. Speaking your mind at work could damage your career (-2)
- 47. I tend to keep quiet for an easy life (-3)

**Items Ranked at -4**

- 39. People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions (-4)
- 44. Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss (-4)

**Other Distinguishing Statements**

- 15. It's really frustrating to keep quiet about things at work (-1)
- 20. You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind (-1)
- 35. If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder (-1)

#### **4.2.3.1 Factor 1: It's Good To Talk**

*Factor 1 has an eigenvalue of 17.6 and explains 22% of the study variance.*

*Twenty-eight participants are significantly associated with this factor. Sixteen (59%) of these participants are aged 46 and above and 14 (50%) have worked for their current organisations for 9 or more years.*

Giving voice to your ideas and opinions at work is a natural thing to do (25: +3) and is a positive experience, especially when things change as a result (12: +4). Whoever you are you can have something useful to say (34: +2) and your opinion counts for something (19: +3). It's not just the views of managers that are important (7: -1). Voice matters and people should not feel they are causing trouble by speaking out (44: -4), nor should they feel it is not their job to express their opinions and ideas (39: -4).

There are always people you can talk to (38: +2) and whom you can share your ideas with (3: +1) and people will be given credit for their contributions (28: +1). Organisations value creative approaches to problem solving (26: +2) and are good at sharing ideas and knowledge with others across the workplace so that they learn from them (31: +3). If people don't speak out, others will not know what they're thinking and will find it harder to understand their perspective on things (37: +2).

Staying silent means that your thoughts will be overlooked (10: -3) and it is not a useful thing to do, even if you think that by keeping quiet you are staying out of trouble (24: -2) or keeping under the radar (47: -3). It doesn't matter if people think they don't know enough about the subject, they should still express their opinions and share their ideas (14: -1). People should feel free to say what they think without worrying about whether they can trust the other person (1: -1) or

whether their comments will be taken out of context (9: -2). You don't need to understand the politics of the situation before you express your voice (20: -1) and sharing your opinions and concerns will not cause a person any longer-term problems (42: -2).

Although some people will always look for the negatives at work (29: 0) it is important to express your concerns otherwise nothing will change (41: -3).

Standing up for what you believe is important (16: +4) and quite natural behaviour (5: +1) at work. You don't have to be confrontational to say what you think (36: -2).

In this factor it is a natural and positive thing for people to share ideas and thoughts and, by implication, keeping quiet is unnatural and may not be good for health and wellbeing. Furthermore, according to this factor, everyone has an important contribution to make, regardless of who they are, what they know and where they sit in the hierarchy at work. This may be so but it doesn't mean they will necessarily be listened to. Ashford, Sutcliffe and Christianson (2009), for example, found that managers may be 'programmed' not to listen to their staff's concerns because to do so would slow down their ability to take action and make quick decisions, and these are behaviours that they have been rewarded for in the past.

It is interesting to note that the majority of participants who believed that 'it's good to talk' were older people (aged 46 and above) and half of them had longer service with their current organisations. Their responses could be explained, at least in part, by the finding that older adults often become more optimistic and tend to seek out positive information more frequently (Charles, Reynolds & Gatz, 2001) which may offer a clue to the reasons behind the generally positive tone of

these participants' views. It could also be explained by the fact that the participant group for the pilot study (who created the concourse for the Q Survey) were, themselves, older people between the ages of 36 and 54, and a younger pilot group might have produced a different concourse.

This factor also highlights the importance and beneficial effects of creativity and innovation in the workplace. This supports the assertion by Bartram (2005) that creative and innovative thinking are at the heart of one of the 'Great Eight' universal competencies at work. Moreover, creativity and innovation are beneficial to employees because they show that people are flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and help organisations to respond more quickly to market changes (Shalley, Zhou & Oldham, 2004).

In addition, this factor described a shared viewpoint that people should not fear recrimination or negative labelling when expressing voice, and that there is no need to scan the political landscape of the organisation when deciding to speak out. However, this point of view is not borne out by research, which asserts that employees will often keep quiet because they fear being identified and labelled as troublemakers (Detert, Burris & Harrison, 2010).

In summary, this factor described a shared viewpoint that everybody has a useful contribution to make and that nobody should fear the consequences of speaking out. Moreover, organisations will encourage voice and will offer lots of opportunities for involvement. It's important to share otherwise nothing will change and people will not understand each other's perspectives if they remain hidden from public view. The second factor extracted from the data takes a somewhat different view and this will be explored in detail next.

**Table 4.9: Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 2**

**Items Ranked at +4**

- 12. It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said (+4)
- 23. We talk about the same problems all the time at work without resolving them (+4)

**Items Ranked Higher in Factor 2 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 1. You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work (+2)
- 9. Messages can easily get distorted where I work (+3)
- 15. It's really frustrating to keep quiet about things at work (+1)
- 22. I speak up at work if I feel strongly enough about something (+3)
- 24. Keeping quiet is a good way to protect yourself at work (+1)
- 27. Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful (0)
- 32. It takes more than words to change people's attitudes (+3)
- 35. If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder (+1)
- 40. If you speak up at work you'll be labelled as a troublemaker (+2)
- 41. Nobody gains anything from complaining at work (-1)
- 42. Speaking your mind at work could damage your career (+1)
- 44. Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss (-1)
- 50. Bottling things up at work is bad for your health (+2)

**Items Ranked Lower in Factor 2 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 3. If I have a good idea at work I know what to do with it (-1)
- 5. I can be myself at work (-3)
- 11. People where I work are interested in what you're thinking (-1)
- 18. My manager likes hearing my ideas (-2)
- 19. I feel that my opinion matters at work (-1)
- 21. I can ask my manager about anything I want (-3)
- 25. It feels completely natural to say what I think at work (-1)
- 26. Creativity is valued where I work (-2)
- 28. You get credit for your ideas and suggestions where I work (-3)
- 38. Where I work there is always someone to talk to if you need to (-2)
- 43. I feel empowered when I speak my mind at work (-1)
- 46. My organisation takes action on what we say (-2)
- 49. There are lots of ways I can have my say at work (-3)

**Items Ranked at -4**

- 2. It's easy to share information where I work (-4)
- 17. There is an open style of management where I work (-4)

**Other Distinguishing Statements**

- 8. It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told (+2)
- 20. You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind (+1)
- 36. I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can (0)
- 39. People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions (-2)
- 47. I tend to keep quiet for an easy life (0)

#### **4.2.3.2 Factor 2: But Is It Really Worth The Risk?**

*Factor 2 has an eigenvalue of 9.6 and explains 12% of the study variance. Thirteen participants are significantly associated with this factor. Six (46%) of these participants are aged up to 35 and have worked for their current organisations for less than 4 years. Nine of these participants are women.*

It might feel good to express yourself at work (12: +4) but it can be a risky business. It's important to think about who you're talking to and be able to trust them before you express yourself (1: +2) as your opinions can easily be taken out of context (9: +3) and may be used against you (24: +1). People could find themselves being labelled as difficult (40: +2) and could even find their career aspirations are compromised (42: +1).

Organisations are actually not that interested in what their staff are thinking (11: -1) and are not good at sharing information (2: -4). It's not easy to know who to talk to (38: -2) or what to do with any ideas you might have (3: -1) and people aren't encouraged to come up with new ways of looking at things (26: -2). If you do have an idea it's not really worth sharing it with your manager, as they are not particularly interested in them (18: -2). Even if your manager is interested, you risk them taking credit for your ideas further down the line (28: -3). In general, managers are not open to sharing ideas and opinions (21: -3) or involving staff in their own thoughts and plans (17: -4). This means that people are often told what's going to happen without being consulted in the first place (8: +2).

In spite of these difficulties, it's important to have your say and it's bad for you if this opportunity is denied (50: +2), especially if people feel strongly about an issue (22: +3). It's important to express your concerns (35: +1) otherwise



nothing will change, so it can be very frustrating when you have to remain silent (15: +1) and it is not helpful to you or your organisation (27: 0). People who complain are not just making a fuss (44: -1) and could make a positive difference (41: -1). If people are not given the opportunity to speak out they will not be able to be themselves (25: -1) or give of their best (5: -3). Being heard at work is important (39: -2) so that you know your opinion counts (19: -1).

However, even if staff are properly listened to and encouraged to share their ideas and views, it might all be a waste of time. The same problems are often discussed without being resolved (23: +4) and organisations will not often act on what they hear from their staff (46: -2), even if they've asked for their opinions. It could be that talk is cheap and deep-seated attitudes are not changed by mere words alone (32: +3).

Almost half of the people represented by Factor 2 are under the age of 35 and have less than 4 years' service with their current organisations. It seems, for this group, that who you are and where you sit in the hierarchy will impact on your capacity to give voice. This apparent reluctance to share ideas may be explained, in part, by the idea of 'Future Time Perspective' (Nuttins & Lens, 1985) which proposes that decisions to express opinions may be influenced by a person's perception of the available time left to them (in this case at work). Older, longer-serving employees may feel they have more to contribute and less to lose by giving voice to their ideas and concerns whereas younger employees who are newer to the organisation may be more circumspect when sharing for fear of possible negative repercussions in the future. This reticence might, in turn, be compounded by the possibility that they may be more likely to think differently to the majority of organisational members precisely because of their more

limited exposure to their current workplace. This may result in them feeling different from the majority, which could, of itself, be a reason to keep quiet. This notion of difference will be explored more fully in the next factor.

Another interesting feature of the community of participants who shared this viewpoint is that the majority of them are women. If women are under-represented in management positions in UK organisations (Office for National Statistics, 2013) then they could experience more readily the imbalances of power that are thought to contribute to decisions to remain silent (Morrison & Rothman, 2009).

Contrary to the viewpoint expressed in the previous factor, the representatives of Factor 2 do not think that their organisations, especially their managers, are particularly interested in what they have to say and that, even if they were, it could be unwise to share without first establishing that it's safe to do so. Even when there is a climate of perceived psychological safety, managers often appear reluctant to share ideas and plans with their staff (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005) and, anecdotally, if managers do encourage voice they may well fail to respond to what they hear or even take credit for their employees' ideas and suggestions further down the line. It seems that there are certain groups within the workplace, including managers, who have a greater 'claim' to giving voice and are, therefore, more likely to engage in voice behaviours. This theme will be explored further in the next factor.

**Table 4.10: Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 3**

**Items Ranked at +4**

- 8. It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told (+4)
- 20. You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind (+4)

**Items Ranked Higher in Factor 3 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 1. You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work (+2)
- 2. It's easy to share information where I work (+1)
- 7. It's easier to say what you think if you're a manager (+3)
- 11. People where I work are interested in what you're thinking (+1)
- 13. If you prefer to keep quiet at work that's up to you (+1)
- 14. I will keep quiet at work if I think I don't know enough about the subject (+2)
- 33. It's hard to speak up at work if your views are different (+1)
- 34. Everyone at work has something useful to say: it doesn't matter who they are (+2)
- 36. I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can (+3)
- 42. Speaking your mind at work could damage your career (+1)
- 50. Bottling things up at work is bad for your health (+2)

**Items Ranked Lower in Factor 3 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 6. People should discuss things face to face more often at work (+1)
- 16. I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work (-3)
- 19. I feel that my opinion matters at work (-1)
- 25. It feels completely natural to say what I think at work (-1)
- 35. If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder (-3)
- 41. Nobody gains anything from complaining at work (-3)
- 45. You need to be outgoing and open to speak up at work (-2)
- 46. My organisation takes action on what we say (-2)
- 48. If you've got something to say at work then say it (-2)

**Items Ranked at -4**

- 39. People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions (-4)
- 44. Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss (-4)

**Other Distinguishing Statements**

- 5. I can be myself at work (-1)
- 9. Messages can easily get distorted where I work (0)
- 17. There is an open style of management where I work (-2)
- 47. I tend to keep quiet for an easy life (0)
- 49. There are lots of ways I can have my say at work (-2)

#### **4.2.3.3 Factor 3: In With The In Crowd**

*Factor 3 has an eigenvalue of 5.6 and explains 7% of the study variance. Six participants are significantly associated with this factor. None of these participants manage other people. Four (66%) have worked for their current organisations for less than 4 years and 5 (83%) are professional and technical staff.*

Although everyone has the potential to make a useful contribution by sharing their thoughts and ideas at work (34: +2) people will only be properly heard if they belong to the right tribe. Managers, for example, will find more opportunities for voice than others (7: +3) as will people who are perceived as having greater knowledge on the subject than those around them (14: +2).

People at work need to scan the political landscape before giving voice to their suggestions and concerns (20: +4) and need to work out who they can trust before they speak out (1: +2). Although the systems might be in place for sharing information (2: +1) and people appear interested in hearing what you're thinking (11: +1) it appears to be more difficult to speak out if your views are different from those who belong to the more powerful groups at work (33: +1). This can be particularly frustrating for those who wish to air their concerns, as they may be perceived as making a fuss even though this is not their intention (44: -4) or they may be labelled as troublemakers even though they believe in the importance of complaining in order to improve working practices (41: -3). People see the importance of giving their opinions (39: -4) but feel frustrated by their inability to do so. They also want to be part of the consultation process but their aspirations here may be scuppered by management practices (8: +4).

People at work feel that anyone has the right to be properly heard, not just those for whom voice feels more comfortable (45: -2), although they also believe that it is an individual choice to speak up or remain silent (13: +1). However, they will take a more guarded approach to expressing their voice (48: -2) even though keeping quiet is not good for their wellbeing (50: +2). This caution might be because they see voice as potentially confrontational (36: +3) and this may be explained by the fact that they have different views from those of key groups within the organisation.

Thus, although important, people may feel uncomfortable when, as they see it, they stand up for what they believe in and feel is important (16: -3). This means that it no longer feels natural for some people to speak out at work (25: -1) because they feel their opinions will be marginalised (19: -1). This is exacerbated by an absence of systems and processes for sharing ideas (49: -2), which, in turn, might be reinforced by a closed style of management (17: -2).

Factor 3 is predominantly about the importance of belonging to the right group in order to feel comfortable about expressing voice. None of the participants who belonged to the community represented by this factor manage other people: most are professional/technical staff with less than 4 years' employment service. Being new to an organisation could have an impact on the desire to speak out, and this has been covered elsewhere in Factor 2.

In Q Method it is the participants' accounts that matter most rather than the participants themselves. With that in mind, however, it is worth noting that Factor 3 is populated exclusively with people who are not managers in the sense that they don't have managerial responsibility for other people. Managers seem to enjoy more opportunities for voice and the opinions of staff are often less

readily welcomed. This may be exacerbated by what Tost, Gino and Larrick (2014) refer to as the tendency for managers to behave in a verbally dominant way, suppressing the views of their staff. However, most of the participants represented by this factor are professional/technical staff, which suggests that they are not necessarily clustered at the lower levels of the hierarchy. What it could mean is that they see things somewhat differently from those around them and it could be precisely this perceived difference that leads to silence, either from fear of being different or from the futility of having ideas and opinions that are not shared by the majority.

The study of difference or deviance suggests that thinking or acting differently may threaten the shared norms of the group, in this case the organisation (Mannetti, Levine, Pierro & Kruglanski, 2010), and may, therefore, be greeted with hostility by the group. This negative response may be strengthened where the deviant is relatively new to the group or less strongly attached to it (Jetten, Hornsey & Adarves-Yorno, 2006).

The temptation, in such a situation, might be for the dissenting group member to appear to agree with the dominant logic of the group in order to gain acceptance (Heerdink, Van Kleef, Homan & Fischer, 2013). It follows, therefore, that those who think differently and who have fewer opportunities to speak out are likely to make a strategic decision to remain silent, which could be the wisest decision under the circumstances. However, the community of opinion represented by the next factor refutes this, as it suggests that people have a right and responsibility to speak out, regardless of the conditions, for the overall benefit of the organisation.

**Table 4.11: Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 4**

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Items Ranked at +4</b></p> <p>12. It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said (+4)</p> <p>29. There are always people who will see the downside in something (+4)</p> <p><b>Items Ranked Higher in Factor 4 Array than in other Factor Arrays</b></p> <p>13. If you prefer to keep quiet at work that's up to you (+1)</p> <p>17. There is an open style of management where I work (+3)</p> <p>21. I can ask my manager about anything I want (+2)</p> <p>22. I speak up at work if I feel strongly enough about something (+3)</p> <p>27. Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful (0)</p> <p>30. It's boring if you can't share your ideas at work (+2)</p> <p>35. If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder (+1)</p> <p>36. I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can (+3)</p> <p>38. Where I work there is always someone to talk to if you need to (+2)</p> <p>47. I tend to keep quiet for an easy life (+2)</p> <p><b>Items Ranked Lower in Factor 4 Array than in other Factor Arrays</b></p> <p>4. Managers will make better decisions if they take staff opinions on board (-1)</p> <p>11. People where I work are interested in what you're thinking (-1)</p> <p>24. Keeping quiet is a good way to protect yourself at work (-2)</p> <p>25. It feels completely natural to say what I think at work (-1)</p> <p>26. Creativity is valued where I work (-2)</p> <p>28. You get credit for your ideas and suggestions where I work (-3)</p> <p>31. We are encouraged to learn from each other where I work (-2)</p> <p>41. Nobody gains anything from complaining at work (-3)</p> <p>43. I feel empowered when I speak my mind at work (-1)</p> <p><b>Items Ranked at -4</b></p> <p>15. It's really frustrating to keep quiet about things at work (-4)</p> <p>20. You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind (-4)</p> <p><b>Other Distinguishing Statements</b></p> <p>1. You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work (0)</p> <p>39. People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions (-1)</p> <p>48. If you've got something to say at work then say it (-1)</p> <p>50. Bottling things up at work is bad for your health (-1)</p> |
|---|

#### **4.2.3.4 Factor 4: Just Do It**

*Factor 4 has an eigenvalue of 3.2 and explains 4% of the study variance. Two participants are significantly associated with this factor. Both are men who work in the private sector and manage other people.*

Organisations who don't seek out the views of their staff are missing a valuable opportunity to tap in to a wealth of knowledge and experience. Employees can bring about meaningful organisational change by their input and involvement and this is a rewarding experience for both parties (12: +4).

Voice should be used positively to help improve working practices (29: +4) and some people will give voice regardless of the situation and conditions at work and without paying heed to the political landscape (20: -4). They don't feel frustrated by a lack of opportunity to give voice because they will automatically express their opinions (15: -4), particularly if they feel strongly enough about an issue (22: +3).

Such people will often enjoy a close relationship with their manager (21: +2) and feel comfortable with the prevailing management style of openness and transparency (17: +3). They will always find someone to share their views with (38: +2). They do not perceive voice as being confrontational (36: +3) and will willingly share opinions and ideas because it will help the organisation and because it is more interesting to do so than to keep quiet on the subject (30: +2).

The main driver behind the decision to express voice is to bring about change for the better. This means that people will speak out and complain if they feel it will



result in better conditions and practices (41: -3). It is less important to get the credit for any changes that ensue (28: -3) so long as things improve as a result. They will not be particularly interested in ideas for their own sake (26: -2) or in the sharing of knowledge as an end in itself (31: -2). Sometimes people may decide to remain silent if they feel that to speak up would result in more work for them to do (47: +2) but often the desire to correct and improve processes and practices will prevail, and this will usually be done irrespective of the potential consequences of speaking out (24: -2).

This factor emphasises the responsibility that people have to air their opinions, whether the conditions are favourable or not, as withholding these views will have a detrimental effect on the organisation's ability to make sound and well-informed decisions. It is interesting to note that the two participants significantly associated with this factor are managers in the private sector. As such, this factor could represent a 'privileged' view of organisational life because managers appear to be afforded more opportunities to be heard in many workplaces.

Moreover, according to Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson (2003), managers are prone to over-evaluating their performance and their chances of future success so, consequently, may feel their voice deserves to be heard because it somehow matters more.

Voice used in this way could be considered to be a good example of managers operating under what these researchers call an activated Behavioural Approach System (BAS), an internal set of processes that manages behaviour linked with desired outcomes. When the BAS is active, people (in this case managers) have a sharper focus on goals and rewards, they value these rewards more highly and feel good when they get them.

These researchers suggest that managers are more likely than staff to have their BAS activated, which means they are more likely to have an overly positive evaluation of their own performance and they are inclined to be more optimistic and risk taking. As a result, they argue, managers are often over-confident in their own voice and won't, as a consequence, seek out ideas and input from their staff.

This one-sided approach to voice may be compounded by what Ashford, Sutcliffe and Christianson (ibid) call cognitive biases, which suggest, in the case of managers, that because of a limited information processing capacity they will take shortcuts, which include confirmation bias (where they search for information that supports their views) and perceptual bias (where, for example, they don't trust staff to have anything useful to say because what they say will be fuelled by self-interest). All this could mean that managers take a rather dim view of staff input and may lead them to believe they have little of any value to say. This idea is crystallised in the final factor to be explored in detail now.

**Table 4.12: Factor Interpretation Crib Sheet for Factor 5**

**Items Ranked at +4**

- 4. Managers will make better decisions if they take staff opinions on board (+4)
- 46. My organisation takes action on what we say (+4)

**Items Ranked Higher in Factor 5 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 1. You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work (+2)
- 3. If I have a good idea at work I know what to do with it (+1)
- 5. I can be myself at work (+1)
- 6. People should discuss things face to face more often at work (+3)
- 10. Choosing to stay silent can send out a powerful message (0)
- 18. My manager likes hearing my ideas (+1)
- 24. Keeping quiet is a good way to protect yourself at work (+1)
- 26. Creativity is valued where I work (+2)
- 39. People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions (+3)
- 41. Nobody gains anything from complaining at work (-1)
- 44. Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss (-1)
- 45. You need to be outgoing and open to speak up at work (+3)
- 47. I tend to keep quiet for an easy life (+2)
- 48. If you've got something to say at work then say it (+2)

**Items Ranked Lower in Factor 5 Array than in other Factor Arrays**

- 8. It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told (-2)
- 9. Messages can easily get distorted where I work (-2)
- 12. It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said (-2)
- 13. If you prefer to keep quiet at work that's up to you (-3)
- 22. I speak up at work if I feel strongly enough about something (-1)
- 23. We talk about the same problems all the time at work without resolving them (-3)
- 30. It's boring if you can't share your ideas at work (-2)
- 32. It takes more than words to change people's attitudes (-2)
- 33. It's hard to speak up at work if your views are different (+1)
- 34. Everyone at work has something useful to say: it doesn't matter who they are (-1)
- 37. Speaking your mind at work will help people to understand your situation (-1)
- 38. Where I work there is always someone to talk to if you need to (-2)
- 50. Bottling things up at work is bad for your health (-3)

**Items Ranked at -4**

- 15. It's really frustrating to keep quiet about things at work (-4)
- 27. Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful (-4)

**Other Distinguishing Statements**

None

#### **4.2.3.5 Factor 5: If You Have Nothing Worth Saying, Say Nothing**

*Factor 5 has an eigenvalue of 2.4 and explains 3% of the study variance. Two participants are significantly associated with this factor. Both are men.*

Opportunities for voice are not equally distributed and people should earn the right to share their ideas and opinions only if they are good and useful (34: -1). Good ideas will result in better decisions if they are taken on board (4: +4) and good, open discussions will normally result in positive outcomes (6: +3) as words are often powerful enough to make people change the way they think about and see things (32: -2).

If people have something useful to say, they have a responsibility to say it (13: -3) but they need to be the right sort of person to do this (45: +3) and they need to make sure they trust the other person (1: +2). If they don't have anything useful to say, they should say nothing (27: -4) and just get on with the job at hand (39: +3).

For some people, giving voice is not really about getting things off their chest to make them feel better (50: -3) or to stop them feeling frustrated (15: -4) and they don't seek out people to talk to unless they know they will be interested in what they have to say (38: -2). Voice is expressed with a belief that action will be taken as a result (46: +4) and that things will change (23: -3). It might sometimes be more difficult to be listened to if your ideas are different (33: +1) but it will usually be worth the effort.

Sometimes it might be that voice leads to extra work for the individual. For example if they have a good idea this has to be implemented. In these situations it might be that the person decides to remain silent for an easy life (47: +2) and to offer a degree of self-protection (24: +1).

This factor extols the democratic principles of employee voice and describes the benefits to be accrued by organisations and employees alike, but it suggests that rights to voice should not be distributed equally around the workplace. This viewpoint, which was shared by two male participants, believes that if people have good ideas then they have a responsibility to share them, but if they have nothing worth saying they should say nothing.

If someone has a good idea they have a right and responsibility to share it, as good ideas will invariably lead to better outcomes for the organisation. On the other hand, bad ideas are a waste of time and should not, therefore, be encouraged. It is interesting to speculate on who decides if an idea is a good one. Milliken and Lam (2009) think that this will usually be the preserve of managers, who are more likely to undervalue the worth of an issue raised because they risk wasting resources in pursuing something that might, ultimately, be of little significance. In this way they are, therefore, predisposed towards downgrading the contributions of their staff.

Factor 5 also suggests that people need to have the right personality to speak out at work, regardless of the quality of their ideas. People share their views because they believe that action will be taken that will result in better outcomes for the organisation. Even if their opinions are different to others, they are still worth airing. This runs counter to research by Cialdini and Trost (1998) that found people are reluctant to express their opinions if they are different and if they expect negative reactions to their contribution.

### **4.3 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has described in detail the findings of a Q Study. The main objective of this part of the research project was to investigate whether there were communities of opinion and shared viewpoints about the experience of voice and silence at work, and the conditions under which people would give voice or keep quiet. The Q Study found there were shared viewpoints about voice and silence and the conditions for speaking out or keeping quiet, and these are illustrated in the 5 factors that were extracted from the data. These factors when combined were able to explain 48% of the common variance in this study. Fifty-one of the Q sorts were 'Defining Q Sorts' which meant they loaded significantly on one or other of these 5 factors. The key messages from these factors will now be briefly summarised in the sub-sections that follow. A full discussion of these findings will be presented in Chapter 6.

#### **4.3.1 Factor 1: It's Good To Talk**

This shared viewpoint described the positive benefits of voice and talked in terms of how everyone has something useful to say and how one's opinion counts for something. Older and longer-serving people in particular believe that voice is important and is a right and responsibility of all people at work. Voice matters and everyone has something useful to contribute, no matter where they are in the organisational hierarchy. Giving voice is a natural and authentic thing to do and it can be good for a person, particularly when it leads to positive change.

This factor links with Morrison's (2011) model of employee voice as it describes the outcomes of voice for the individual. In this model, the outcomes include an enhanced sense of control, an improvement in job attitudes, lowered stress

levels and higher performance appraisal ratings. The participants who were significantly associated with Factor 1 referred mainly to lowered stress levels as an outcome because they described the benefits of voice to wellbeing, as it was a natural and authentic thing to do. Wellbeing is also linked to felt control, and it could be argued that participants in Factor 1 were also talking about the positive benefits of enhanced control when their voice was invited and acted upon.

According to Greenberger and Strasser (1986) people have a need for control over their working environment and they gain this, in part, by the expression of voice. Parker (1993) proposed that a perceived lack of control would lead to dissent and exit from the organisation. Participants associated with Factor 1 seemed to share the view that their voice mattered and this was good for them, especially if it was acted upon as it helped them to have control over their work situation.

#### **4.3.2 Factor 2: But Is It Really Worth The Risk?**

Younger, less experienced women in particular thought that people should be more circumspect when deciding whether to express their opinions at work. They believe people need to be able to trust the person they're talking to and be comfortable that they won't take their views out of context or use them against them at a later date. They also think that people who give voice to their opinions may be seen as difficult and may be storing up trouble for themselves in the future.

This factor links with Morrison's (ibid) model of employee voice as potentially unsafe because it challenges the status quo, which has a degree of risk attached to it. Burris (2012) found that people who were too challenging, were viewed by

their managers as less loyal, more threatening and worse performers. This supports the shared viewpoint of Factor 2.

Women and newer workers were over-represented in this factor. Morrison's model refers to individual differences as important antecedents of employee voice, and these include experience and tenure, and demographics, such as gender. Both of these factors are generally assumed to influence voice and are, therefore, routinely controlled for as possible extraneous variables, but there has been little, if any, systematic research into their impact on voice. Factor 2 is strongly associated with women and newer workers and these demographic variables will be explored further in Study Two, the qualitative study of the current research project.

#### **4.3.3 Factor 3: In With The In Crowd**

This shared viewpoint said that people have to belong to the right group at work if they want their voice to be heard. Managers have many more opportunities to be heard than staff, even though everyone in the organisation has a useful contribution to make, especially those who are more knowledgeable regardless of their position. If people don't belong to the right group they will be denied opportunities to share their views. If they express their opinion regardless of this, they need to be politically astute and trust the listener before saying what they think, especially if their views are different from the majority. Speaking out in this way, when uninvited, could mean that people think the person is out to cause trouble, even though their intentions may be innocent. This can be immensely frustrating, as it's important for people to give their opinions, but decisions will most likely be made without their input anyway. People with less



employment service and those who don't manage other people were over-represented in this factor.

This factor links with Morrison's (ibid) model of employee voice, which proposes that voice will be heard differently depending on the position and status of the person giving voice. Managers will often have better access to voice opportunities and may be more dominant verbally (Tost, Gino & Larrick, 2014) which could suppress the communications of those below them. Managers with low managerial self-efficacy will be less likely to solicit the voice of their staff (Fast, Burriss & Bartel, 2014), and their action biases (Ashford, Sutcliffe & Christianson, 2009) mean that they do not seek out the voice of others because they prefer to trust their own voice, as they have been rewarded for this in the past.

Factor 3 also suggests that different thinking is not properly heard or welcomed. This supports the research by Mannetti, Levine, Pierro and Kruglanski (2010), who concluded that thinking differently may threaten the shared norms of the group and may, therefore, be greeted with hostility. It is tempting, in such a situation, to appear to agree with the dominant logic of the group in order to gain acceptance, and this supports the findings of Heerdink, Van Kleef, Homan and Fischer (2013). Different thinking is not referred to in Morrison's (ibid) model, but it will be explored in greater depth in Study Two, the qualitative part of this research project.

#### **4.3.4 Factor 4: Just Do It**

This viewpoint was shared by two participants, both of whom were managers in the private sector. According to this factor, managers will give voice to their ideas and opinions regardless of whether the conditions are favourable or not.

This is largely because voice is a positive experience for them and is seen as being of great benefit to the organisation. These people believed that real, sustainable and meaningful change could only be brought about by genuinely inviting, and acting upon, the views of organisational members. Managers want to make a positive difference and will make sure they are properly heard.

This factor links with Morrison's (ibid) model of employee voice in two main ways. Firstly it suggests that managers have more opportunities for voice than staff, and this is predicted by the model, which says that position and status are important antecedents for voice (see 4.3.3 above for more detail on managers and voice). Secondly it says that real and meaningful change can be brought about by inviting and acting upon the views of organisational members. This links to the model, which claims that voice will lead to a number of positive outcomes for the organisation. These include learning and improvement, and Argyris (1977) theorised that when voice is not expressed, organisations will find it difficult to engage in 'double-loop learning', which involves the organisation in questioning its systems and procedures rather than merely fine tuning these processes in response to feedback.

These outcomes also include better organisational performance, and empirical research is starting to find clear links between voice and work unit performance. For example, Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011) discovered a positive relationship between voice and work unit performance, and found this link was stronger when other behaviours, such as altruism and courtesy were also high. In a similar vein, Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) found that upward and inward flow of voice led to improved unit performance and lateral flow

negatively affected unit performance. This suggests that voice targeted directly at unit leaders will lead to improved unit performance.

#### **4.3.5 Factor 5: If You Have Nothing Worth Saying, Say Nothing**

This viewpoint, which was shared by two male participants, believed that not everybody has an equal right to express voice in the workplace. If people have good ideas then they have a responsibility to share them, but if they have nothing worth saying they should say nothing. Good ideas are valuable because they lead to better decisions that will result in better organisational outcomes. Bad ideas are a waste of everybody's time.

This factor links with Morrison's (ibid) model of employee voice, which says, among other things, that the nature of the message will affect how well it is heard. The quality of the idea or opinion suggested, therefore, should make a difference to its reception. This has not been explored to date in any depth. Empirical research has looked at the nature of the message in terms of how challenging it is. Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011) found that voice had a positive impact on workgroup task performance up to a point: beyond that point it had a deleterious influence on performance unless there were high levels of 'affiliation-oriented organisational citizenship behaviours' present. Burriss (2012), found that people who engaged in challenging voice, as opposed to supportive voice, were viewed as worse performers, less loyal, more threatening and had their ideas endorsed less by their managers. Study Two of the current research project looks in more depth at the nature and packaging of the message, and whether they influence how well voice is received.

#### **4.4 Limitations Of The Q Study**

There are some possible limitations to the way this study was conducted. The Q Survey was on-line which meant that it had greater reach to a large group of working adults who were unknown to the researcher. However, it also meant that there was no opportunity for the researcher to explain the process in detail and answer any questions as the respondents were completing the survey. To counter this, all statements and the survey itself were piloted before going live and important changes were made accordingly.

All participants were incentivised for taking part in the research. This was a group of people who were accustomed to completing on-line questionnaires so they were familiar with how to navigate around such sites. However, being rewarded for taking part and being familiar with the format could have led to a more expedient approach to questionnaire completion. This may be evidenced by the fact that the entries in the free text boxes at the end of the questionnaire were normally quite bland and offered little to aid interpretation of why the respondents had ranked the statements in the way they had.

However, the analysis of the Q sorts was robust and 5 factors were extracted from the data, which were able to explain 48% of the common variance in this study. Fifty-one of the Q sorts were 'Defining Q Sorts' which meant they loaded significantly on one or other of these five factors. The 5 factors could be linked back to the chosen theoretical model and identified some gaps in the research literature, which were further explored in Study Two, the qualitative study. The next chapter describes and discusses this qualitative study in more detail.

## **Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of an Inductive Semantic Thematic Analysis into the transcripts from interviews carried out with 15 volunteer participants, who were staff and managers working for a large trade union and professional body, which represents health professionals. These interviews were carried out between June and August 2015.

This chapter will begin by summarising the main findings from the research literature (see Chapter 2) and the main factors that were extracted from Study One, the quantitative study (see Chapter 4). It will then describe the main research questions for Study Two before going on to present a brief summary of the main themes that were identified from this qualitative study. Finally it will describe the researcher's overall conceptualisation of these themes and then explain and discuss the thematic analysis in full detail.

#### **5.1.1 Main Findings From The Research Literature**

There were a number of key findings from the research literature that had a bearing on the way in which the thematic analysis was approached and conducted (see Chapter 2 for a full account of the extant research literature). The first point to note is that managers have a critical role in voice at work. Managers who are approachable and open, who genuinely invite voice and who downplay status differences will encourage their staff to speak out, because they will feel safe in giving voice and will not think it a waste of time. However, managers who are more extroverted and verbally dominant, and who experience low self-efficacy will not welcome voice, especially if it's challenging.

Secondly, there are certain features of the workplace that will impact on voice behaviour. Hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations with centralised decision-making will not easily hear the voice of their staff. A climate of silence may develop which might quickly spread around the workplace. People will also be influenced by the climate of their workgroup, and how much they identify with that group, when deciding to give voice or remain silent.

Thirdly, certain types of people are more likely to give voice than others, irrespective of the climate or context of the organisations they work for. These include people who feel a strong attachment to and identification with the organisation, who experience a strong obligation for change and who report high (and low) levels of personal control at work. Conscientious and extroverted people are more likely to speak out, as are full-time, longer serving and more senior employees, along with better performers, who will give voice and be heard more readily than other staff.

Next, it is apparent that, for voice to be heard, it needs to be packaged in the right way. People should engage in moderate levels of voice, and this shouldn't be too challenging, critical or change-oriented. Voice should contain a solution and should be given in private. It should also be directed where it has the best chance to be effective, not just to the line manager. Voice should flow around organisations in different ways for different purposes.

Finally, voice has been shown to have a positive impact on organisations and the individuals who work for them. Organisations who encourage employee voice will make better decisions, handle change more effectively, experience lower staff turnover and have work units who perform better. Staff who give voice will feel valued, be more conscientious, have a greater sense of control and be rated

more positively by their managers, provided they are good performers and their voice isn't too challenging.

### **5.1.2 Main Findings From Study One (Quantitative Study)**

Study One, the quantitative study, involved 80 members of a consumer group called 'Adults Working for UK Organisations' completing a 50 item on-line Q Study in November 2013. For the Q Study, these participants were asked to rank order a set of 50 statements about voice and silence at work. All participants were incentivised for taking part in this research by Respondi, the market research group that held this database of participants. Five factors were extracted from this Q Study and are discussed in detail in Chapter 4. They can be summarised as follows:

#### **Factor 1: It's Good To Talk**

This shared viewpoint described the positive benefits of voice and talked in terms of how everyone had something useful to say and how one's opinion counted for something. Older and longer-serving people in particular believed that voice was important and was a right and responsibility of all people at work. Voice mattered and everyone had something useful to contribute, no matter where they were in the organisational hierarchy. Giving voice was a natural and authentic thing to do and it could be good for a person, particularly when it led to positive change.

#### **Factor 2: But Is It Really Worth The Risk?**

Younger, less experienced women in particular thought that people should be more circumspect when deciding whether to express their opinions at work. They believed people needed to be able to trust the person they're talking to and be comfortable that they wouldn't take their views out of context or use them

against them at a later date. They also thought that people who gave voice to their opinions might be seen as difficult and might be storing up trouble for themselves in the future.

### **Factor 3: In With The In Crowd**

This shared viewpoint said that people had to belong to the right group at work if they wanted their voice to be heard. Managers had many more opportunities to be heard than staff, even though everyone in the organisation had a useful contribution to make, especially those who were more knowledgeable regardless of their position. If people didn't belong to the right group they would be denied opportunities to share their views. If they expressed their opinion regardless of this, they needed to be politically astute and to trust the listener before saying what they thought, especially if their views were different from the majority. Speaking out in this way, when uninvited, could mean that people thought the person was out to cause trouble, even though their intentions may have been innocent. This could be immensely frustrating, as it was important for people to give their opinions, but decisions would most likely be made without their input anyway. People with less employment service and those who didn't manage other people were over-represented in this factor.

### **Factor 4: Just Do It**

This viewpoint was shared by two participants, both of whom were managers in the private sector. According to this factor, managers gave voice to their ideas and opinions regardless of whether the conditions were favourable or not. This was largely because voice was a positive experience for them and was seen as being of great benefit to the organisation. These people believed that real, sustainable and meaningful change could only be brought about by genuinely



inviting, and acting upon, the views of organisational members. Managers wanted to make a positive difference and would make sure they were properly heard.

#### **Factor 5: If You Have Nothing Worth Saying, Say Nothing**

This viewpoint, which was shared by two male participants, believed that not everybody had an equal right to express voice in the workplace. If people had good ideas then they had a responsibility to share them, but if they had nothing worth saying they should say nothing. Good ideas were valuable because they led to better decisions that resulted in better organisational outcomes. Bad ideas were a waste of everybody's time.

#### **5.1.3 The Research Questions For Study Two (Qualitative Study)**

The main research question addressed by the current research project was "How do employees talk about voice and under what conditions will they give voice or remain silent?" Within this overall research question were a number of subsidiary questions that were devised to address gaps in the extant research literature on employee voice and were located in the definition of employee voice proposed by Morrison (2011) as "the discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning". The main features of this definition of voice are that it is self-initiated and promotive behaviour designed to invite the organisation to do something differently or to cease current practice, and that it is focused on and targeted at one's immediate line manager, at another manager or to one's coworkers. The author has used this definition and accompanying model of voice (see Chapter 2, p. 32 for full details) as a template around which to organise his research.

The main aim of Study Two, the qualitative study, was to investigate how people talked about voice at work and the conditions under which they gave voice or remained silent. The subsidiary questions addressed by this study have been drawn from gaps in the current literature and from the findings from Study One of the current research project. They have been organised according to the main features of the model of voice presented by Morrison (ibid):

"What impact does organisational context and climate have on employee voice?"

"What types of people get heard more readily at work?"

"Is it safe to give voice at work and does it make any difference?"

"Does the way voice is packaged make a difference to whether it is heard?"

"What is the impact on organisations when voice is welcomed or not welcomed?"

"What does it feel like when voice is welcomed or not welcomed and how do these feelings influence employee behaviour?"

#### **5.1.4 A Summary Of The Main Themes From The Qualitative Study**

Five main themes were extracted from the thematic analysis. Within four of these themes a number of sub themes were developed by the researcher to help organise and explain the data. These themes and sub themes are shown in Table 5.1 overleaf:

**Table 5.1: Summary Of The Main Themes And Sub Themes**

| Main Themes  | Sub Themes  |
|--|---|
| <p><b>Theme 1: Dams and Aqueducts</b><br/>This theme described the barriers and facilitators in place, which served to encourage and inhibit the flow of voice around the organisation. These included contextual factors, climate, key players and important dispositions and emotional states.</p>   | <p><b>Context</b><br/>The impact on voice of the hierarchy, bureaucracy, size and complexity, member focus and busyness of the organisation.<br/><b>Climate</b><br/>The impact on voice of the organisational and departmental climate and national culture.<br/><b>Key Players</b><br/>The influence of the senior team, middle managers, staff and the old guard on how voice was heard and welcomed<br/><b>Dispositions and Emotions</b><br/>The impact on voice of perceptions of sensitivity, fear and futility.</p> |
| <p><b>Theme 2: Flows and Eddies</b><br/>This theme described what actually happened to voice as it began its journey. Mechanisms were in place to encourage voice but these were often ineffectual. Voice was helped along its way by how well connected the person was around the organisation, but sometimes it got stuck in certain places or it changed shape as it progressed.</p>                              | <p><b>Mechanisms</b><br/>The processes designed to encourage the flow of voice and how they often served to inhibit this flow.<br/><b>Connectedness</b><br/>The importance to voice of understanding the landscape, being connected and sidestepping the line manager.<br/><b>The Journey of an Idea</b><br/>How voice rarely left the team and how it was often compromised as it made its way up the organisation.</p>  |
| <p><b>Theme 3: Barges and Rafts</b><br/>Certain types of voice were considered more buoyant than others and had a better chance of surviving their journey. When voice was packaged carefully it was able to travel further, but critical, challenging and change-oriented voice often sank without trace.</p>   | <p><b>Sugaring the Pill</b><br/>How voice needed to be carefully packaged to have a chance of being heard.<br/><b>The Too Difficult Box</b><br/>How voice was rarely heard if it was new and different, or challenging and change-oriented.</p>   |
| <p><b>Theme 4: Boatmen and Landlubbers</b><br/>Some people were better equipped than others to survive the journey, irrespective of the vessel they were using. Voice was welcomed differently according to the grade and tenure of the person, and certain biographical differences and individual dispositions impacted on how voice was heard.</p>  | <p><b>The Pecking Order</b><br/>How voice was heard and welcomed differently depending on where it came from in the hierarchy.<br/><b>Tenure</b><br/>How the voice of new starters and long servers was heard differently.<br/><b>It's Not Who You Know It's Who You Are</b><br/>How the voice of certain people was heard more because of biographical differences and personal dispositions.</p>  |
| <p><b>Theme 5: All At Sea</b><br/>This final theme imagined the end point of the journey as the sea or, in organisational terms, the overall impact of voice on organisations and the people who work for them. It discussed the positive and negative impact of voice heard and unheard. For individuals it described how it felt when voice was heard or unheard, and what impact this had on their behaviour.</p> | <p>There were no sub themes associated with this main theme. All data were comfortably located within the main theme.</p>   |

### **5.1.5 Conceptualisation Of The Themes**

In line with the recommendation by Braun and Clarke (2013) to be creative when naming themes, the researcher used a nautical motif to name the main themes, and this provided an overarching conceptual narrative for the thematic analysis. In this analysis employee voice was reimagined as water. Just as water is essential for the survival and growth of living organisms, so employee voice is believed to be desirable for organisations to survive and flourish (Mackenzie, Podsakoff & Podsakoff, 2011; Detert, Burris, Harrison & Martin, 2013). This offered a way for the researcher to organise his themes around a central point of meaning. As he was undertaking the data analysis the researcher was regularly drawn back to the way participants described how voice did not flow around the organisation, in spite of the mechanisms in place to encourage this. It is important to note, however, that the conceptualisation of voice as water took place after the analysis had been undertaken. By doing this after the analysis, the researcher was able to avoid making the data fit the motif.

Contextual factors, such as the complexity of the organisation and the sensitivity of senior people, seemed to stem the flow of voice, and this suggested the idea of 'Dams and Aqueducts' as facilitators or barriers to flow. The processes in place to encourage the flow of voice sometimes appeared to impede it, and downward flow was much easier to achieve than the flow of voice upwards. This suggested the idea of 'Flows and Eddies' as useful descriptions of how voice, like water, did not flow in a uniform way, with some voice moving much faster and other voice getting stuck in eddies or whirlpools where it circled around without progressing forward. Voice had to be 'seaworthy' for it to survive, and certain voices rarely flowed because the messages they carried, such as change and

challenge, were often considered to be unpalatable. This suggested the idea of 'Barges and Rafts' as some vessels, like some messages, were better equipped than others to stay afloat and move forward. Some people were more likely to be heard because of who they were or where they sat in the hierarchy, and this suggested the idea of 'Boatmen and Landlubbers' as a way of distinguishing between people whose voice would carry and those whose voice would remain grounded. Finally as water flows into the sea so it was possible to conceptualise the sea as an end point to the flow of water and, likewise, the organisation as an end point to the flow of voice. In other words, the way in which voice flowed around the workplace would impact on the effectiveness of the organisation and the satisfaction of the people within it. This suggested the idea of 'All at Sea' as the final theme.

This Thematic Analysis was, therefore, organised around five main themes, which reflected the central motif of water.

### **Theme 1: Dams And Aqueducts**

This theme described the barriers and facilitators in place, which served to encourage and inhibit the flow of voice around the organisation. These included contextual factors, climate, key players and important dispositions and emotional states.

### **Theme 2: Flows And Eddies**

This theme described what actually happened to voice as it began its journey. Mechanisms were in place to encourage voice but these were often ineffectual. Voice was helped along its way by how well connected the person was around the organisation, but sometimes it got stuck in certain places or it changed shape as it progressed.

### **Theme 3: Barges And Rafts**

Certain types of voice were considered more buoyant than others and had a better chance of surviving their journey. When voice was packaged carefully it was able to travel further, but critical, challenging and change-oriented voice often sank without trace.

### **Theme 4: Boatmen And Landlubbers**

The central organising concept for this theme was that some people were better equipped than others to survive the journey, irrespective of the vessel they were using. Voice was welcomed differently according to the grade and tenure of the person, and certain biographical differences and individual dispositions impacted on how voice was heard.

### **Theme 5: All At Sea**

This final theme imagined the end point of the journey as the sea or, in organisational terms, the overall impact of voice on organisations and the people who work for them. It discussed the positive and negative impact of voice heard and unheard. For individuals it described how it felt when voice was heard or unheard, and what impact this had on their behaviour.

## **5.2 Thematic Analysis**

Each of the themes will now be discussed and explored in greater detail. Data have been presented in this chapter as illustrative examples of the main themes and sub themes. This chapter has followed Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommendations to embed shorter extracts into the main text and to reference relevant literature within the narrative, but to expand on these references in the discussion section (see Chapter 6: Discussion).

### **5.2.1 Theme 1: Dams And Aqueducts**

This theme describes the organisation itself as both a facilitator and inhibitor of voice. Participants described the context of the organisation in terms of its hierarchy, bureaucracy, size and complexity, the nature of the business and being busy as factors that largely served to inhibit voice. They also referred to the organisational and departmental climate and national culture as factors impacting on voice. There were important groups of people within the organisation who had a key influence on whether voice was invited and heard. There were a number of important dispositions and emotional states that seemed to characterise the organisation in terms of its attitude to voice.

#### **5.2.1.1 Sub Theme 1: Context**

A common theme among participants was that organisational context was an important factor in determining how voice was invited and heard. Context is a broad construct, but participants referred mainly to hierarchy, bureaucracy, size and complexity, member focus and busyness as key antecedents for voice. In other words, it was thought that these features of the organisational context had the biggest impact on voice. The research literature points to some of these factors as inhibitors of employee voice (Kakabadse, 1979; Glauser, 1984;

Nemeth, 1997). Morrison and Milliken (2000) cite the market in which the organisation operates as a potential barrier to voice, but participants in the current study specifically referred to the nature of the business, in this case member representation, as having an impact on how voice was heard. Similarly, Morrison and Milliken (ibid) describe the competitiveness of the market and a focus on cost-control as other important contextual factors, but the idea of 'busyness' as a barrier to voice has not been explored thus far.

### **Hierarchy**

Hierarchy has long been thought to influence the character of organisations and how they conduct their business (Kakabadse, 1979). It is also thought to impact on voice by impeding the flow of upwards communications, and this is exemplified in the findings of Glauser (1984) and Nemeth (1997) who theorised about the importance of upward communications and divergent viewpoints for effective decision-making in organisations. Participants described hierarchy with a sense of inevitability, as if it was setting out the natural order of things: " I think there is a hierarchical structure that we cling to because it gives us a sense of solidity and it sort of reflects the organisations that we're trying to work with and critique" (Michael, Transcript 12, 678-681). Here Michael was suggesting that the organisation was hierarchical because many of its staff had joined from the very same hierarchical workplaces, mainly hospitals, which the organisation was representing.

Hierarchy was thought, however, to lead to a lack of transparency: "Things are happening at management level that aren't communicated or discussed. It's just hard to see the transparency about how these decisions are made" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 102-105). Moreover, awareness of rank and grade was believed to



have a particular impact on whose voice got heard: "If an event comes up the most important thing is that we've got the right rank attending the event rather than the knowledge of the issue or subject" (Michael, Transcript 12, 479-481). Grade consciousness will be explored in more detail in Theme 4: Boatmen and Landlubbers, but as Elise noted:

"They refer a lot to people's grades so often in emails you're just it's abbreviated you know Es and Fs have made this decision so H and G don't, you know, sort of count anyway. It's not even managers. They're just F grades" (Elise, Transcript 10, 240-243).

### **Bureaucracy**

In a similar vein, bureaucracy has been posited as a potential impediment to voice (Kakabadse, 1979). In the organisation in question, bureaucracy was characterised by a strong sense of governance, by its committee structure, by a proliferation of policies and by the way that special project groups were set up. It would appear that there were many rules and processes in place, which was seen as positive by many participants when they compared the current organisation to how it used to be run. However, what some participants described as over-governance, meant that people often didn't know where to go to raise an idea or ask a question, or even if they had permission to do so. What this meant was that some participants believed the organisation had set up a complex system of processes, committees and special project groups which people had to navigate in order to find out how and where to give voice. In short, participants described a sense of confusion and uncertainty, which sometimes led to a disinclination to give voice. The researcher was struck by the number of policies, systems and processes in place in the organisation, although the committee system, which the

organisation relied heavily upon for its decision-making, appeared quite straightforward.

To further illustrate this sense of confusion, the management of special project groups was considered to be especially mind-boggling: "There's a project board, there's an interim management group that I'm a member of, and there's a champions' group. There's implementation leads, there's all kinds of groups and different individuals working on this project, and if you actually want to kind of come in and say what you think or even ask a question it's really hard to know where to go to do that" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 310-315). In this data extract, Sandra was describing the difficulty in finding a place for her voice when so many different people and groups were involved in the project, and this seemed to be a common view among participants. This underlines the impact of bureaucracy on voice (Kakabadse, 1979; Morrison & Milliken, 2000) and challenges the idea of voice flowing naturally around an organisation.

The array of policies within the organisation was also thought to be difficult to manoeuvre: "I counted up the number of HR policies and there are 57 of them and there are 50 odd HR forms and I think there's a similar number of forms for finance and elsewhere, so a formidable number of things to get your head round" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 576-579). Some participants described uncertainty around permission to get involved: "I think sometimes it feels like we set up a number of different sorts of processes and ways of doing, which means that you're not quite sure if you have permission to do something or not" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 305-307). What this meant was that participants sometimes felt overwhelmed by the rules and processes in place and, at times, hamstrung in their ability to give voice with confidence, as they feared unwittingly breaking

the rules and protocols that, presumably, had been set up to make life easier and more transparent for employees. In this way, bureaucracy was thought to be acting as a way to control the flow of voice rather than facilitating it, in much the same way as a dam controls and regulates the flow of water.

Although not the sole preserve of larger organisations, bureaucratic procedures are more likely to be found as the organisation grows and becomes more complex. To what extent did the participants view the size and complexity of their organisation as potential facilitators or barriers for their voice?

### **Size And Complexity**

Hierarchy and bureaucracy are often more commonly seen in larger organisations, and the size and complexity of the current organisation were believed, by some, to impact negatively on voice: "If you don't know your director because they're in a different office and you've never been down to that office it might then become harder to have those conversations" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 200-203). In this extract Caitlin expressed the importance, for her, of having access to the people to whom she was trying to give voice, a task made more difficult by multiple locations. This organisation is represented across nine regions and four countries. A significant proportion of the workforce is also employed at headquarters. Size and complexity were believed to be impediments to voice because people couldn't easily find their way around.

According to Michael, smaller organisations were not just easier to navigate, but were also better at correcting negative voice behaviour:

"When I've worked in smaller organisations, five people around a table, if two people are exhibiting either of those extremes you know someone is very very quiet and someone is very very noisy it's noticeable, and there tends to be a bit of

a self-correcting mechanism, that people will either reflect on their own behaviour or other people say well we've had enough of you (laughs), let's hear from somebody else (...), and I think at a bigger table in a bigger organisation that's much harder" (Michael, Transcript 12, 115-123).

Michael seemed to be saying here that, as an organisation grows, so the normal rules of behaviour become harder to enforce. This links back to the earlier comments about bureaucracy, and its attempts to regulate behaviour. Perhaps bureaucracy is inevitable as an organisation grows but Michael's perspective seemed to be that rules and processes could not substitute for the natural checks and balances in place in smaller work environments.

The size and complexity of an organisation can restrict the flow of voice just as the flow of water is compromised by the barriers and obstacles in its path.

Beyond size and complexity, however, was there anything about the nature of the business that participants thought had an impact on voice?

### **Member Focus**

According to Morrison and Milliken (2000), the market in which an organisation operates can have an impact on voice. The organisation in question is a trade union and professional body representing health professionals. A common theme among participants was that this dual identity between trade union and professional body created confusion for the organisation, which, in turn, impacted on voice. This was because, according to some participants, certain voices had been heard more readily at different times in the organisation's history, as it repositioned its main focus. Currently, according to some participants, the organisation's main focus was as a trade union, but some felt that the impending change of personnel at the top would shift its focus towards

being a professional body representing the professional development and interests of its members. This notion of dual identity will be explored further in Sub Theme 2: Culture.

If the business of this organisation is to represent the voice of its members, how did that business focus influence voice? In a majority of the texts analysed, participants spoke of an organisational sensitivity to criticism from its members:

"Somebody criticises and there is the automatic default in that you run round like a headless chicken, you can't quite cope with the criticism and you act really quickly on it, and you're worried about it" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 486-489).

Member issues, understandably, were thought to have importance to the organisation, but this sometimes meant that other issues could be buried and ignored: "Managers who don't want to do something (...), could comfortably say members aren't asking about that, members don't want that (...) we simply do what they tell us" (Michael, Transcript 12, 210-215). The focus on membership also brought benefits to employee voice: "A lot of that need to listen to their members is mirrored in the perceived need to listen to their staff" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 27-29). In voice terms, this reaction to criticism suggests that employees' ideas, suggestions and opinions on how to deal with the issue in the longer-term may be lost in the rush to put out the fire.

In the extracts above, member focus was thought to lead to a sensitivity to criticism from members which, in turn, often led to a good deal of hand-wringing and fire-fighting. This meant that the organisation worked hard to placate its members and this, inevitably, increased the workload of its employees. The notion of 'busyness' and its possible impact on voice will now be explored in more depth in the next sub section.

## **Busyness as Usual**

A final contextual issue worthy of note was the belief that "busyness" had a negative effect on voice. This was constructed in two ways by participants: the organisation was too busy to listen and people themselves were too busy to give voice or to accommodate the changes that voice, particularly new ideas, often created. Although an obvious point on the face of it, this idea has not been explored in the literature on voice to date. When asked about some of the main barriers to giving voice at work, Jonathan said: "Busyness, the sheer complexity (...), it's sheer time and complexity. It's very common you know. It's a very complex organisation" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 347-355).

On a personal level, a common theme among participants was that busyness stopped one giving voice because there was simply too much day-to-day work to do. When asked whether people lacked the breathing space to give voice, Sandra said:

"Yeah, especially when it comes to bringing in new ideas. I have a member of staff who's been with us for about a year, who came from a similar job in another organisation, who's brimming with ideas, got loads of new things, and I've seen her enthusiasm wane in the last six months because of the day to day volume of work, and I wish I could free her up to contribute all the ideas that she could bring from outside" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 444-450). Here Sandra appeared to be lamenting the fact that everyday work was somehow getting in the way of the expression and implementation of new ideas, and she seemed to be disappointed by the waste of such good resources. This notion of wasting the ideas and creativity of new employees has not been properly addressed in the empirical

research to date, and will be picked up in more detail in Theme 4 Sub Theme 2: Tenure.

If immediate work pressures were perceived to be a difficulty, another barrier to voice was that an idea voiced might lead to more work if it was implemented: "I think that if you come up with a great idea that might just be another thing on the plate to deal with, when you've already got what feels like hundreds of things to do" (Janine, Transcript 15, 81-84).

When talking about her experiences in another organisation, Caitlin noted:

"It was very much like you know you just didn't challenge it, so the problem was if you did ever make any suggestions it was something that then became your responsibility, even if it wasn't necessarily appropriate to be sitting with you, so everybody ended up not saying anything" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 586-590).

These extracts from Janine and Caitlin seem to have a strong sense of anecdotal truth about them. New ideas were likely to cause more work in the short term, although, presumably, they should lead to greater efficiencies in the longer term. In spite of this, the perceived pressures of everyday work meant that, for some people, ideas might not be shared for fear of the extra work associated with them. Although the research literature has considered fear as a potential barrier to voice, this has largely been couched in terms of fear of recrimination (Detert & Trevino, 2010), fear of wasting management time (Detert, Burris & Harrison, 2010), fear of the negative consequences of voicing their concerns about the competence and performance of others (Burris, 2012), and fear of putting oneself at risk, which, according to Van Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003), is one of the primary motives for defensive silence. There has been no examination to date of the fear of taking on more responsibility at work as a result of voice. To

return to the chosen metaphor of water, voice may be feared for the potential damage it does, in the same way that water can cause untold damage when left unchecked.

#### **5.2.1.2 Sub Theme 2: Climate**

##### **Organisational Climate**

Organisational climate has received more attention than context in the literature on voice, although this body of research is still quite limited (see, for example, Dutton et al, 1997; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith & Kamdar, 2011). Organisational climate can be thought of as the shared and enduring perceptions of psychologically important aspects of a work environment. It includes perceptions about the culture of the organisation, for example supportive, inclusive and change-oriented versus unsupportive, exclusive and conservative. It also includes climate at the group level rather than the organisation as a whole. Participants described climate at both levels and, for most, it was not possible to talk unequivocally about the organisational climate without referencing the department in which they worked.

Participants used a variety of different ways to describe the organisational climate. These included positivity, lacks overall vision, old fashioned and hierarchical, complacent, makes promises it can't keep, and good but could be better. Many people commented on how the organisation had improved and was now run like a business, whereas before there were very few controls and little governance in place.

There were a number of communities of opinion about the climate of the organisation. A common theme in the data was that staff got treated well and stayed. The impact on voice was that there were a lot of long-serving staff,



especially managers, in employment. Long-serving managers were thought by many to have more voice and an instinctive desire to block change, and these beliefs will be explored more fully in Sub Theme 3: Key Players and in Theme 4: Boatmen and Landlubbers. Long service was also thought by some to lead to complacency: "They can do the job 9-to-5 then go home, they don't care. There are a lot of people like that and therefore if they get an easy ride, if they don't have to push forward something a bit different or think up something a bit different they won't" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 564-568). What Anavi seemed to be suggesting here was that some people would opt for an easier life if they could, and that the organisation had more than its fair share of such people because of how well they treated their staff, which led to low rates of staff turnover which, in turn, led to a sense of comfort and complacency among people, who would not rock the boat for fear of the extra work that change might provoke. In terms of water, some people were shy of getting wet because of the work involved in getting into the water and drying off afterwards.

A second aspect of climate reported by some participants was that the organisation tried to listen: "I think it puts out to listen. I'm not sure whether it hears, so I think it listens. It wants to hear people's ideas but I don't think you necessarily see the understanding and taking on board of what people are saying" (Christine, Transcript 3, 8-11). This data extract is quite typical of a general feeling that the organisation appeared to try hard to capture voice but didn't always succeed. It links back to the earlier commentary on member focus, which said that the organisation would inevitably express interest in the voice of its staff because it existed to hear and represent the voice of its members. What it also suggests, though, is that the organisation was more successful at hearing the

voice of its members than the voice of its staff. Although the organisation was offering encouragement to its staff to get in the water, it was much more concerned to see that its members were safe once in.

Many participants commented that the organisation felt different on the inside compared to its public image, that the reality of the organisation was not always matched by the public rhetoric surrounding it: "We get all these lovely awards for being best employer, all those lovely trophies downstairs, and sometimes it's like we say we do those things and I kind of wonder how much we actually do" (Bob, Transcript 9, 184-187). When describing an incident in which a senior executive publicly singled out members for responding negatively to a proposal, Michael said: "What does that say about the organisation's culture as a learning organisation, which is at odds with the public pronouncements about the organisation wanting to support staff?" (Michael, Transcript 12, 330-332). The organisation was also described as old fashioned and resistant to change: "Looking from the outside I would have thought that (name of organisation) was at the forefront of (name of profession), but actually I've come inside and I think some of its ideas and views are really very old-fashioned. It's sort of, you know, haven't we all moved on now (laughs)? No? OK right let's see why" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 250-254).

It is not uncommon for the workplace to look different on the inside compared to the view from outside. Organisations are keenly aware of their public image, and this organisation was no different. Its main source of income was member subscriptions and, therefore, it had to present itself in an attractive light for its members and potential members, otherwise they might go elsewhere. In terms

of the chosen metaphor, these extracts suggest that the water looks different, and more appealing, from a distance compared to the view close up.

A common theme among participants was that the organisation had a blame culture and was reactive and risk averse. The implications for voice were that people feared blame so didn't give voice, and that ideas tended to fall on deaf ears because the organisation only addressed issues once they needed fixing. Many participants commented that the organisation was prone to blaming when things went wrong: "There is a bit of a blame culture sometimes, and it's hard to challenge that. So whereas if it was a more open forum it's kind of like well let's have a look at what went wrong, then you'd be more encouraged to speak out" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 46-49). Others talked about how the organisation was reactive and risk averse: "I think a lot of the time they wait till it's broke and then fix it rather than continue to develop and improve and change" (Simon, Transcript 7, 619-621). The organisation appeared to be aware of being reactive and risk averse but, according to some, didn't know how to address it. As Janine noted:

"We had a managers conference recently which was all about taking risks, but it was odd because you (...) just came back and carried on being risk averse and nothing else happened you know. We didn't continue the work. It was strange it's like we got an awareness of that's what we're like but we don't know what to do" (Janine, Transcript 15, 159-165).

A number of participants described a schism between the trade union and professional body sides of the organisation: "I think there is a kind of schizophrenia between the trade union side and the professional side (...) I don't think there really is an organisational identity" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 27-30). This

split was thought to lead to different perspectives and ways of working by some: "The fact that we've got a split between the practice, the professional stuff and the trade union stuff creates different mentalities" (Michael, Transcript 12, 30-31). The impact of this identity crisis on voice was that some voices were louder and heard more readily than others, depending on which side of the fence they originated from.

A few participants described how the organisation mirrored the profession it represents. Key features of this comparison were a degree of passivity and an acceptance of hierarchy, both of which suggested reluctance to voice and an expectation that decisions were made at the top. Michael described the profession having a quieter voice than related professions:

"There's always a sense that, you know, (name of profession) is always left behind. They're always the ones that are outside the discussion circles, and in some ways that can reflect back in the organisation as well. We don't push as hard as we could do in certain fora. We let the (names of other professions) get preference" (Michael, Transcript 12, 370-375).

Janine observed that the hierarchical structure in the organisation mirrored the profession it represented:

"I wonder whether it might be because, you know, (name of profession) are (...) it's very much a hierarchy it's very much you're told what to do. But that's how it is and it has to be like that for a reason, and I wonder whether that's been brought across and that's reflected in the whole organisation's culture" (Janine, Transcript 15, 140-146).

Participants described the organisation in a number of different ways, as a good organisation which treated its staff well and tried to listen to them, although

somewhat risk averse and accepting of hierarchy, which some believed came from the nature of the profession it represented. This demonstrated the difficulty of thinking about climate as a straightforward concept, which is uniform across the organisation. For many participants climate was determined by where one sat within the organisation, specifically which department they worked for, and the notion of departmental climate will now be explored in greater depth.

### **Departmental Climate**

A common pattern across the data corpus was that participants found it difficult to articulate the organisational climate without referencing the belief that overall climate was determined by where one sat in the organisation or, to be more precise, which department one worked for: "The new members of the team have come in and gone gosh you lot are so sensitive (...) they've never been spoken to in the same way that they have been by other departments" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 418-422). These differences were attributed largely to the department manager and how he/she set the tone for the culture. A number of people also referred to the 'silo mentality' that was prevalent in the organisation, which meant that knowledge of and contact with different departments was quite rare. In terms of the chosen metaphor, voice flowed more freely depending on its location. Some parts of the organisation were thought to be quiet backwaters for voice, some were dry creeks while others were faster flowing streams and currents.

The empirical research literature has acknowledged the influence of departmental climate on voice behaviour. For example, Vakola and Bouradas (2005) found that the 'micro-climate' created by supervisors' attitudes had more impact on voice than the 'macro-climate' of communications systems and senior

management attitudes. Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008a) showed that the group climate factors of autonomy and egalitarianism led to voice being given more freely, and Morrison, Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2011) demonstrated the importance of a favourable group voice climate, where people thought it was safe and worthwhile to give voice.

Most participants in the current research study thought that workplace climate depended on where you worked within the organisation: "It's sort of an unwritten phrase that people often bring up. There's working for (name of organisation) and then there's working for (name of department) as if it's somehow different working in our department to working in another department" (Elise, Transcript 10, 39-43). When asked to comment on the organisational climate, Bob observed:

"In some parts of the organisation, well this place is great look at these people how motivated they are. Look at the great things they're doing. They wanna come to work, they wanna have some fun, they wanna work here, and then other parts of the organisation you think oh blimey (laughs)" (Bob, Transcript 9, 405-409). These two data extracts underline the varied nature, not only of voice opportunities, but of the experience of work itself, depending on where the person was located within the organisation.

What did the participants believe was the main cause of these noticeable differences? According to many people, the biggest influence on departmental climate was believed to be the style of the department manager: "It is dependent on your department and who manages you, in a way that gives you the opportunity to do this, so I think it's quite important who your manager is" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 55-57). This is not surprising: research has identified

managers as having an important influence on voice. For example, Tost, Gino and Larrick (2014) found that managers' experience of heightened power meant they were often more dominant verbally and this suppressed staff communication and damaged team performance. McClean, Burriss and Detert (2013) demonstrated that staff turnover rates were higher where employees gave voice but their managers had limited access to resources, limited influence and low change orientation.

Participants in the current research study talked in a more nuanced way about how the manager "set the tone" for voice: "My boss, you know, she's a very controlling person in a very nice way but (laughs) she's a very nice person. You can talk to her about lots of different things, but she's very controlling, doesn't empower you to make decisions. So I would say that's the culture here" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 289-293). The influence of managers on voice was talked about at some length by participants, and will be explored in much greater detail in Sub Theme 3: Key Players.

As stated earlier, a common observation among participants was the perceived existence of a "silo mentality" which referred to the belief that departments worked independently of each other and rarely collaborated. This supported the feeling that departmental climate was different depending on where you sat, but also that there was little concrete evidence of this, because of a lack of exposure to other departments: "We really work in silos in this organisation. Cross departmental working, matrix working isn't something that would ever be considered, yet I think it would improve the way we communicate" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 307-310). Silo working meant that voice was thought to be heard and welcomed differently in different departments, and that it was much more

difficult to become connected: "I think it probably takes a while for people to kind of become networked around the organisation because it's a bit siloed" (Bob, Transcript 8, 561-563).

Although a common enough experience, silo working has not received any attention thus far in the empirical research literature on voice. In terms of the main theme of dams and aqueducts, silo working could be construed as a dam or an inhibitor of voice, controlling its flow by diverting it into different channels. Siloes made cross-functional working difficult and limited the ability of some participants to connect with others outside of their department. The idea of being networked and connected across the organisation was thought to be important in getting one's voice heard, and this will be explored more fully in Theme 2: Flows and Eddies.

### **National Culture**

Although only cited by one participant as having an impact on voice, national culture (specifically Englishness) is worthy of consideration because it may hold a key to further research into how well voice travels across national boundaries, and this is why the researcher decided to give it some prominence in the data analysis. The influence of national culture on voice has received scant attention in the research literature to date. Morrison and Milliken (2000) posited that it would impact on how the top management team made decisions but this hasn't been empirically tested. Moreover, most research on voice has taken place in the USA, so it is not clear how well the conditions for voice might travel between nations.

Michael believed that Englishness might impact on voice because of a "grin and bear it" mentality: "I think that sort of with minor irritations just grin and bear it.



Unless something is really bad people just get on with it" (Michael, Transcript 12, 594-596). He also felt that what he described as comfort with hierarchy might interrupt the natural flow of ideas: "You get five English people together in a room to discuss something and they'll end up forming a committee, you know somebody says who's going to do this and who's going to be the chair?" (Michael, Transcript 12, 586-589). In addition, he thought voice might be impacted by what he saw as an English desire not to draw attention to oneself: "I don't want to flag something, I don't want to set a process, I don't want it to be captured by somebody else and turn it into something bigger or implicate me in something that I don't really want to be implicated in" (Michael, Transcript 12, 727-730). Finally, he observed that, in his view, asking for voice did not come naturally to businesses in this country. He talked about the value of asking staff what they would do if they could run the organisation for a day. When asked why his organisation didn't ask that question, he said:

"I don't think many British businesses do (laughs). I think it's very much, I don't think it's even a fear of what the response would be I just don't think it's on the radar. I don't think we get it and yet the chances of the way that the British mind is set is that no one is going to come back and say let's sell the building and (laughs) work from a small office in Lambeth with a dog (laughs)" (Michael, Transcript 12, 562-567).

It is advisable not to read too much into these data extracts because they were the views of only one participant. However, these interesting perspectives on Englishness could merit further valuable research.

### **5.2.1.3 Sub Theme 3: Key Players**

Any account of context and climate as the main organisational conditions for voice would be incomplete without a review of the people who work for the organisation. Morrison (2011) proposed that supervisors and senior leaders would have a big impact on how employee voice was heard, and this was a common theme shared by the majority of participants in the current research study. However, there were other patterns of response in the data corpus, which suggested that other people had an important influence on voice. These were long-servers and employees themselves. Long servers, in particular their capacity to block change and new ideas, will be explored further in Theme 4: Boatmen and Landlubbers. Their inclusion here is more about the responsibilities they have for getting voice heard.

#### **The Senior Team**

Many people spoke freely and without prompting about the senior team. This is a highly visible and high profile team who lead directorates and countries and sit at the top of the organisation tree. Their influence on voice was thought to be significant, and often this influence was believed to be negative. The senior team was described in four main ways by participants: approachable and informal, disrespectful and dismissive, deferred to and not challenged, and out of touch with the shop floor.

A common theme among participants was that members of the senior team were, on a personal level, friendly and pleasant: "They're very nice people, they're very sociable people. I've never had an impression of any of them not being pleasant, in fact the opposite a lot of the time. They aim to please, they're very much pleasers" (Simon, Transcript 7, 303-306). They were also seen as

approachable, irrespective of where one sat in the hierarchy: "Some people I've met, you know, perhaps they're in more senior positions within the organisation, and I suppose like (name of senior executive) is an example of this. You know, certainly will be friendly and talk to anyone within the organisation, regardless of their grade or what department they work in, you know you'll have a chat make a cup of tea or something" (Elise, Transcript 10, 271-276).

Conversely, a different side of the senior team was reported by a number of participants, who observed that, in public fora and senior level meetings, they could be dismissive, disparaging and disrespectful. This behaviour could feasibly be linked to sensitivity to challenge, which is explored further in Sub Theme 4: Dispositions and Emotions and in Theme 3: Barges and Rafts. Some participants described a senior team member's behaviour in a twice-yearly open session with all staff: "There are comments made in public fora to colleagues, which are disparaging, so it feels quite scary to raise things in a wider forum. So you may ask a question, but the response back is usually quite belittling and that puts off anybody asking questions" (Christine, Transcript 3, 57-63). Another person recalled a time when he gave a presentation to the senior management meeting: "I had to make a presentation and the barracking I received (...) it was bruising, which I found quite an unusual experience" (Michael, Transcript 12, 613-616). The senior team was thought by some to be deferred to and protected from challenge and bad news: "I think there's still a culture of deference around the (senior management role), that they're protected from bad news, and they're, you know, told what they want to hear rather than challenged" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 310-312). A failure to allow negative messages to flow upwards in organisations is believed to impair their ability to detect errors (March, 1991)

and engage in double-loop learning (Argyris, 1977), and this organisation was thought by some to be guilty of this by protecting the senior team from bad news and challenge.

Linked to this was also a belief, shared by some participants, that the senior team was out of touch with the shop floor: "Staff sense that there is I feel a bit of a disconnect between the top of the tree and where we are" (Bob, Transcript 9, 159-161). When discussing her director's involvement with her team, Sylvia said:

"I note with dismay that the manager's manager doesn't go any more, or has only been to about one of the meetings, which I find a bit disappointing, because he's relatively new in post and once again I think it's an opportunity to actually understand a little bit more what we're doing" (Sylvia, Transcript 1, 518-523).

### **Middle Managers**

If the senior team was thought by many to have a generally deleterious effect on voice, what did participants say about their own managers? Not surprisingly, they had a lot to say about their line managers and middle managers in general. Much research on voice to date has focused on managers and supervisors as having a powerful influence on voice in the workplace. For example, Grant, Gino and Hofmann (2011) found that extroverted unit leaders responded less well than introverted unit leaders to proactive behaviour from their staff and that this, in turn, affected their unit's performance. Fast, Burriss and Bartel (2014) showed that managers with low managerial self-efficacy were less likely to solicit voice, more likely to denigrate those who gave voice and less likely to implement ideas.

The wealth of data extracts about middle managers has been organised according to the main patterns of response across the data sets. Participants shared beliefs about the ideal manager, how managers were different from each other, how poor behaviour (such as verbal dominance and defensiveness) and good behaviour (such as openness and sharing) impacted differently on voice, and how managers were in a difficult place and were often not properly supported by the organisation. According to some participants middle managers were, metaphorically speaking, cut adrift by the organisation and left to float without direction or sink without trace.

After being asked how they thought their manager felt about them sharing their ideas, opinions and suggestions, participants were also asked what advice they would give that person to encourage them to speak out more at work. This provoked a range of responses, which at times amounted to a recipe for the ideal manager. According to participants, in order to encourage the voice of their staff, a good manager should be supportive and approachable: "Everyone understands that sometimes you're busy and you just don't have time to put everything down and stop and talk to that person, but you know it's just simple. You say if you're busy at that moment, come back in half an hour or something" (Elise, Transcript 10, 211-215). A good manager should also be a good listener: "You need not just to appear to listen. You need to demonstrate that you've listened and the demonstration of that is through behaviour and action" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 192-194). A good manager is honest if nothing can be done: "If they're really listening they can tell you that they've heard what you said but actually at this moment in time that might be a valid opinion, I can't do it" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 252-254), and is able to treat staff as individuals: "There are some people who

won't come forward in a team conversation, even if they have a burning desire to say something. So you draw them in in a different way, and you kind of ask their opinion and wait for them to give it" (Bob, Transcript 9, 618-621). This has clear echoes of individualised consideration, one of the four major characteristics of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), which encourages leaders to treat each follower as a whole individual to help them to reach higher levels of attainment. Metaphorically speaking, such managers were clearly thought to be facilitators of voice in the same way that aqueducts carry water across difficult terrain.

Although some managers may have exhibited some of the characteristics of transformational leadership, a recurring theme across the data sets was that managers in the organisation behaved quite differently from each other, and that there was no single 'house style' of leadership. This links closely to the different climates across departments noted earlier (Sub Theme 2: Climate). Access to voice opportunities appeared to depend, at least in part, on where people worked, because of the belief that different climates existed in different departments. When talking about how different managers were across the organisation, Michael noted:

"I think they see themselves as leaders, as champions, as one of the team, and those self-perceptions influence how they behave in their management functions. Somebody who sees themselves as one of the team isn't very good at doing the hard stuff around sickness and absence or making hard decisions, so they'll fudge them or they'll interpret them in a in an unusual way, which leaves individual members of staff perhaps a little confused. A manager who wants to be a leader will encourage people to do lots of stuff but forget the day-to-day

stuff, will not be good at making sure the whole thing connects together, and I think we've got various styles across the organisation" (Michael, Transcript 12, 262-273).

Participants were often quick to criticise their managers for failing to properly welcome voice. Some people described a lack of management interest in voice: "Where I'm working now, the managers believe that they know how to do it best and that's it. They know best, their decisions are the decisions we all stick to" (Simon, Transcript 7, 91-94). This has strong echoes of the 'fallacy of centrality' as espoused by Weick (1995), where managers think if an issue is important they would already know about it so new concerns and ideas can't, by definition, be of much importance. Other participants believed that managers were merely going through the motions when asking for voice: "You feel like you're being asked your opinion for the sake of being asked your opinion and the feedback that you give isn't really gonna make any difference, but it's something that they have to do to make you feel as if you're being included, and that you're being listened to" (Elise, Transcript 10, 223-227). These participants believed they weren't being properly heard because perhaps their managers did not think what they had to say was of sufficient importance. Milliken and Lam (2009) suggested that managers have to gamble on whether to act upon voice and if they follow up on insignificant concerns this will likely be seen as a waste of resources. Burriss (2012) found that managers may be tempted to disregard the voice of those who speak out too frequently on the same issue, particularly if the message is perceived as too challenging and change-oriented. It could be the case for these participants that their managers were going through the motions of welcoming

voice when they privately believed it was not that important or it was too challenging.

According to some participants, their managers didn't pay lip service to listening in the way described above but, instead, were more verbally dominant and this impacted negatively on voice in different ways by closing down proper discussions: "It's very easy for one person just to talk, particularly if you were a team leader. You're sort of talk talk and nobody else is going to say oh shut up, you know, let me say something" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 141-142). This supports the research of Tost, Gino and Larrick (2014), who found that more verbally dominant leaders closed down a free exchange of views and presided over teams whose performance suffered as a result.

Some participants also described their managers as being insecure, defensive and lacking in confidence: "Sometimes I do get the sense that it's a little bit of ego, a little bit of hierarchy, maybe insecurity within what their remit is and what they're looking after, instead of looking at the greater good" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 126-129). According to one participant, this meant such managers would be closed to voice: "I think there are some managers who feel defensive or uncertain or frightened or, for whatever reason, like to play things very close to their chest" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 254-257). The same participant thought that this lack of confidence could lead to aggressiveness: "If your people are not confident they might react in the way opposite to that, aggressive you know. Attack is the best form of defence sort of thing. If I'm aggressive people won't start picking holes in my capabilities. I'll just go around shouting the odds" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 271-275). This lends qualified support to the research of Fast, Burriss and Bartel (2014) who found that managers with low managerial



self-efficacy were less likely to solicit voice from staff, were more likely to negatively evaluate those who spoke up, and were less likely to implement others' ideas. In metaphorical terms, these managers were demonstrating aquaphobia, or a fear of water, so closed it down to stem its flow.

Some participants, inevitably, had more positive things to say about their managers, and these centred on openness: " Openly shares what he's doing (...) some of the challenges we have, some of his frustrations and difficulties he might have" (Christine, Transcript 3, 97-100), and comfort with challenge: "I was talking about a number of options, and I've got an opposite view to my line manager, but it was perfectly fine to have that opposite view" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 73-75). According to Charlotte, inviting and giving challenge meant you were being heard:

"I think it's also about challenging, being challenged in terms of your opinion. That's when you know somebody's really listening. Not challenge you in a negative way but they kind of wanna know more. They ask you to elaborate on what you said and also to take ownership. You had that opinion and why is that?" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 372-377).

A final common theme of note was that many participants had a degree of sympathy for their managers. Some felt their managers weren't well supported: "In some ways (name of organisation) mirrors the practices in the NHS, in that the NHS is very good at pushing forward but not providing the support to stop them falling over, and I think sometimes that happens here too" (Michael, Transcript 12, 255-258). Other participants saw managers as being caught in the middle: "I think middle management is a very lonely place to be (...) because you're caught in the middle (laughs). You know obviously you're getting

feedback from your staff and you're getting stuff coming down and you have to kind of manage both those things" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 78-85). Metaphorically speaking, these managers found themselves at the estuary, or the tidal mouth of the river, where the tide meets the stream, the point where water flows both up and down and where the waters are notoriously hard to navigate.

Linked to the notion of busyness mentioned earlier, time, or lack of it, was also thought to act as an inhibitor for voice. As Charlotte, herself a manager, observed:

"Once you plan and you've got time for reflection and you've got time to action the points, you actually become more open because you have got time actually if you want to go through with some of the things that you want to discuss. When you go like that you're more open, because you've got more time and you know it's not like you bring something in and it's a curve ball and you can't cope with it because you're trying to juggle everything else" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 459-466).

### **Staff**

So far in the sub theme Key Players, the narrative has focused on the difficulties of getting the senior team and middle managers to listen, but what of the problems in encouraging employees to speak? A number of managers talked about the difficulty of getting their staff to talk. Some people just came in to do their jobs: "I think people should be heard when they want to be heard. Some people are quite happy coming in at 9 and going home at 5 and not worrying about work, and that's fine as long as they do their work well. You don't have to be thinking about it 24/7" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 375-379). Others were seen as ambivalent, unless the issue affected them directly: "What really gets people

coming to see me is something that's really immediate, really focused or really big. So we've got some change going on in one of our departments, and other people are coming to speak to me about it because it's their direct personal experience" (Michael, Transcript 12, 730-734).

Some participants described a sense of frustration at the collective silence of their staff: "If they're not saying something (...) it may be that I'm not aware of it, because if it's in my team and it's not coming up, and that's one of the difficulties of being a manager actually is that you don't always know if things are being kept quiet or not" (Janine, Transcript 15, 12-16). Others talked about the responsibility of staff to give voice in the right way: "We're all adults, you know. You shouldn't walk into your office and shout at your manager and, you know, it should be two way, because it's fine to feed something back but it's also fine to be told no actually this can't be put in place in this way" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 502-505).

What these data extracts suggest is that voice was not always freely given by staff, even if all the right conditions were in place, because some people were simply not that interested unless the issue affected them directly. This ambivalence was generally accepted but was sometimes a source of frustration for managers. In addition, voice had to be presented in the right way by staff when it was given, and the notion of packaging the message will be taken up in much greater depth in Theme Three: Barges and Rafts.

### **The Old Guard**

A number of participants talked specifically about long serving managers, at all levels, and their influence on what got heard. Long servers were also thought to have more voice as a group but this will be picked up separately in Theme Four:

Boatmen and Landlubbers. Long serving managers were perceived to have the power to block voice, especially voice that led to change: "They don't want to know, and in those cases I don't do anything, I just let them carry on, because it's just too much of a battle. I don't really see the point. I will battle against it, which will make them frustrated and even less inclined to work with me" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 456-460).

It was also thought by some that the poor behaviour of long serving managers around voice was condoned and accommodated rather than addressed: "There are members of senior management, who are known for their brazen behaviour, but they've been here for a long time and they aren't going anywhere. They're in positions of power and so I think the organisation does have people who that's the way they are we're not gonna do anything, we'll work around them" (Michael, Transcript 12, 624-628).

Length of service in an organisation seems to make a difference to voice, with more experienced staff reporting more voice behaviour than newer employees (Detert & Burris, 2007; Burris, Detert & Chiaburu, 2008). Study One of the current research thesis also found that older, more experienced employees were strongly associated with the viewpoint that giving voice was natural and their opinions counted for something. However, the research literature on voice has not looked specifically at how long servers might block the voice of others: it has simply stated that voice behaviour is more prevalent among long servers, which may be linked to a greater investment in the organisation. Participants in the current research study talked specifically about the blocking power and poor behaviour of long serving managers, and further research in this area might be

valuable to see whether this is a general problem in the workplace or whether this was an issue that was germane only to this organisation.

#### **5.2.1.4 Sub Theme 4: Dispositions And Emotions**

The main theme of Dams and Aqueducts has so far considered the facilitating and blocking effects of the organisational context and climate, and key groups of people in the workplace. The final sub theme 'Dispositions and Emotions' takes a somewhat different approach and examines the psychological climate of the organisation. A commonly shared perception among participants was that voice was potentially unsafe and often futile. A majority of people also described the organisation as sensitive to criticism, and this was thought to be attributable, in the main, to its member focus (see Sub Theme 1: Context). This notion of sensitivity, which was played out across different levels in the hierarchy, led many participants to express fear of giving voice and to deem it as largely a waste of time.

#### **Sensitivity**

There was a pattern of responses across the dataset that suggested a degree of sensitivity within the organisation: "Generally speaking I don't think (name of organisation) takes on board criticism very well" (Janine, Transcript 15, 315-316). Sensitivity as a barrier to voice has not been explored in the research literature to date, except in the work of Fast, Burriss and Bartel (2014) who showed that managers with low managerial self-efficacy were less likely to solicit voice, more likely to denigrate those who gave voice and less likely to implement ideas. It could be argued that sensitivity to criticism was one of the factors behind the behaviour of these managers, but further research in this area

might be beneficial to understand the role of sensitivity as a potential inhibitor of voice.

In the current research study, the senior team was thought to be particularly sensitive to challenge and feedback from staff and members: "You may raise something (...) about genuine concerns on policy or something like that, but actually the response you get back is a personal one and a defensive one, sort of what do you mean? It feels discriminatory (laughs)" (Christine, Transcript 3, 74-77). A number of participants described how this sensitivity from the senior team was played out in public fora: "I do think people find it awkward to speak their mind. For example at the staff link up I think it's awkward to actually voice your opinion. I think unless you've got something positive you wanted to say I don't think they encourage any kind of negative criticism" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 60-64).

Michael described how a senior executive singled out dissenters in public: "The member survey had some critical comments, and (name of senior executive) in one of his broadcasts to staff (...) singled those people out, not by name because he didn't know who they were, but singled out members who responded negatively to some proposal" (Michael, Transcript 12, 313-318).

What were the possible reasons for this perceived sensitivity from the senior team? According to some participants it could have been attributable to the team being passionate about its work: "I think the running thread through all of them is probably the passion for the business and wanting to do the best for members" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 156-157), and striving to be brilliant: "When you strive to be really brilliant criticism can be more difficult. It shouldn't be because it should

help you become brilliant, but I don't think it copes very well with criticism from its members" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 481-484).

### **Fear**

Sensitivity to challenge and criticism led many participants to conclude that voice was not safe. This notion of safety is a well-rehearsed line in research literature on employee voice. For example, Morrison and Milliken (2000) and Morrison (2011) described perceptions of safety as being a key antecedent for voice. According to Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson (2003) staff may be primed to fear giving voice by the activation of their Behavioural Inhibition System. Van Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003) posited that people who felt fearful and at risk would engage in 'defensive silence'.

There was a pattern of responses across the majority of datasets that supported these propositions by suggesting that voice was not safe: "I think it's just a fear of saying something that might be derogatory, or for the repercussions it might have. I'm not saying you're being warned off or told off or anything, but I think you'd be reluctant to perhaps speak up" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 75-79).

This perception of safety depended primarily on where and to whom voice was given. Voice was considered to be safe within the confines of the team but not outside, particularly when challenging voice travelled upwards to the senior team: "In my team fine absolutely no problem, other environments (...) not so safe" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 491-492). Even within the team, some people would only give voice if it was given en masse: "I suggested the idea in our next team meeting why don't we all say something jointly rather than it coming from one person, and they kind of liked that idea (...) it's harder for individuals to say

something, but if they weren't singled out as the only one that's being disruptive then it might happen more often" (Elise, Transcript 10, 296-303).

Voice was thought by the majority of participants to be less safe when challenging upwards: "I've been at staff meetings where people have challenged the (name of senior executive role), and he's kind of made joking references to his card on the door, and that sets the tone I think" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 145-148). In this extract the card on the door was thought to refer to the employee's P45.

Ruth's statement supports the research of Detert and Trevino (2010) who found that voice to 'skip-level' leaders (two or more levels above), was deemed unsafe. To underline this, when asked if there were any barriers to speaking out at work, Christine said:

"I think there are unintentional barriers that have been put there just flippant comments as in, you know, your P45 those sorts of comments (...) not understanding the effect of that and (senior management role) making those sorts of comments would have on the rest of the organisation" (Christine, Transcript 3, 278-284).

Outside of this scenario, there was a strong sense from many participants that they feared doing the wrong thing or stepping out of line in some way: "I think there's a certain level of (...) fear about not wanting to put a foot wrong, not wanting to get in trouble with your own manager, and it kind of goes up to the top. I sense that very much. I think people are a bit afraid of doing the wrong thing" (Janine, Transcript 15, 154-158).

When asked how she felt when presenting papers at senior management meetings, Charlotte said:



"You're so worried about following process that you almost miss the moment. Things have moved on by the time you think when is it going to be alright to say something, now you've missed your gap, or is it all right to say something" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 61-65).

Sometimes the consequences of stepping out of line were more concrete: "We've got a new intranet that's gone up at the moment (...) but my first experience of it was putting something on the staff news and being told to take it down by my manager" (Janine, Transcript 15, 358-361).

A less common theme was around the longer-term consequences of giving voice when it wasn't safe to do so. For some, these consequences were quite nebulous: "It's hard to think of some examples when you've been disciplined or there's been consequences for saying what you really think, but I think that perhaps it's just because people don't actually say anything (laughs) in the first place" (Elise, Transcript 10, 306-310), whereas for others they were much clearer and were considered career threatening: "I believe that by raising my concerns I've burnt my bridges as far as promotion is concerned" (Simon, Transcript 7, 362-363), "I think it would be career limiting if you actively put (a suggestion) like transparency in decision-making" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 266-268).

These data extracts suggest that fear could be a multi-faceted construct. Participants feared challenging upwards, being a lone voice, being publicly humiliated, stepping out of line and doing the wrong thing, and damaging their careers. These are interesting findings, which are worthy of further research to understand more about what precisely it is that people fear when they say it's not safe to speak out.

## **Futility**

A number of researchers have referred to a 'climate of psychological safety' as being an important antecedent of voice at work (see, for example, Detert & Burris, 2007; Liang, Farh & Farh, 2012) and this is thought to be largely a product of an open management style within the team. Few participants in the current study believed that their immediate manager made it unsafe to speak out, but some thought that their manager's lack of interest rendered voice futile: "Occasionally I'm made to feel what's the point (...) sometimes you can sense from people whether they just don't want to hear it and that's when I'll just stop" (Sylvia, Transcript 1, 152-156), while others thought that giving voice was a waste of time because of their manager's refusal to consider alternative perspectives: "I know she won't do anything, refuses to do something, or just point blank ignores it, so it's pointless (...) I've been doing this job for so long this is how it's done and nothing will deviate from that" (Simon, Transcript 7, 291-295).

Occasionally, participants showed a sense of defiance against the futility of voice: "I suppose I probably don't think it's a waste of time. I think even if it's not taken on board or nothing changes, I think generally it's still better to say something that not at all" (Elise, Transcript 10, 356-358). When asked if she thought that voice was safe but is a waste of time, Christine said:

"If somebody says that that's been done loads of times before well then do it again then in a different way. No I don't give things up" (Christine, Transcript 3, 418-420).

### **5.2.1.5 Dams And Aqueducts: Key Messages**

The main theme 'Dams and Aqueducts' has described the organisation itself as both a facilitator and inhibitor of voice. The organisation's hierarchy and bureaucracy, its size and complexity, the nature of its business and the attendant workload were thought to be factors that largely served to inhibit voice. The organisational and departmental climate and national culture also impacted on voice. Important groups of people within the organisation were believed to have a key influence on whether voice was invited and heard. There were a number of important dispositions and emotional states that seemed to characterise the organisation in terms of its attitude to voice.

To return to the chosen metaphor the flow of voice, like water, was interrupted on its journey by the way the business was organised, by the actions of important people, especially the senior team and middle managers, by the climate of the organisation and its different departments, and by the dispositions of sensitivity, fear and futility that were believed by participants to feature large in the psychology of their workplace. The notion of flow will now be explored in much greater depth in the next main theme, which will attempt to describe what actually happened to voice when it had been given.

## **5.2.2 Theme 2: Flows and Eddies**

This theme describes how information flows around the organisation. Like water, voice may flow effortlessly in streams and currents or may be trapped in eddies and move in a different direction from the main current, flowing round in a circular motion but, essentially, going nowhere.

The organisation had a range of mechanisms for seeking voice and for broadcasting out to staff and the outside world. There was a strong sense from participants that formal mechanisms and grand gestures did little to capture the ideas, opinions and suggestions of its workforce. Healthy discussion of issues, particularly new ideas, was largely confined to the work team. Middle managers were viewed as important, but largely ineffective, conduits for voice upwards. Participants described a dilution of the original message as it travelled up to the top.

In addition, informal channels had emerged where an understanding of the political landscape of the organisation was considered critical to getting voice heard. Empirical research has considered this issue, in the sense that it has looked beyond the flow of voice between employees and their direct line managers. For example, Detert and Trevino (2010) examined the flow of voice further up the line to 'skip-level' leaders (see Chapter 2, p. 46-49), and Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) found that upward and inbound flow of voice improved work unit performance whereas lateral voice damaged the performance of the unit (see Chapter 2, p. 91-94).

### **5.2.2.1 Sub Theme 1: Mechanisms**

The organisation had a number of different ways in which it communicated with staff and invited their voice. Voice was perceived to flow down the organisation

more successfully than it went back up. Participants spoke of the formal systems for voice and the sometimes grand projects the organisation had established to involve its workforce. Some participants described a feeling of being superficially involved in decision-making, a kind of pseudo-consultation. There was a feeling that more informal and low-key initiatives for voice were more effective but were largely absent from the workplace.

### **The Flow Of Information**

A number of participants described how difficult it was sometimes to get voice to flow: "The governing board and (name of senior team) have powerful restraints put upon them, political and external drivers, imperatives" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 16-18). A lack of commercial focus and an emphasis on committee-based decision making meant, for some, that voice did not flow easily: "Because it's not commercially focused, because it's member led committees and that kind of thing, so as a consequence in previous roles my voice was heard much louder because of that" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 291-294).

Michael described the challenges faced by all organisations when trying to encourage voice:

"I think with any organisation it's a challenge to create structures that allow that to happen without disrupting the flow of the organisation. We can't have everyone having a two-hour berating meeting every week, but you can provide fora that allow people to feel comfortable in saying well if we can do this in a different way" (Michael, Transcript 12, 651-656).

The organisation had a range of systems and processes to get voice heard:

"There are systems and mechanisms in place" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 189-190).

These included staff briefings, operations meetings, one to ones and special

interest groups: "I have catch-ups with my line manager and we talk about the day-to-day work. I have one to ones with my line manager where we talk about longer project work. We have chats in the office with my peers. We have monthly operations meetings, set up around particular topics, and then we've got departmental ones which are set up quarterly" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 34-42).

Despite such opportunities for voice, many participants were critical of the mechanisms for voice, because they were seen as formulaic and bland: "We have the monthly briefing where your manager is supposed to read it out at the team meeting and you're supposed to discuss it, and then everyone sits in silence so it's all a bit boring" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 486-490). Formal mechanisms for voice could not cater for individuals who preferred to speak out in a particular way and this meant that those who were comfortable with the systems put in place often got heard more: "If you're just sticking to one way of doing things going forward you just get (...) the same people who will always have a voice" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 297-299).

### **The Problem With Grand Gestures**

This notion of formulaic and 'one size fits all' voice mechanisms meant that many participants felt that simple, informal channels worked better: "Putting people in very formal, unfamiliar situations, they might have a lot to say or a lot to contribute. They find it so unfamiliar and formal that that they just sit back and shut down" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 56-58). This led to a backlash against 'grand voice gestures' among the majority of participants: "There was a feedback thing that said tell us what you think about red tape, and that went on for a while, and then I think there's been one or two things change but not much really that I've noticed (laughs) as a result of that" (Janine, Transcript 15, 334-338). Apart from

such gestures not making much difference, some believed there was a lack of clarity around their objectives: "We have away days for managers and people aren't quite sure what the purpose is, over and above getting everyone together and having speeches and stuff" (Michael, Transcript 12, 280-284). There was a strong sense among participants that grand gestures could be avoided by listening more readily on an everyday basis: "It would've been nice if someone had listened to people saying could we do it this way without it having to escalate into a big project" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 200-202).

Bureaucratic and complex organisations may need processes and systems in place to encourage voice, but not at the expense of simple informal exchanges of views and ideas. According to many participants, voice was only taken seriously when it was attached to a special project or initiative, and they bemoaned the fact that, according to them, early and informal interventions involving genuine listening would have avoided the grand gestures they spoke about. It would seem that the simple flow of voice between people was interrupted by these gestures, which, in turn, led to voice being diluted. For example, the Red Tape Challenge, and the organisation's responses to staff opinions about red tape, seemed to lead to eddies and backwaters, where voice given was perhaps an end in itself and did not lead to much tangible change.

### **Downward Flow**

The upward flow of voice was thought by many to be arduous and carefully choreographed. Conversely, many participants thought that the organisation was very efficient at passing information down the hierarchy: "The general sense is that an email coming from the organisation will be telling you about what it's doing or what it would like you to do" (Michael, Transcript 12, 558-559), and

some saw this 'broadcasting out' as being out of place in modern organisations: "It's all a bit boring and (...) not really in tune with the way especially younger people work now, and that we ought to be engaging in much more informal ways using social media more, and being different in our tone our voice" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 490-495). When asked to elaborate on how younger people communicate, Sandra observed:

"When I see how young people communicate with each other now the tone is much more informal but still respectful (...) we kind of see this blurring of work and personal life as being something to avoid, but younger people blur it all the time. They mix it up it, you know, and I just think that culturally we need to think about how we get in that mindset more" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 498-507).

In these extracts Sandra was referring to what social marketing professionals describe as 'Generation Y', people born between 1977 and 1994, who are believed to communicate differently with each other, particularly through the use of technology. Although an interesting idea on the surface, this notion is, as yet, untested although there seems to be an anecdotal ring of truth to these assumptions. Further empirical research is required in this area to determine the communication styles, patterns and preferences of younger workers. If they are shown to be different this presents a real challenge to organisations as they strive to reach out to their younger workforce and hear their voices.

### **Pseudo Consultation**

A common theme among the majority of participants was that the organisation appeared to show an interest in the voice of its employees but that, often, this was more for show than anything else: "So they put a survey out to say give us your ideas on this and your ideas on that. Then you'll get back, well thank you



very much for your ideas but we are doing it this way anyway" (Christine, Transcript 3, 13-15). There was a shared belief that voice, particularly critical voice, would not be properly heard and taken into account when decisions were made: "We had discussions around pensions, and what came across for me was that we weren't being consulted, we were just being told this is what's going to happen, and the problem was that this was rolled out as a consultation, but people who asked questions were batted back" (Michael, Transcript 12, 539-543). When talking about consultation around the new intranet site, Simon noted:

"They don't come and talk properly to the people who are going to be using those systems, so they put somebody in charge of it who they think is going to deliver what they want to be delivered for a cost that they want to be provided, and they'll go out and pay lip service to setting up a group. It doesn't matter who because we're not gonna listen to you anyway" (Simon, Transcript 7, 126-131).

What these data extracts have in common is a sense of frustration and uncertainty about how much their voice is welcomed. In the incidents described above, it would seem to be incumbent on the organisation to be explicit about how employee voice, when requested, would be used to shape the decision-making process. There appeared to be some confusion over whether the organisation was informing, consulting or involving its staff, and this led to some participants being mistrustful of the organisation because there was a disconnect between what they were asking for and what they did with that input.

### **A System Is Only As Good As Its People**

There was a common theme in the data corpus that the success of voice mechanisms depended, to a large extent, on how they were used and interpreted

by people: "It feels like it's doing all the right things, but then I guess it's the individuals within the teams and the departments that, you know, make those things work well or not" (Elise, Transcript 10, 454-456). Managers were believed by many to have a particular responsibility to ensure voice mechanisms worked properly: "I think the support from individual managers is perhaps not as uniform as it could be, so there's a lot of individual interpretation of the broad strictures, so we have good policies but quite often there's variability in how those are implemented or interpreted" (Michael, Transcript 12, 232-236). When asked what next steps her manager would take after a recent away day, Janine said:

"She's going to do the same thing with all the different teams in (name of department) and then the ideas are gonna be pulled together (...) I'm hoping that they'll be open to not just changing the wording of the document, because that's the danger you just end up doing that and not actually implementing solid ideas, but I've got high hopes that I think it's gonna move forward" (Janine, Transcript 15, 398-404).

In these extracts participants described the flow of voice as being dependent on the attitudes and interests of those who controlled it, namely managers. In metaphorical terms, mechanisms and systems may be in place to manage the flow of water but these are controlled by people and human error may influence how water is captured, managed and controlled, leading on occasion to flooding, contamination and drought. If the mechanisms for voice weren't working as well as was hoped, how could people ensure their voice was heard? The answer for many participants was that they had to find their own way to navigate the organisation, and this leads to the next sub theme of connectedness.

### **5.2.2.2 Sub Theme 2: Connectedness**

The majority of participants showed limited faith in the efficacy of formal voice mechanisms for getting their voice heard. Most talked about the importance of connectedness. This meant being connected to the way things were done in the organisation and, more importantly, to the right sorts of people. Normally this meant being connected further up the hierarchy, which invariably involved sidestepping the immediate line manager.

#### **Understanding The Landscape**

A common theme from the data corpus was the importance of understanding how things worked in order to get one's voice heard. This didn't mean getting to grips with the mechanisms for voice. It meant, instead, understanding the political landscape of the organisation and how things actually got done.

Empirical research to date has indirectly addressed the political complexions of the workplace, and their impact on employee voice, as part of more general research on organisational climate. For example, Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes & Wierba (1997) found that reading the context and the current situation of the organisation was important. This notion was supported by many of the participants: "You have to be savvy about what the different political influences with a small p are here. Who's got whose ear, how you can manage and negotiate the different committees and councils, who you really need to build a relationship with in order to get your stuff on the agenda" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 469-473). Political influence was a theme picked up by a number of participants: "My manager is supremo in politics and knows who needs to be influenced, so she's good at advising on have a quick word with her, have a quiet word with him, take it to that committee, get it covered, write a paper. So there's a lot of

small p politics about how policies are taken forward" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 445-450).

There was a belief by a smaller number of people that it took time to understand the landscape of the organisation, which worked to the detriment of newer employees, although some new staff managed to find a way round this problem: "What one colleague has done, who's quite new to the organisation and who is very proactive, he goes round and tells his idea to anybody who will listen, it's kind of like a rambling scattergun. He's not quite sure who he needs to speak to so he'll go and speak to everybody about it and I kind of think good on you mate (laughs) at least you're doing it" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 343-348).

What these participants seem to be saying is that formal voice mechanisms are often ineffective and that, to get their voice heard, people need to understand how decisions are really made and how certain people and groups need to be influenced in order to get their voice to carry and flow further. In this sense, there appears to be a dual system for voice in place. The first is known to everyone and has limited power, while the second, which is known to those who are politically savvy, is where the real power lies.

### **Friends In High Places**

Understanding the landscape was seen to be important in the sense that people worked out where to go to get their voice heard. This inevitably involved seeking support and forming alliances with important people around the organisation, usually further up the hierarchy. Establishing good relationships with influential people was perceived by the majority of participants as being key to getting voice heard. This was particularly important because of the organisation's complex structure: "Relationships are absolutely key here, because it is a

complex organisation. It's really about negotiating relationships in order to be able to get to the people who you need to get your messages to and work with them" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 107-111).

Some people believed they were better placed than others to get their voice heard, often by dint of which department they worked for, but sometimes simply because of fortuitous historical circumstances: "I feel I've got a good relationship with (name of senior executive) because they managed me before they went into that role for a short period (...) I feel I could take my idea all the way to them and I have" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 121-126). A common theme among participants was that managers were not always effective at pushing voice upwards: "When you try and progress those ideas upwards to gain support from your own director there are challenges (...) so depending on the relationships you have or don't have it can often get stilted" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 54-58), and this will be explored in greater depth in Sub Theme 3: The Journey of an Idea.

This meant, for many, that they needed to take action to get heard, and some saw relationships as helping to give voice to their own voice: "You're better off having a champion, which is a voice for your own voice isn't it by default, you get a louder voice than your voice and you get a bigger voice" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 617-623). The same participant went on to describe the different sorts of champions who were available, and how best to communicate with them: "Some people want it all in black and white on paper, for others it would just be a concept or an idea. Some people you go to with the idea and they'll work it up. Others will coach you to have a voice (...) whereas some people will be your voice and others will take it and it will be their voice, you know, so it just really depends" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 654-662).

Relationships are thought to be important at work to gain access to influence, but there has been little empirical research conducted on this to date in the area of employee voice. Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003) suggested that we make calculations about how much, if at all, speaking out will damage relational capital and social currency within the workplace. This refers to the resources at one's disposal based on ties with others, and this can be mobilised to facilitate action as required. However, this research was couched largely in terms of decisions to remain silent for fear of damaging this capital. Participants in the current research study thought that connections were important for their voice to be heard and these connections went beyond their line managers, who were often believed to be ineffective at promoting voice beyond the team. In terms of the chosen metaphor, voice could travel faster and further by stepping aboard a seaworthy vessel sailed by an experienced captain, and this inevitably involved circumventing one's immediate line manager.

### **Sidestepping The Line**

According to Detert and Trevino (2010) voice given to immediate supervisors is considered to be safe but futile, which means that people will often go above their line managers to get their voice properly heard. When giving voice to more senior managers (what the researchers referred to as 'skip level leaders') employee voice is less safe and, in some cases, less futile. A number of participants described how they routinely sidestepped their line manager to get their voice heard higher up.

Although giving voice to senior people has been described as unsafe in Theme 1, Sub Theme 4: Dispositions and Emotions, the act of going above one's manager did not appear to cause participants any difficulties, because this meant going to

a person of influence elsewhere in the organisation but not at the top:

"Somebody might think they're the most relevant person so I try and go to them first even though it's sort of out of politeness. I go to that person knowing they can't solve it in order to go to the next, so I go through the motions" (Simon, Transcript 7, 66-69), and did not involve duplicity: "I'm quite up front. I don't hide what I'm doing, so I'll seek permission if I think it's difficult but (laughs), I'm also savvy enough to know sometimes it's easier to seek forgiveness than permission, so sometimes I'll do it and then I'll inform them afterwards" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 138-142).

Unlike the participants in the research by Detert and Trevino (ibid), the participants in the current study did not necessarily go to their manager's manager but, instead, found the person who was best placed to take their voice forward. One participant talked about going outside the organisation: "I actually outsourced some work to get an external person to come in to do the work that I wanted doing and position it for me, and actually having an external person come in and do the voicing was quite useful to pave the way for me to then go on and do the rest my way" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 382-386).

In the extracts under this sub theme, participants described a strategic positioning of voice to give it the best chance of being heard. Many people bemoaned the ineffectiveness of their line managers in promoting their voice so would often go elsewhere as a matter of routine. This wasn't usually covert: many people were quite up-front with their line managers when doing this. Connectedness and establishing a good network of contacts were believed by many to be critical for getting their voice heard. If the formal mechanisms and their reporting line weren't working properly they would simply go elsewhere.

This knowledge of the landscape was not shared equally across the workforce as it took time to develop, which meant that newer employees were at a disadvantage as they sought to use the formal voice processes because they lacked the knowledge of how their ideas, opinions and suggestions actually got heard. For many people, connectedness meant that voice travelled further and faster but this did not mean that it was unchanged on arrival at its final destination. Voice could get diluted and hijacked along the way and the next sub theme explores this potential distortion in more depth.

### **5.2.2.3 Sub Theme 3: The Journey Of An Idea**

The majority of participants talked about how free they were to express themselves and share ideas within their teams. They also talked about their frustrations at having to rely on their team manager to advocate these ideas further up the chain. There was some concern about the effectiveness of this advocacy, and frustration that a lot of good ideas seemed to get stuck at team level. If an idea did leave the team, participants described its dilution as it travelled towards the top of the organisation. It was not clear whether this dilution was as a result of 'Chinese Whispers' or whether it was done in order to make the message more palatable to senior decision makers. The originator was rarely invited to present their idea at the top table, and this led to senior managers having to present and defend ideas that they knew little about. As a consequence bad decisions were sometimes made.

### **Warm In The Team**

A common theme among participants was the ease with which voice could be heard within one's own team: "We're all very free to share opinions, make suggestions about how we tackle bits of work, and I think that works



fantastically well, but it is just within our department" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 49-52). A related concern felt by most participants was that voice and ideas sharing rarely left the team: "Within my team it's very fluid. We meet regularly, we bounce ideas off each other, how we might move something forward, what barriers that might be encountered and solutions around that so it's really fluid within the immediate team but outside of that is more of a challenge" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 37-43).

Participants generally felt safe and comfortable giving voice in their teams. This supports the work of Morrison, Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2011), who found that 'group voice climate' (shared beliefs about the safety and efficacy of giving voice within the team) would be strongly correlated with voice behaviour. What these researchers failed to do, however, was to explore what happened to voice beyond the team, and the current research study addresses this gap by looking at the journey of an idea outside of the team.

Many participants in the current research study were frustrated at how voice seemed to get 'stuck' in their teams: "Frustration, resigned (...) but more often than not it's a case of OK well that's it then which is a shame because they might not be the right ideas, but they should at least be explored" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 363-369). Furthermore, they were suspicious of how well their voice was being represented outside of the team by their managers: "My manager, I think I would be critical of her because there doesn't seem to be a two way flow about how she has presented our interests in management meetings" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 69-72). It was not clear if her voice was being deliberately reshaped or inadvertently weakened, but Ruth seemed to be expressing a lack of confidence in how well her voice had carried, and was not getting any confirmation about

this from her manager. In metaphorical terms, this participant seemed worried that her voice might end up in an eddy rather than a flow. In contrast, Sandra was clear what happened to her voice outside of the team. When asked if she thought that her line manager was not properly representing her views at the top table, she said:

"Yeah I think so but maybe that's because she doesn't agree with me. Sometimes I just think it's a bit of a block, you know, you can't go and see one of the other directors without going through the one you're reporting to, and it gets complicated" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 72-75).

### **Filtering The Message**

If voice flowed quite freely within the team, what happened to it when it left?

Some participants thought that voice got to the top in the end: "I think it would find its way to (name of senior committee). It might go through a kind of circuitous route, but I do think it would end up there" (Bob, Transcript 9, 643-645), but others thought it stayed in the team: "Most of the minor gripes and grumbles stay within teams (...) so you'll hear about what's happening in another office or another department, but they do tend to stay within those places, even if some of them actually are things that have application across the organisation" (Michael, Transcript 12, 351-357). It seemed quite common for people to grumble among themselves but this meant that some important issues never left the team. This flow of voice within the team was what Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) referred to as Lateral Flow, which they found negatively affected unit performance because it reinforced negative feelings about lacking the power to address these issues. In other words, even when talking about improvement-oriented ideas within the confines of the team this had a negative

impact, so one can speculate about the effect on the team of sharing gripes and grumbles.

If voice did travel to the top of the organisation then, according to some participants, it seemed to undergo change along the way: "I'm not sure when it gets to the very top how much they really understand it by then, and how much it's been filtered down, so it actually wasn't the problem it started off as. It could be a very different issue by the time it reaches the top" (Simon, Transcript 7, 625-629). This was not simply a case of the message being diluted as it was passed upwards. Some participants felt their voice was being engineered and deliberately manipulated on its travels: "By the time it goes through all these different iterations, what started out as one thing ends up being something totally different, and it's somebody else's agenda that's being fulfilled" (Bob, Transcript 9, 314-316).

In these extracts both participants seemed to believe that their voice had been deliberately tampered with as it made its way upwards, perhaps to make it more seaworthy and buoyant or perhaps to hijack the vessel for another agenda. More research is needed into the way the original message can be engineered and attenuated as it travels up the hierarchy because, even if voice is properly heard at the top, it could have undergone such changes along the way that the original meaning is lost, which means the organisation could still be making decisions based on incomplete information.

### **Room At The Top Table**

Longer serving participants could remember a time when there was much easier access to the top table (the senior decision making team): "One of the worst things culturally I find (laughs) is that now only certain people seem to be

allowed to go along to senior meetings and talk about their areas of work.

Whereas previously, you know, if you were responsible for a project or an area of work (name of senior team) would invite you along at various points to give a report or an update or talk about an issue, and that very rarely seems to happen now" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 178-185). Nowadays, a seat at the top table was considered rare, and ideas were no longer presented by their originators:

"Directors will present a paper written by somebody in their team about a piece of work or a project, and they might be quite distant from it, but they're still the ones who present it to (name of committee) and then they get asked questions and often they don't know the answers" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 191-196).

According to some participants, voice by proxy at the top table caused problems because the presenter lacked sufficient knowledge of the area: "I did a paper (...) that was presented by somebody who didn't know anything about congress and they made a ridiculous decision to go somewhere we should never have gone" (Bob, Transcript 9, 288-292). The same participant also recalled a situation where a manager expressed concern about his ability to properly represent the voice of his staff at the top table: "(He) said if we're going to have a wash up, going to have an evaluation I'd like to bring my team members to that meeting, so that you can hear what they want to say, and it was very firmly rebutted, oh no you're representing them, and he said well actually I can represent them to a certain degree but, you know, I can't speak using the words that they would use to speak to you, and I found that kind of resonated with me" (Bob, Transcript 9, 98-104).

#### **5.2.2.4 Flows And Eddies: Key Messages**

The organisation had a range of mechanisms for seeking voice and for broadcasting out to staff and the outside world, and this theme described how information flowed around it. People sought alternative ways to express their ideas, opinions and suggestions, as formal mechanisms and grand gestures did little to capture the voice of the workforce. A lot of voice was confined to the work team, and middle managers were viewed as important, but largely ineffective, conduits for voice upwards. Participants described a dilution and distortion of the original message as it travelled up to the top, and informal voice channels had emerged where an understanding of the political landscape was considered critical to getting voice heard. Voice flowed downwards in torrents but it left some parts of the workforce cold. For this organisation, the real problem seemed to be what happened to voice as it moved upwards, as there was usually no opportunity for the originator of the idea, opinion or suggestion to be present when top-level decisions were made.

Empirical research on the flow of voice has started to emerge, but has looked at what impact the flow of voice has on work unit performance and what the implications are for people when they give voice to skip-level leaders. There has been no research undertaken to date on how voice actually flows and changes as it travels around the organisation, and what stands in its path or helps it along its way, or what it looks like as it arrives at its destination. In metaphorical terms, how does water flow and why is it sometimes stranded in eddies or backwaters while at other times it flows freely to the sea? These are important questions for organisations to consider otherwise they may be making key decisions with insufficient information.

### **5.2.3 Theme 3: Barges And Rafts**

This theme describes what sorts of voice get heard. Voice had to be 'seaworthy' for it to survive, and some vessels, like some messages, were better equipped than others to stay afloat and move forward. Certain types of voice were considered more buoyant than others and had a better chance of surviving their journey. When voice was packaged carefully it was able to travel further, but critical, challenging and change-oriented voice often sank without trace.

Participants described a range of techniques and strategies for packaging their voice to give it the best chance of being heard. The nature of the issue was also described as having a significant impact on the success or otherwise of voice being heard, irrespective of how skillfully it was packaged. New ideas, change and challenge to the status quo were often seen as being unpalatable for the organisation and, consequently, were consigned to the 'too difficult box'.

#### **5.2.3.1 Sub Theme 1: Sugaring The Pill**

There was a strong sense from most participants that, for voice to get heard, it had to be communicated in the right way, what some people described as needing to be packaged properly. Participants described a broad range of approaches and creative techniques they had used to package their voice to give it the best chance of being heard. This is a theme that has received scant attention in the voice research literature to date. One exception is the research into issue selling conducted by Dutton et al (1997), which suggested there might be an accepted way to present issues to senior managers. According to these researchers, an issue that is sold to senior managers will have the best chance of success if it has not been previously rejected, if it is supported by data and it contains a solution to a problem, if it doesn't imply criticism of senior managers,

if it doesn't imply change for the organisation, and if the issue-seller is known to and has rapport with the senior manager.

The current research project supports many of these propositions, but also has data from its participants that revealed a deeper and more nuanced approach to packaging voice. With all other things being equal, according to the participants, voice that had the best chance of being heard was voice that was positive, in tune with the audience, using the right language, and evidence based. Criticism and challenging voice were thought by the majority of participants to need the most sensitive packaging.

### **Positivity**

A common theme in these data was the idea that positivity would always be more warmly received by the organisation than negative voice: "It's about always being positive about whatever it is you're trying to achieve, so rather than saying that I don't like this that, actually, it's about being even better than being like this, because that is the way that we've been trained to behave" (Christine, Transcript 3, 461-464). Positivity was greeted with cynicism by a few participants however: "We don't want people with opinions. We want people to say nice things. We want people to talk about how wonderful it is" (Simon, Transcript 7, 372-374), and as potentially dangerous by others: "It doesn't address where the challenges are in the organisation, where the problems are, because you're not looking at the weaknesses you're only looking at the positives and celebrating them" (Christine, Transcript 3, 471-474). However, positivity was also seen as an antidote to reactivity: "We all grumble about the commute home, but how many people write in? Not many. How many people write if it's a good commute home you know (laughs)" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 393-395).

The main implication of this propensity towards positivity is that organisations risk getting a piecemeal picture of the ideas, opinions and suggestions of their staff and this, again, means there is a danger of them making decisions based on incomplete information. It follows that organisations and their managers need to find ways to encourage the voice of all staff, both positive and negative, and to set a climate where it's safe to give negative voice without sensitivity and fear of retribution.

### **Tuning In To Your Audience**

Beyond presenting a positive perspective, many participants commented that voice needed to be packaged according to the needs of the audience. Some referred to the level of the audience: "If they're a frontline ops manager they want to know chapter and verse all those statistics, you know, get down to the nitty-gritty. If it's the (senior executive role) they just want to know the flows, the charts, does it mean anything" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 531-534), and occasionally participants described the importance of a more subtle understanding of the audience's needs. For example, when talking about the importance of getting feedback from those who are affected by new policies, Caitlin said:

"I'm not married, you know, I don't have kids, I've not got a mortgage, I'm not working in (name of profession), I am not travelling to do external events, all of these things, that's not me. So somebody out there is all of those and I might not necessarily think about stuff in the same way as them, so it's quite good to get that information back on policies and processes" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 491-496).

The majority of participants agreed that tuning in to the needs of one's line manager: "You were silenced because you said something that isn't in tune with



what the manager's thinking" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 144-146), was particularly important to get voice heard: "I think she has to agree with it (laughs) and feel positive about it and consider it a priority" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 467-468). One participant talked about how happy it made her manager if ideas were linked to the operations plan: "It's so much about linking them in with a plan and a procedure, and any kind of plan that will make my manager happy or that my manager can see will make her manager happy is more likely to succeed than something that's vaguely a good idea" (Janine, Transcript 15, 287-291).

These data extracts have demonstrated the importance of attuning the message to the receiver, by showing understanding of the level of detail required, empathy with the audience's situation, and an appreciation of the priorities of one's immediate manager. Ideas, opinions and suggestions packaged in this way were thought to have a better chance of being heard. This presents a challenge to organisations to help properly equip their members with the knowledge and skills to be able to do this effectively.

### **Learning The Language**

Occasionally participants discussed the importance of language in voice. There was a shared perception that different languages were used in different departments: "It's a different language yeah, but we struggle to, I think because of that the lack of understanding of why the two fit together, but we do speak a different language" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 236-238), and this difference could leave people on the back foot when trying to give voice: "I occasionally go into a meeting in another department and I miss lots of things, I mean yes there's some

jargon but there are certain ways of speaking that I'm not familiar with really what that means" (Elise, Transcript 10, 382-386).

The same participant gave a vivid illustration of how her request to attend a training course was granted because she used the type of language that was used within the organisation:

"I found the best way of being heard is you use 'organisational speak', by which I mean you use the sorts of words that that they use in meetings, in emails and in feedback. So they love saying things like this person is taking a lead on things, we're making a step change that ties in with such and such, and they say things like you need to make a business case for why you want to do this, so I say my business case is and this links to such and such a plan which ties in (...) I've had this happen today. I asked if I could attend a course and I had an email back from my manager saying, you know, basically could you rewrite it and make a business need for going on the course. So I already said why I wanted to but I basically had to say it again, but it felt like they just wanted me to say it again in a language they liked" (Elise, Transcript 10, 364-378).

In metaphorical terms, messages that are packaged using the right language are barges because they are better equipped to survive on the water. When the language used is not familiar to the audience, perhaps because they are in a different department, or when 'organisational speak' is ignored, then the message may be likened to a raft which is a vessel whose robustness might be more easily compromised as it tries to navigate difficult waters.

### **Evidence Based Business Cases**

In a majority of the transcripts analysed, participants spoke about the importance of well-researched and carefully considered messages: "I think

evidence I've done my research and I know my facts, and that I presented it in a brief way because (my manager) is so wretchedly busy" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 538-539), and voice that is focused on key outcomes: "It's about how you can see a different way of doing something that will enhance the way that it's done, saves time, preferably saves money, preferably enhances the customer experience" (Bob, Transcript 9, 462-464). Occasionally participants thought that evidence-based arguments were not well received: 'I don't think nuanced arguments cut the mustard, that deliberately well thought-out arguments that say, on the one hand but on the other hand this. I think more eye-catching arguments are better received" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 359-362). However, the majority of participants thought that carefully considered voice had the best chance of being heard, and Sylvia talked about what happened when she came up with an idea but hadn't thought it through:

"I find quite often you're then asked ten questions, so why, what's that going to do, how is that going to work, and (...) sometimes you end up feeling well actually I've come up with the idea, it doesn't mean I've come up with the whole package. It's the first step of the journey. I haven't completed the journey, and it sometimes makes me feel a little bit mmm maybe I should've kept quiet because I don't always have all the answers all the way down the line, and I don't really wanna be made to feel well actually you've not thought it through" (Sylvia, Transcript 1, 215-223).

The main message from these data extracts is that if people want their voice to be heard they must do their homework and take the hard work away from their audience by anticipating, as far as possible, the questions they will raise. It also suggests that people will be more inclined to trust the credibility of the message

if it is carefully considered and persuasive, and if it is focused on desirable organisational outcomes such as improving the customer experience and saving time and costs.

### **Iron Fists In Velvet Gloves**

Some of the most creative packaging was reserved for when staff criticised and challenged their managers, and this is linked to managerial sensitivity, which was explored in Theme 1, Sub Theme 4: Dispositions and Emotions. Here the main emphasis was on packaging difficult messages in a way that saved face for the manager. Most participants gave illustrations of how they had delivered criticism and challenge to their managers. The emphasis on positivity, that was mentioned earlier in this sub theme, meant that it was difficult to say something wasn't good: "I think you have to say well, you know, I think the organisation could do this differently maybe, not better because that sometimes gets people's backs up" (Bob, Transcript 9, 514-516).

Another strategy was to steer the conversation in such a way that the manager believed they had come up with the idea themselves: "I was able to have a meeting to say this is where we are, these are my concerns around that idea, and actually frame it in terms of this is what could be a potential risk to us in terms of if we frame it this way, why don't we soften it, and then they were able to say oh yes that's what I meant. So it's about negotiating it so that it feels safer without necessarily losing face" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 420-425). In addition to this, it was considered to be important by some participants to de-personalise criticism "I know some people have been hurt by those kind of conversations, because you could think like well it's my process, but we've discussed this and we've always said you know it's not about you it's about the process" (Caitlin, Transcript 6,

441-444) and to soften challenge with a question: "Sometimes if it's sensitive I pose a question, you know, because questions aren't confrontational are they? They're only questions. So you say would it be better like this or would you prefer doing it like that, so it gives them an option" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 564-568).

### **5.2.3.2 Sub Theme 2: The Too Difficult Box**

Regardless of how well it was packaged some voice was never heard, because the issue was too challenging or involved new ideas and change, while voice that addressed process and member issues was much more readily welcomed. One participant talked about how certain issues belonged in the "too difficult" box, although for some issues, irrespective of how difficult they were, there was a moral imperative to speak up.

#### **New Ideas And Different Thinking**

There was a common theme among participants that new ideas, although encouraged within the team, were rarely welcomed beyond its confines: "The initial reaction is the shutters come down, that's about ideas" (Janine, Transcript 15, 325-326). The main barrier to the progress of a new idea seemed to be the closed thinking of longer serving managers: "If you want to do something that's slightly different or a bit bold or maybe challenging (...) you sometimes hear that's not how it works, or that's not what we do, or that's not how we do it, and I've heard that a few times, that's not quite the way it works" (Michael, Transcript 12, 152-156). Some participants were frustrated at this closed thinking: "We have a lot of people in this organisation like me, who have been around for a long time, and I'm very conscious that we need to draw on new ideas. I mean it might be that what they bring from other organisations isn't as

good as what we're doing here, but I'd like to find out if we can do things better" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 458-462).

Occasionally participants spoke about the difficulty of thinking differently to those around them: "If you think differently now that's quite hard if you're in a small team, because you don't want to be sidelined and you want to be part of a team" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 277-280). This supports the research by Mannetti, Levine, Pierro and Kruglanski (2010), as detailed in Chapter 4, who concluded that thinking differently may threaten the shared norms of the group and may, therefore, be greeted with hostility. When people thought differently they had to decide whether to give voice or keep quiet: "I think practically the two options are to shut up and fit into the box or to persevere. Both of them carry pressures with them. In some instances it's worth pursuing in others it's not, and that's always a judgement call" (Michael, Transcript 12, 167-170). It was tempting, in such a situation, to appear to agree with the dominant logic of the group in order to gain acceptance, and this supports the findings of Heerdink, Van Kleef, Homan and Fischer (2013), as detailed in Chapter 4, who concluded that those who thought differently and who had fewer opportunities to speak out were likely to make a strategic decision to remain silent, which could be the wisest decision under the circumstances.

It is interesting to speculate on what happens to different thinkers over a longer period of time, whether a desire to fit in means that people stop thinking differently or whether they find other ways to express this difference. Janine was quite clear on what happened to different thinkers over time:

"I'm not sure that I've met many people who think differently. I guess they must either keep quiet or leave, because people seem to all have a (name of

organisation) voice, you know, how people get the language right and start using all the right terms, and so that mindset and what have you. I can't think of anybody in particular who I would say is different in any way. OK so they may come in different, but it's soon knocked out of them" (Janine, Transcript 15, 187-194).

It is apparent from these data extracts that some participants believed there were particular challenges associated with thinking differently and having new ideas. These included the challenge of winning over longer serving managers, and the risk of inciting hostility among one's work group, because different thinking might violate shared group norms. The temptation, in the face of such challenges, was to keep quiet and appear to agree with those around you. The main research question for the current study asked about the conditions under which people gave voice or remained silent, and it would seem that thinking differently is one of these conditions. This is worth exploring further with more research, as new ways of thinking might help the organisation to grow and flourish and, if denied, such thinking will not find its way anywhere within the workplace, let alone to the top.

### **Challenge**

In a majority of the transcripts analysed, participants believed that challenge was not welcomed: "I think (my manager) sort of likes to hear your opinions when it's kind of keeping the status quo. It's just very much sort of toeing the line" (Elise, Transcript 10, 161-162). Some participants questioned how open the organisation was to challenge: "I think it's variable. I think sometimes when it suits the agenda it possibly feels more open than when it doesn't" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 484-485). A common thread in participants' responses was that

challenge had to be delivered sensitively if it was to have any chance of being heard: "I think if you approached somebody after the meeting and said actually look I've got some information that might help in regards to that opinion, you know, you said we need to do this but actually I've seen that this may be a better way of doing it, I'm sure they would accept that and listen to you" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 229-234). Occasionally participants talked about not being heard because people got a reputation as being difficult: "If you wanna challenge, you have to think about the way that you do it to be heard, because otherwise people just think oh that's just thingy going on again about that thing" (Bob, Transcript 9, 506-509), and, consequently, risked losing credibility: "Where you have somebody who is very challenging, then it tends to be, like in a lot of places, they lose credence. So even if they've got something good to say they've lost their audience" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 453-455).

These shared perceptions lend support to the research findings of Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011), who concluded that challenging voice was only welcomed when accompanied by other behaviours, such as altruism and courtesy: without such prosocial behaviours in attendance challenge was not welcomed and had a negative impact on the performance of the work unit. They also reinforce the research of Burriss (2012) who found that managers often perceived challenge as threatening, unless they thought it was coming from a loyal employee with the good of the organisation at heart.

### **Change**

Some participants described the organisation as risk averse (see also Theme 1, Sub Theme 2 Climate), and thought that people, particularly long serving managers, were resistant to change: "I don't think we challenge, because we are



conscious of the change that people are probably a bit averse to" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 400-402), and tried to block it where possible (see also Theme 1, Sub Theme 3 Key Players). It follows, therefore, that the majority of participants believed that the organisation was not open to change: "I was having a conversation with somebody about this yesterday actually, saying how difficult it is to get things done. Anything new it's kind of woah, you know, we don't, God that's new, we can't do that" (Janine, Transcript 15, 319-322). This supports the research of Burriss (ibid), who suggested that managers might be more receptive to voice that is less proactive and may favour voice that is more incremental and less change-oriented.

Change may be difficult for some people, and this may be particularly the case for long-serving employees, because it upsets the status quo, it often brings more work (at least in the short term), and because it might create an air of uncertainty about the currency and value of one's experience, expertise and skills set. Managers in particular might be hostile to change-oriented voice as it challenges the way things are currently done and, as Burriss (ibid) found, managers often perceived challenge as threatening.

Occasionally participants thought there was a wish to embrace change but a lack of knowledge on how to make change happen. As Simon observed:

"The organisation just toodles along, because nobody knows how to change. You can't force them to change something. It's in the too difficult box and so it's set aside, you know, (...) because that means moving, that means telling somebody you're not working hard enough, that means telling people that there aren't enough resources here and that we need to move resources from there to here,

or this area just needs new brand new resources" (Simon, Transcript 7, 542-549).

### **5.2.3.3 Barges And Rafts: Key Messages**

This theme described what sorts of voice got heard. Voice had to be seaworthy or fit for purpose for it to survive, and some messages, were better equipped than others to stay afloat and move forward. When voice was packaged carefully it had a better chance of surviving, but critical, challenging and change-oriented voice often disappeared, regardless of how skillfully it was packaged. New ideas, change and challenge to the status quo were often seen as being unpalatable for the organisation and, consequently, were consigned to the 'too difficult box'. Positive messages got heard but risked ignoring the real challenges faced by the organisation. Voice was received more favourably if it was aligned with the needs of its audience and given in a language that was understood and preferred across the organisation. Messages that were evidence-based with clear, desirable outcomes travelled further.

Difficult messages could be packaged to save face for the listener, especially if that person was a manager. New ideas and different thinking were generally not welcomed and, as a result, were often lost. Challenging and change-oriented voice was regularly blocked, shut down and not heard because it was believed to threaten the status quo, to bring more work in the short term and to create uncertainty in the audience.

#### **5.2.4 Theme 4: Boatmen And Landlubbers**

The central organising concept for this theme was that some people were better equipped than others to survive the journey, irrespective of the vessel they were using. This suggested the idea of 'Boatmen and Landlubbers' as a way of distinguishing between people whose voice would carry and those whose voice would remain grounded.

In organisational terms, this meant that some people were more likely to be heard because of who they were or where they sat in the hierarchy. Regardless of the issue and how skillfully people were able to package their message, the voice of some people was simply heard more. These differences in access to voice were thought to be attributable to seniority, tenure and individual differences.

This theme describes how voice is heard differently depending on the identity of the originator. Participants described the organisation as "grade conscious". This meant that voice was heard differently depending on where it came from within the hierarchy. Length of service was also perceived as having an impact on how warmly voice was invited and heard, with longer servers having much more voice than newer staff. Biographical differences, such as gender and ethnicity, were seen to have little impact on voice but participants drew a vivid picture of the type of personality who got heard more readily within the workplace.

##### **5.2.4.1 Sub Theme 1: The Pecking Order**

When asked to describe the types of people whose voice was heard more, the majority of participants reached first for a description based on position in the hierarchy. Senior managers, middle managers and junior grades were believed

to have different levels of access to places where voice was heard and, as a consequence, voice was welcomed and heard differently according to seniority.

### **Senior Managers**

Most participants thought that the voice of senior managers was heard more, and this supports the research literature on employee voice. For example, Morrison (2011) proposed that position and status would be predictors of whether voice would be given. Morrison & Rothman (2009) believed that power led senior people to be less open to input, thus rendering voice futile, and more censorious in their behaviour towards others, which meant that voice was perceived as less safe. In the same vein, Tost, Gino & Larrick (2014) found that the experience of heightened power led senior people to be more verbally dominant, which shut down the voice of those around them.

The hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the organisation (see Theme 1, Sub Theme 1 Context) allowed senior managers access to the places where decisions were made: "Managers and senior managers get heard more than perhaps people lower down in the organisation (...) because of the structure of the organisation. I mean there is the (name of senior committee) there are (members of senior committee) and managers and the senior management team, so they would get more of a voice I think than the ones lower down" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 115-122). According to some, grade consciousness meant that people with certain job titles had a louder voice: "I think there's a pecking order (...) it's the people with the posts that have got director or manager in it that get listened to first" (Michael, Transcript 12, 468-471), although occasionally participants believed that the importance of one's work was what really counted: "I think it's not just about your seniority. I think it's about the portfolio that you

hold (...) that influences where your voice is heard and who will listen" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 39-43). One participant thought that the voice of senior managers was not only louder but also had more value placed on it. As Jonathan noted: "It's often difficult because who says that idea often changes the value put upon it. I mean we've all had that experience of a junior who might have said something and people say oh that's a good idea, but then when the chief exec says it it's right well we'll do that tomorrow (laughs) if not today, so hang on a minute I said that as well" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 643-648).

What these data extracts have in common is a shared belief that the voice of senior people was louder and given a higher value than the voice of others. This was because of access to the right places, a perceived grade-consciousness in the organisation and the visibility and high profile of the senior team. It would be interesting to explore in more depth the value placed on voice depending on the status of the originator, and this could have important implications for the way organisations communicate with their staff and hear their voice.

### **Middle Managers**

If senior managers enjoyed a privileged position with regard to voice, did that privilege extend to middle managers in the organisation? The facilitative role and blocking power of middle managers has already been considered at length (Theme 1, Sub Theme 3 Key Players) but occasionally participants talked about this group in their own right as people who were denied voice: "There's a meeting about three or four times a year, but they're more like a business meeting I suppose, like day-to-day issues, but as a group I don't feel that group has a voice at all" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 217-219). Some described middle managers' lack of influence over decisions that were made:

"I think there's a wider problem, that's about how decisions are made, and that might be exposing my manager and her lack of clout within those decisions" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 83-85). According to McClean, Burris and Detert (2013) managers who can't influence senior decision makers will often preside over units with worse performance and higher staff turnover. The current research study was not set up to test this hypothesis, but it was noticeable how a lack of influence by the line manager led to feelings of frustration among participants. Others referred to middle manager inertia as an inhibitor of voice: "The people who occupy those middle positions who are in a position of being fairly stable, who found a position of comfort which, perhaps, is not going to be brilliant but it's good, so I don't want to rock the boat too much" (Michael, Transcript 12, 340-343).

These data extracts speak of a lack of managerial 'clout' to influence decisions and effect change, which was made worse but what some participants believed was an antipathy towards change from longer serving managers. Empirical research usually presents managers as having a louder voice than others, but this was often thought not to be the case in the current research study. McClean, Burris and Detert (ibid) noted a lack of management influence, and its implications for staff, but, apart from this, there has been little attention paid to lack of influence and lack of appetite for change among managers, especially those with longer service. This is worthy of further attention as it could have significant implications for how voice flows in the workplace. In metaphorical terms, middle managers are often depicted as boatmen, but in the current research study they were just as likely to be landlubbers, whose voice was not

equipped to travel far or whose inertia meant they were often not willing to set sail in the first place.

### **Junior Grades**

In a majority of the transcripts analysed, participants perceived an inequity between grades in terms of their access to voice: "On a day-to-day basis is everybody being heard in the same way? I don't think they are" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 273-274). Some participants thought the voice of junior staff was disparaged: "I went to the meeting and I kept quiet, and she said I bet it was a stupid (name of grade), and I was sitting there and I wanted to say yeah go on (laughs), and I felt that was a bad attitude" (Sylvia, Transcript 1, 265-268), or paid lip service: "It just feels like there's something a little bit disingenuous (...) they're asking for your opinion or your feedback because that's the way things are done here. They have to do whether it will actually have an effect" (Elise, Transcript 10, 249-253). One participant described how junior grades were put in their place when attempting to give voice: "If you've got somebody who's really keen and they've got an idea, you almost have to kind of discourage them because they're not on the right grade. I find that a bit strange" (Janine, Transcript 15, 115-118).

A common theme among participants was that ignoring the voice of junior people was a missed opportunity, because the people who did the job had the best knowledge and ideas on how to improve things: "People who do jobs on a daily basis know a lot more about the detail than the managers. They know how you can shortcut things (...) so I think you're missing out as an organisation" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 212-215), and that encouraging the voice of junior staff would help them do the job better: "I think for anybody to do their job properly

they need to be able to express ways of improving how the job is done, because the best person who knows how the job is done is the person doing it" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 475-478).

The sub theme 'The Pecking Order' has presented patterns of shared beliefs about the impact of hierarchy on how voice is welcomed and heard. Privileged voice status did not appear to extend much beyond the senior team. Middle managers were often thought to lack influence and, according to some participants, longer serving managers did not seek this influence in the first place. Junior staff were often ignored, disparaged and put in their place. The main implication for the organisation was that only the voice of the most powerful was properly heard, and this could mean that decisions were being made without complete information and without input from a range of different sources. In metaphorical terms, senior managers were depicted as boatmen while the rest were landlubbers who were left behind on shore.

#### **5.2.4.2 Sub Theme 2: Tenure**

A common theme across the data corpus was that voice was welcomed differently according to length of service. Although length of service in an organisation would seem to make a difference to voice, this has not been properly explored to date. Tenure is often controlled as one of the variables thought to have an impact on voice (see, for example, Detert & Burris, 2007; Burris, Detert & Chiaburu, 2008), but has not been properly investigated in its own right. The current research study has started to address this gap.

The organisation in question had many long serving staff, often in middle management positions. It also treated the recruitment of new entrants very seriously, using competence-based assessment centres for all its recruitment



campaigns, regardless of grade. This meant that people joined the organisation having gone through a careful and comprehensive selection process and, as a consequence, believed that their abilities and experiences to date were valued by the organisation, who would want to hear their voice, particularly their new ideas. For many participants, the reality upon arrival was somewhat different from the rhetoric: "It's just like an X Factor test. You've got through the door, but now you've gotta learn the way we do things around here, and what you did before isn't so relevant" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 107-110). As Elise noted: "I suppose, like any organisation, I suppose I expected to be listened to in terms of the work I was doing and the projects I was working on, yeah I suppose that was it" (Elise, Transcript 10, 68-70).

These data extracts reveal a set of expectations about working for the organisation, because of the rigorous selection process it employed. The reality of working life was rather different for some participants and this will be explored further below.

### **The Newbies**

Around a third of participants had joined the organisation in the previous 12 months. They arrived with expectations about the organisation and their role within it: "I'm relatively new into the organisation and so for me I brought my expectations and ideas about what I thought it might be, and I've had time to reflect on how they differ" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 10-13). This adjustment of expectations sometimes had a direct impact on voice: "I suppose I was quite keen when I started (laughs), you kind of see how things are done differently here, you want to make suggestions for improvements, but I think now because

of some bad management I've slightly become resigned, so now I don't really speak up (laughs)" (Elise, Transcript 10, 78-83). As Anavi observed:

"I think I came in quite bright eyed. I've got all these ideas about what we can do, and then realised that people were getting frustrated because they've been there, done that, or so they say they have" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 437-440).

A commonly shared perception was that new starters were given no special treatment and were expected to perform quickly: "I don't think there's automatically a landing pad (...) there's an expectation that people come to the organisation because they're good at something, or they've shown that they're capable, and there is the expectation that that will kick in fairly quickly" (Michael, Transcript 12, 74-80).

A feature of this lack of special treatment was that the voice of new entrants was not captured in any specific or deliberate way: "I don't think there's a forum for them to have a voice, apart from within their teams and to their managers. The pace of change is very slow in this organisation and I suspect that's an inability for new members of staff with new ideas to be able to influence and change things" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 423-427). Individual managers were able to take an interest in the voice of new staff, if so inclined: "People have different experiences from their previous workplace, and I'm always really open to that because then I think people become motivated to do what they do if they think their voice is being heard and that their opinions are valid" (Bob, Transcript 9, 12-16), and this reinforces the idea, expressed earlier (Theme 2, Sub Theme 1 Mechanisms), that processes for voice were only as good as the manager who implemented them. On an informal basis, voice from new entrants was sometimes greeted with a cool reception by colleagues and managers alike: "I

found that you say when I worked for such and such and their eyes glaze over (laughs), and yet they recruited you specifically because of the experience you've demonstrated at interview. It's weird isn't it?" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 102-105).

These data extracts reveal a shared experience among newer employees of adjusting their expectations as the reality of organisational life set in. New starters were given no special treatment and were expected to get on with learning for themselves how things were done. There was no deliberate attempt to capture the voice of new joiners and there was a sense that people didn't want to hear about their ideas or experiences from other jobs and workplaces. This invariably impacted on voice in a negative way and meant that these new employees often lost heart. When voice is not welcomed or heard, it often stirs up negative reactions and emotions for the people concerned and this impacts on their behaviour going forward. It could also be thought to affect the quality of ideas and decision making across the organisation, and these issues will be examined in more depth in Theme 5: All at Sea (see Section 5.2.5 in this chapter).

### **The Old Guard**

Long servers have been discussed in some detail already (see Theme 1, Sub Theme 3 Key Players) as people with the potential to block voice, particularly change-oriented voice. In this section, the emphasis is on how their voice is heard as a group in their own right. Many participants commented that the voice of long servers was louder. There was a belief by some participants that long service led to sure-footedness and self-assurance: "I think (...) surety is about for me having been here a little bit longer, and you know the ropes. You're a bit more firm in your situation" (Michael, Transcript 12, 527-529), and this was

closely linked to a sense of connectedness: "Their voice is heard and they have an in always to where they need to be in the different committees or wherever" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 363-365).

Occasionally connectedness suggested a disconnect elsewhere in the organisation: "You find if you're not careful that you get a distinct distance with the people who've been here longer, that there's more of a connection across than there is down" (Michael, Transcript 12, 299-301), which could be linked to the reported lack of voice for junior grades (see Theme 4, Sub Theme 1: The Pecking Order). However, it was generally seen as a positive for getting one's voice heard, as long servers were able to build strong relationships: "I think the other people that get listened to are people who have been here a long time and have built those relationships with colleagues" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 426-428) and instinctively connect to the right places to get heard: "I think when you've been in an organisation for quite a long while you must do things without thinking about them, because it's intuitive, you know where to go to push a button" (Bob, Transcript 9, 547-550).

In these data extracts, long servers, especially managers, were depicted as people who intuitively knew their way around the organisation and understood how things got done. This often involved gaining access to the right fora or committees where important decisions were made, and this access was made possible, according to participants, not by seniority and position but by developing strong networks across the organisation. This lateral connectedness ran the risk of disconnecting further down the hierarchy, which could have been another contributing factor to the belief that the voice of junior grades was rarely heard (see Sub Theme 1: The Pecking Order above).

### **5.2.4.3 Sub Theme 3: It's Not Who You Know, It's Who You Are**

Regardless of tenure and seniority, and irrespective of how the message was packaged, some types of people just seemed to get their voice heard more than others. As Michael noted:

"You could probably divide the organisation into three. There are people like me who are quite happy to do that, and there are people in the other extreme third who will sit in a meeting and say nothing. Then there are those in the middle, which is probably the largest bit of people, who move between the two but they're always conscious when they're doing one or the other that they're consciously pushing themselves forward, so it's always with a degree of trepidation, or they're consciously not saying something because they just don't have the energy or they don't think they'll be listened to" (Michael, Transcript 12, 102-110).

Participants talked at some length about the types of people who got listened to in the organisation. Everybody had an opinion and there were a number of recurring patterns of response across the data corpus.

#### **Biographical Differences**

There has been very little empirical research on the role of gender in voice (Detert & Burris, 2007). Most participants thought that men and women were heard equally in the organisation, although there were a couple of interesting exceptions to this general pattern: "Generally speaking the key influencers are men" (Christine, Transcript 3, 369). The same participant talked about her line manager:

"She's very well respected and she's very experienced, very able, and has taken us through some really challenging work. She appointed somebody junior to her

as one of one of her staff and he's the one that gets regularly called into meetings to discuss policy etc etc, called upon by the senior people in the organisation" (Christine, Transcript 3, 442-447). Another participant had a slightly different view: "If you are an attractive woman you get heard in the organisation (...) because men are often the listeners, the decision-makers at the top" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 355-367).

The belief demonstrated by these extracts was that the voice of men was both louder and more welcomed than the voice of women, unless those women were perceived as attractive by men in senior positions. This negative and somewhat disparaging view of gender differences deserves attention in its own right, although it has to be said that this view was not shared by many participants across the data corpus.

If men and women were generally thought to have equal voice, what of people from different ethnic backgrounds? As with gender, there has been little empirical research into the impact of ethnicity on voice (Detert & Burris, 2007). Participants generally agreed that BAME workers were heard as well as everyone else, although it was noted that the occupants of senior positions in the organisation were almost exclusively white. Occasionally, participants talked of the difficulties for BAME employees: "I've got two members of staff who are from minority ethnic groups, and one is our modern apprentice who's only 18. I think probably her age is more a factor, although she's coming on, and the other lady lacked confidence when she started here and I don't know why. She's developed since she's been here and again she's more confident in smaller groups" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 408-413).

When asked how people from different ethnicities were heard at the workplace Anavi, who was the only BAME participant, said:

"There aren't a huge number proportionately of different ethnic minorities in senior level roles within (name of organisation), which is interesting. I hadn't really thought about that until very recently and I did wonder is that why I'm not being encouraged or supported, but to be fair that's just an observation" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 488-493).

Other biographical differences that were believed by some participants to make a difference to voice included specialist knowledge: "I think the fewer people that know something the big likelihood is that you'll be heard. If you know something lots of people know, the pecking order comes in" (Michael, Transcript 12, 502-505), and this lends qualified support to the finding of Burris (2012) that experts who challenge are tolerated more readily than non-experts. Another important biographical difference was organisational fit: "It's about being a corporate player really, being seen to be a corporate player for me" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 102-103). A lack of fit with the organisation's values led some participants to question whether they had a long term future in the organisation, and this belief will be explored further in Theme 5: All At Sea.

To return to the chosen metaphor, it would seem that biographical differences such as gender and ethnicity did not influence the seaworthiness of voice, although the voice of specialists and corporate players had a better chance of staying afloat and travelling further. Perceptions of the organisation's values have already been unpacked in Theme 1, Sub Theme 2: Climate, and corporate players may have been a direct reference to the notion of positivity, which was

developed as part of Theme 3, Sub Theme 1: Sugaring the Pill, and is discussed in further detail below.

### **Personal Dispositions**

Beyond biographical differences, all participants had something to say about the types of people who got heard more at work. There was a broad spread of responses, some obvious and some less obvious, and these data extracts have been organised according to the main patterns of response across the data sets.

Passion was a disposition mentioned frequently by participants: "If I'm passionate about something then I find an avenue through the forums for setting up a group or whatever, to get my voice heard" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 126-129) and occasionally this meant that people put up with more from the organisation: "I think a lot of people who work here are very passionate about the membership and what the members do, and so we tend to put up (...) you may be prepared to put up with more than you would do in another organisation, because ultimately you think of the members who are benefiting from it" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 625-631).

Positive people were also believed by some participants to have a louder voice: "If you're very negative, miserable, depressed I think it filters through to other people and you won't get your voice heard so actually you've got to kind of build that aura of positivity and then you're looked at in a better light" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 261-265), although this was occasionally viewed with scepticism: "If you're sitting on one of these working groups and telling them how wonderful it is and the direction of travel they're going in is brilliant, and not being a thorn in their side, you're gonna do alright" (Simon, Transcript 7, 481-484).



Extroverted people were also thought by some to be able to get their voice heard more easily: "The sort of people that get listened to are (...) people who are a bit more extrovert. I think that introverts tend to get somewhat sidelined" (Janine, Transcript 15, 229-232). Empirical research into the effects of extroversion on voice has been limited, although LePine and Van Dyne (2001) found positive correlations between extroversion and voice, and Grant, Gino and Hofmann (2011) found that extroverted leaders worked most effectively with more passive followers. Linked to extroversion in the data sets was the notion of self-confidence: "It's definitely the people that are the most confident and assertive in saying something. Those people get listened to because I think a lot of the other people just don't say anything at all (laughs)" (Elise, Transcript 10, 327-330), although this did not guarantee their voice was worth listening to: "It might all be a bit rubbish what they say, but they will be the people that speak and are confident at speaking" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 382-383). One participant believed that confidence bred more confidence: "If you're confident, quick and you have a voice, and then you continue to have a voice because you'll be the one that gets called in, because you have a voice. It's kind of cyclical" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 525-528).

These data extracts spoke of the advantage that extroverted people had when giving voice, and there was a suggestion that people who spoke louder did not necessarily have the most useful and important things to say. The implication for organisations is that they may need to work harder to encourage the voice of quieter and more reflective people, who might feel left behind by the agenda driven nature of meetings and other fora where voice is encouraged. This idea is developed further below.

Occasionally participants described resilience and fearlessness as important qualities for getting heard: "I think you've got to be quite tough and hard, you know, have quite a thick skin to sort of take things forward" (Janine, Transcript 15, 233-234), and this was articulated by one participant as an absence of worry: "A strong personality, somebody who's quite resilient so can take criticism and not worry about it" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 384-385). Bob gave a vivid illustration of the importance of fearlessness:

"I will give you an example of this junior member of my staff kind of fronting up to the executive director who asked her the questions, and she answered very confidently and having no fear. I think that people like that have more of a chance in a way because they're not worried about speaking up" (Bob, Transcript 9, 592-596).

Although the research literature has considered fear as a potential barrier to voice, there has been no examination to date of fearlessness, toughness and resilience as potential facilitators of voice. This is worthy of further empirical attention because organisations who invest in developing the resilience of their staff could, by doing so, encourage more voice. To return to the chosen metaphor, some people may be more inclined to dive in and brave the choppy waters of the organisation, and others could be helped to develop the toughness and fearlessness to do this.

As noted earlier, participants also talked on occasion about the difficulty of being reflective, because opportunities for voice favoured those who were able to think on their feet: "People put their opinion forward and they shout loudest, which potentially could mean those people who need more reflective time may not get listened to" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 269-272), and this meant that certain voices

were lost, which could work to the detriment of the organisation: "There are quite a few reflectors in our team, and if they're put in a situation where decisions need to be made there's not a lot of narrative that goes with that. I think that they sometimes struggle and there ought to be another way and maybe, you know, from a business perspective that's not right for this organisation, but I do see that kind of agenda driven process quite often, so people struggle with it" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 287-293).

#### **5.2.4.4 Boatmen And Landlubbers: Key Messages**

This theme described what sorts of people got heard. The organisation was described as grade-conscious, which meant that voice was heard differently depending on where it came from within the hierarchy. Senior managers had a louder voice which had more value placed on it, whereas middle managers lacked the power, and sometimes the will, to influence decisions. Junior grades, despite having the most direct knowledge of some issues, were often put in their place when they tried to give voice.

Beyond seniority, length of service was thought to make a difference to voice. Newer employees talked of having to readjust their expectations about the value of their ideas and experiences. Long servers were heard more because they had an intuitive understanding of the landscape and knew where to go to get things done. Certain personal dispositions meant that voice carried further. These included passion, positivity, extroversion and fearlessness.

For organisations, the main implication was that, by failing to welcome the voice of all their members, they risked stagnating and making decisions based on incomplete information. The impact of this selective hearing on organisations and their employees will now be considered in the final theme All at Sea.

### **5.2.5 Theme 5: All At Sea**

This theme describes the impact of voice being heard and unheard. It imagines the end point of the journey as the sea or, in organisational terms, the overall impact of voice on organisations and the people who work for them. As water flows into the sea so it is possible to conceptualise the sea as an end point to the flow of water and, likewise, the organisation as an end point to the flow of voice. In other words, the way in which voice flows around the workplace would impact on the effectiveness of the organisation and the satisfaction of the people within it. It discusses the positive and negative impact of voice heard and unheard. For individuals it describes how it felt when voice was heard or unheard, and what impact this had on their behaviour.

Participants spoke about the impact on the organisation, but talked at greater length about the personal impact of being heard or otherwise. Personal impact was described in terms of the feelings they experienced when their voice was heard or not heard, and what behaviours these feelings led to. Empirical research has examined the outcomes of voice not welcomed in terms of intention to leave. For example, McClean, Burriss and Detert (2013) found that staff turnover was higher where employee voice behaviour was high but access to resources, influence and change orientation were low, in other words where voice didn't change anything. Beyond this, there has been little, if any, research into the implications of voice and silence for individuals on a more personal level and it is difficult to ascertain what it feels like when one's voice is welcomed or denied. The current research study attempts to address this gap.

Some participants thought these feelings and behaviours had an indirect impact on the organisation. Being heard or unheard meant, for the participants, voice

being invited or not invited, being heard or being unheard. Overall, the reception of voice by the organisation can best be described as voice being welcomed or not welcomed. In metaphorical terms, did the way in which voice, like water, was controlled and managed on its journey make a difference to what got through and flowed into the sea? Were some vessels and some people able to complete the journey more easily than others? Did sea levels rise or fall and did this have any consequences for surrounding lands? Was the sea rendered more difficult to navigate or did it remain largely still and untroubled by the influx of water?

### **Voice Welcomed And Its Impact On The Organisation**

Employee voice is thought to be good for organisations, and empirical research is starting to demonstrate links between voice and unit performance. For example, Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011) found a positive relationship between moderate levels of voice and unit performance, and Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) demonstrated that voice flowing to the unit leader from within and from outside the team led to improvements to unit performance.

Participants in the current research study seemed to find difficulty articulating the impact that employee voice had on their organisation beyond general platitudes about how good it was to encourage people to speak out. When they talked about the beneficial impact of voice they were often talking hypothetically. The current research study asked people directly about the benefits of voice to their organisation but any direct links between the two remained unclear from the interview data. The limited extracts that follow often

refer to what possible benefits voice could give rather than what actually happened in practice.

Encouraging voice was thought by some to improve the business: "It tends to do the every day business very well by listening to the voice of its staff, the experience they have and their contributions to making things happen, you know, the day-to-day business ticks over really well" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 590-593). Beyond the day-to-day business, participants occasionally talked about broader issues, such as keeping current: "If you don't listen to your staff you can't remain current. You can't, you know, be where you need to be. You can't be at the cutting edge" (Bob, Transcript 9, 660-662), and creative solutions: "Really creative organisations are the ones who do really well, and I think listening to our staff will enable us to do that" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 574-576).

Participants did not clearly articulate the direct benefits of voice to the organisation, but some saw the value of voice as improving employees' experience of work which, in turn, would benefit the organisation: "You get real enthusiasm and, you know, it could only ever be a positive thing for the perception of the organisation internally and externally I would have thought" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 509-511), by improving the happiness levels of staff: "Happy staff are healthy staff and happy staff deliver good outcomes, so I think allowing people the opportunity to speak about things that might cause them difficulty or which impede or impinge on their ability to do better is good" (Michael, Transcript 12, 648-651).

These data extracts show how people talked about the generic benefits of voice on their organisation, and how being heard meant that individuals were happier and more enthusiastic which meant, in turn, that they would give more of

themselves at work. This extra effort, it was thought, would have an indirect benefit to the organisation in the longer term.

### **Voice Welcomed And Its Impact On The Individual**

Participants had more to say about how it felt when their voice was welcomed. A common theme from the data corpus was that being heard was personally satisfying and rewarding, especially when ideas were actioned: "Oh it's lovely when you are heard and it's acted upon yeah absolutely. You feel praised, you feel positive, because actually, you know, you've been able to do something constructive to make things better" (Christine, Transcript 3, 570-572). This positive feeling was usually due to the fact that the person had helped to change things for the better: "Oh it's empowering, yeah definitely empowering, because it feels like, you know, you're making a positive difference to things" (Jennifer, Transcript 11, 395-396), or had helped to bring out the best in others: "I just find it rewarding, you know, and particularly rewarding if you can get somebody who normally doesn't contribute to say something really interesting" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 640-643).

In a majority of the texts analysed, a common theme was that voice heard meant that people gave more: "If they think their voice is being heard and that their opinions are valid, I think you get more out of them to be honest with you" (Bob, Transcript 9, 15-17), and started to work beyond their remit: "I suppose it probably helps staff feel (...) valued within the organisation and therefore want to go that bit further, want to put more into their work if they feel like they're being listened to" (Elise, Transcript 10, 426-430). These positive feelings were linked to beneficial outcomes. Most participants believed that being heard meant people gave more of themselves. This makes good intuitive sense but it has to be

seen in the context of what else might be going on in the workplace. For instance, people who are heard may give more but this might only be a temporary effect if other factors, such as development, promotion and reward are not aligned with this extra effort and higher performance level. In other words, good will and discretionary effort might not last if they go unnoticed.

One participant described how decisions were better supported: "As long as you've put your information in at some point then you kind of get behind the decision to be made" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 354-355). Jonathan gave a vivid illustration of how welcoming voice had empowered his team:

"If you bring your team in on the information gathering and ideas generation you can increase the capacity of the team several times over. The manager doesn't have a monopoly on good ideas, and I've proven this is that if you liberate people, empower people, I know that's a bit of a hackneyed phrase, but if you just let people come forth with their ideas, not just to embrace change but to start initiating change, it's not only interesting for them, because they feel a bit more in control, but it means that they then get to do some real work. I can delegate people to do stuff they wouldn't dream of doing" (Jonathan, Transcript 13, 216-225).

This extract provides a good example of how important and beneficial it could be for managers to go beyond mere lip service into genuine engagement of their staff. It resonates with inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, two of the four major characteristics of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), which mean inspiring, motivating and challenging followers to be innovative and creative. Metaphorically speaking, this management style can be thought to be a facilitator of voice in the same way that aqueducts carry water across difficult



terrain. The message for the organisation here is that, in the absence of any real 'house style' of leadership, it should consider transformational leadership as a useful set of principles to shape and guide the behaviour of its managers.

### **Voice Not Welcomed And Its Impact On The Organisation**

Participants often found it difficult to articulate the precise impact on the organisation of voice not welcomed: "I don't see how they could function" (Ruth, Transcript 8, 469-470), although occasionally they referred to valuable data being lost: "I think if you don't hear your staff you don't know what you don't know do you? So you don't listen, you just get more entrenched in the same way of doing things, and you don't change, you don't evolve, you don't move forward" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 667-670).

The most interesting point to come out of these discussions, although only a minority perspective, was that the organisation might lose data about the performance and behaviour of its people when it was considered unsafe to give voice: "Maybe it takes one bad experience across the organisation for people to say well I'm not going to say anything. I'll whisper, I'll tell my friends, there'll be rumours going around. People will know that that person is not a very good manager and you need to be careful, or that thing that happened that was really bad, but no I'm not gonna put my neck out" (Michael, Transcript 12, 710-715).

When asked if she thought silence could be contagious, Caitlin referred to another organisation she had worked for and said:

"People talk, and it may not be something that you've experienced, that L & D manager didn't bully me, but it meant that after I heard what had happened from my friend who talked to the director, no way on this planet I'd ever talk to the director. I wouldn't trust her as far as I could throw her, and then the next

person (...) the first thing you're going to say is look just be really careful, don't say anything because it could get you into trouble and it kind of spreads out" (Caitlin, Transcript 6, 635-642).

This notion of silence as somehow catching could be predicted by Social Information Processing Theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), which states that people's perceptions and attitudes towards their environment are strongly influenced and largely determined by significant others such as colleagues. People look for social cues from their environment to guide them on which attitudes and behaviours are most appropriate. This means that fears of recrimination will quickly catch on with colleagues around the workplace. The data extracts represented here lend qualified support to this notion.

### **Voice Not Welcomed And Its Impact On The Individual**

Many participants commented that voice not welcomed made them feel belittled, irrelevant and reminded of their place: "I feel a little bit beaten, not physically, mentally, and I feel mmm I've just been put in my place a little bit" (Sylvia, Transcript 1, 659-660). The point was made by one participant that some people would feel this negative impact more keenly than others: "On a scale of 1 to 10 there will be people who find it really easy and it's just ideas and just throwing things out there and it doesn't matter whether anybody listens, they're going to say it anyway, and there will be other people down here on the scale who find it really really difficult. If they're not listened to they're not going to do it in a positive way again they'll do it in another channel, a negative channel" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 712-718).

This example described how negative feelings about not being heard could lead to specific behaviours. In a majority of the texts analysed, participants described

how feeling unheard led them to take various actions, which included giving up, working to rule, preparing to leave and soldiering on. A common theme observed in the data sets was that people simply stopped giving voice if their voice was not welcomed: "I tried. I haven't got anywhere. I could keep on trying but (laughs) I'm not sure what good it will do, so I think at that point I decided well, I'll just leave it" (Elise, Transcript 10, 198-200), and decided to put up with things as they were: "I don't think that people think that they can make a difference by speaking up, so they don't. It's just this is what I'm getting. This is what I'll put up with" (Simon, Transcript 7, 702-704).

Many participants said they went beyond giving up by working to rule if their voice was not welcomed. This manifested itself in a decision not to go the extra mile: "You just carry on and get on with the job. You just do what you have to do, so in that way I guess it kind of reduces productivity as well, because you're doing the minimum" (Sandra, Transcript 5, 615-617), and to stop volunteering, which led one participant to stop caring about her work: "I certainly feel less keen to put my hand up to do extra things that perhaps you might normally volunteer to do, and I suppose being listened to is partly, you know, feeling quite respected. Also personally I think well if I'm not respected then I feel less respectful towards them, and therefore I must care less about work and the work I'm doing" (Elise, Transcript 10, 398-405). Organisations need to be mindful of these sorts of consequences when they fail to invite or welcome the voice of their staff, as a workforce who have stopped caring and are doing the bare minimum would, inevitably, impact on their ability to survive and grow.

A smaller number of participants talked about people leaving because they weren't heard: "I think sometimes we've lost staff because they feel that they've

got a lot to offer but they haven't got a channel to be able to put that through" (Bob, Transcript 9, 108-110). Some said that when voice wasn't welcomed, it forced people to question their fit with the organisation and its values: "I think where people feel very strongly about something and they cannot see that they can influence the agendas (...) then I think for some people the decision will be well I'm not the right fit and they'll move on" (Sonia, Transcript 14, 444-448). Occasionally participants described themselves being in this situation: "I don't want to be too disillusioned in that I don't wanna leave here. I do love working here but I do want something to change, but I don't think that's going to happen this week, next week, next year, the next two years" (Anavi, Transcript 2, 527-530). Janine described this as a common feeling, which rarely led to people taking action and leaving: "I do feel like genuinely like moving on actually yeah. I've worked here for XX years so it's enough to start thinking is this the right place for me (...) it's a common thing. Oddly it's not a common action. People don't actually seem to do a lot about it but the conversations are definitely going on" (Janine, Transcript 15, 408-420). Organisations need to be careful that they don't create a disaffected workforce by failing to listen to them. Staff turnover is expensive and can be hugely disruptive although, perversely, the host organisation seemed to experience a different sort of problem because people didn't often leave.

What the data extracts suggest is that people might consider leaving but not take that step, which could result, for this organisation, in a workforce that doesn't necessarily want to be there but that is so well-treated that they simply don't leave (for more details see Theme 1, Sub Theme 2: Climate). Whether people actually leave or not, the intention to leave can be just as damaging in different

ways to having high turnover rates. The research literature has not addressed intention to leave: it has merely looked at relationships between voice and turnover. For example, McClean, Burriss and Detert (2013) found that turnover rates were higher where employee voice behaviour was high but where access to resources, influence and change orientation were low. However, this research took place in an industry known for its high staff turnover rates. It would seem to make sense, therefore, to carry out more research into the possible links between denial of voice and intention to leave.

Some participants took a different view. Rather than wanting to leave they decided to express defiance in the face of their voice not being welcomed: "What I tend to do is be selfish about the situation and look after me, so I've become almost less caring about the people around me than I was before, because nobody's helping me" (Simon, Transcript 7, 693-696). Some described giving voice in a less constructive way: "If I'm not listened to it doesn't stop me talking (laughs), I might just not do it in a constructive way. I do it in an either lost cause way over in the pub, or in a, you know, just talking about stuff, letting off steam, or you might do it in a kind of negative way yeah. People might do it anonymously, you know, or waiting till your big vent" (Charlotte, Transcript 4, 730-736). Christine talked about a particular initiative she was backing, and described how she would be cheerfully defiant and push on regardless: "Who do I need to speak to about this? How can I get people engaged in this? It's gonna cost money but that's all stuff that I have to initiate, but there is no money to be able to do that, and I know I won't get heard but I'm gonna keep going at it I'm gonna keep going at it (laughs)" (Christine, Transcript 3, 558-562).

### **5.2.5.1 All At Sea: Key Messages**

This theme described the impact on the organisation and its people of voice being heard and unheard. Participants spoke about the impact on the organisation, but talked at greater length about the personal impact of being heard or otherwise. Personal impact was described in terms of the feelings they experienced when their voice was heard or not heard, and what behaviours these feelings led to. These behaviours were thought to have an impact on the organisation itself.

Participants described satisfaction, greater enthusiasm and more engagement when they were heard. This meant that they were more inclined to give more of themselves at work by engaging in more discretionary extra role behaviours, which were thought to have a positive impact on the organisation.

Conversely, when voice was not welcomed, participants described feeling belittled or irrelevant which had a number of different outcomes. Some would simply give up on voice while others would continue to voice regardless. Some would withdraw extra role behaviour and work to rule. Others described how they cared less and questioned their fit with the organisation's values and, for some participants, this meant they seriously considered leaving, although few people actually carried out this threat.

### **5.3 Chapter Summary**

The main findings from this thematic analysis are best organised around the main themes and sub themes that formed the thematic analysis. It is important to remember here that these findings reflect the main patterns of responses from the participants, which were shaped and organised by the researcher. In this sense the findings represent what the researcher believes might be happening and have not been verified independently. With this in mind, the main findings can be summarised as follows:

#### **Theme 1: Dams And Aqueducts**

##### **Context**

The influence of organisational context was thought to be significant. Hierarchy and bureaucracy were thought to impact on voice, as it was hard to get voice to travel upwards, seats at the top table were reserved for the most senior people, and governance meant that people often didn't know where to take their voice. When voice did travel upwards it was often distorted by the time it reached its destination.

The busy nature of the work meant that the organisation didn't always have time to listen, and that some people were reluctant to express new ideas for fear of the extra work this would involve. The size and complexity of the organisation meant that voice often got stuck at base, in spite of the mechanisms in place to hear it. The nature of the business meant the organisation was sensitive to criticism from its members.

##### **Climate**

The impact of organisational climate was also significant, and was characterised in various ways. People stayed a long time and this meant that change was

resisted. The organisation struggled with its dual identity as trade union and professional body, which meant that certain voices were louder at certain times. The organisation was thought to mirror the profession it represented, which led to a more passive approach to voice. Departmental climate was a stronger reference point for most participants, and experience of the workplace was shaped largely by where one worked. Managers had a big impact on departmental climate, but knowledge of other departments was limited by silo working. National culture was proposed as an inhibitor for voice.

### **Key Players**

There were a number of key groups that influenced how voice was given and welcomed. These were the senior team, middle managers, staff and long serving managers. The senior team was described as personable but also sensitive to criticism and, as a result, often disparaging and dismissive of voice. Middle managers were generally perceived to be open to voice, but they were thought to have little influence, and sometimes desire, to take voice further up the hierarchy. Middle management was thought by some to be a lonely place with lots of conflicting pressures and little support. There was no 'house style' of leadership and management. Managers were different across the organisation and had a big influence over voice in the way they interpreted policies and processes. Occasionally participants talked about managers who lacked confidence. There was a feeling that such managers saw voice as threatening and, consequently, closed it down.

Staff did not always give voice, even if all the right conditions were in place, because some people were simply not that interested unless the issue affected them directly. This ambivalence was generally accepted but was sometimes a



source of frustration for managers. Voice had to be presented in the right way by staff when it was given.

Long serving managers were perceived to have the power to block voice, especially voice that led to change. It was also thought by some that the poor behaviour of long serving managers around voice was condoned and accommodated rather than addressed.

### **Dispositions And Emotions**

A commonly shared perception among participants was that voice was potentially unsafe and often futile. Most participants thought it was safe to give voice within their teams but less safe elsewhere, particularly when their voice was challenging and critical. It was felt to be particularly unsafe to give voice to senior leaders in public fora. People talked about the fear of saying the wrong thing in the wrong place or doing the wrong thing and stepping out of line.

Some participants feared public humiliation, retribution and being put in their place. Some feared being singled out and thought collective voice was safer.

Many participants could not articulate their fear beyond the immediate situation, although a small number thought challenging voice could be career threatening.

A majority of people also described the organisation as sensitive to criticism, and this was thought to be attributable, in the main, to its member focus. This notion of sensitivity, which was played out across different levels in the hierarchy, led many participants to express fear of giving voice and to deem it as largely a waste of time.

## **Theme 2: Flows And Eddies**

### **Mechanisms**

The organisation had a variety of different ways for communicating with staff and inviting their voice. Voice flowed down the organisation more successfully than it went back up. Some participants were critical of how the organisation broadcasted out, saying it was bland, formulaic and not in tune with younger employees. There was thought to be a problem with the complexity and sometimes grandiose nature of projects the organisation had established to involve its workforce. Some participants described a feeling of being superficially involved in decision-making, a kind of pseudo-consultation. There was a belief that more informal and low-key initiatives for voice were more effective but were largely absent from the workplace.

### **Connectedness**

Most participants expressed limited faith in the efficacy of formal voice mechanisms for getting their voice heard. Many talked about the importance of connectedness. This meant being connected to the way things were done in the organisation and, more importantly, forming alliances with the right people who could help voice to travel further, and this invariably involved sidestepping the immediate line manager. Getting connected in this way required knowledge of the organisational landscape, which took time to develop.

### **The Journey Of An Idea**

Most participants talked about their freedom to express themselves and share ideas within their teams. They also talked about their frustrations at having to rely on their team manager to advocate these ideas further up the chain. There was a question about how effective this advocacy was, and there was a fear that

good ideas got stuck at team level. If an idea left the team, participants described its dilution as it travelled upwards. The originator was rarely invited to present their idea at the top table, and this led to senior managers presenting and defending ideas that they knew little about. As a consequence bad decisions were sometimes made.

### **Theme 3: Barges And Rafts**

#### **Sugaring The Pill**

Most participants that voice had to be communicated and packaged in the right way, for it to be heard. A broad and nuanced range of approaches and creative techniques was used to package voice, in order to give it the best chance of being heard. With all other things being equal voice that had the best chance of being heard was voice that was positive, in tune with the audience, using the right language, and evidence based. Criticism and challenging voice were thought by most to need the most sensitive packaging.

#### **The Too Difficult Box**

Regardless of how well it was packaged some voice was never heard, because the issue was too challenging or involved new ideas and change, and was often consigned to the 'too difficult box'. New ideas and different thinking were generally not welcomed and, as a result, were often lost. A number of participants thought that different thinkers could either bury their thoughts and conform or plough a lone furrow by pursuing their line of thinking. Challenging and change-oriented voice was regularly blocked, shut down and not heard because it was believed to threaten the status quo, to bring more work in the short term and to create uncertainty in the audience.

## **Theme 4: Boatmen And Landlubbers**

### **The Pecking Order**

There was a pattern of beliefs about the impact of hierarchy on how voice was welcomed and heard. The voice of senior managers was heard loudest and sometimes had more value placed on it. Middle managers were often thought to lack influence and, according to some participants, lacked the will to represent the voice of their staff. Employees on lower grades were often ignored, disparaged and put in their place. Only the voice of the most powerful was properly heard, and this meant that decisions could have been made without complete information and without input from a range of different sources.

### **Tenure**

According to many participants, voice was welcomed differently according to length of service. There was no concerted attempt to capture the voice of new joiners and there was a sense that people didn't want to hear about their ideas or experiences from other jobs and workplaces, which meant that these new employees often lost heart. Long servers on the other hand, especially managers, were seen as people who knew their way around the organisation and understood how things got done. This involved gaining access to the right places where important decisions were made, and this access was made possible by developing strong networks across the organisation.

### **It's Not Who You Know, It's Who You Are**

Regardless of tenure and seniority, some types of people seemed to get their voice heard more than others. Biographical differences, such as gender and ethnicity, were not thought to have much impact on voice, but certain personal

dispositions meant that voice carried further. These included passion, positivity, extroversion and fearlessness.

### **Theme 5: All at Sea**

#### **Voice Welcomed**

Participants reported a sense of personal satisfaction, greater enthusiasm and more engagement when they were heard. This meant that they tended to give more of themselves at work by engaging in more discretionary extra role behaviours, which were thought to have a positive impact on the organisation.

#### **Voice Not Welcomed**

When voice was not welcomed, participants described feeling belittled or irrelevant which meant that some people might give up on voice or continue to voice regardless. Some might withdraw extra role behaviour and decide to work to rule. Others described how they started to care less and began to question their fit with the organisation. For some participants, this meant they seriously considered leaving, although few people actually carried out this threat.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

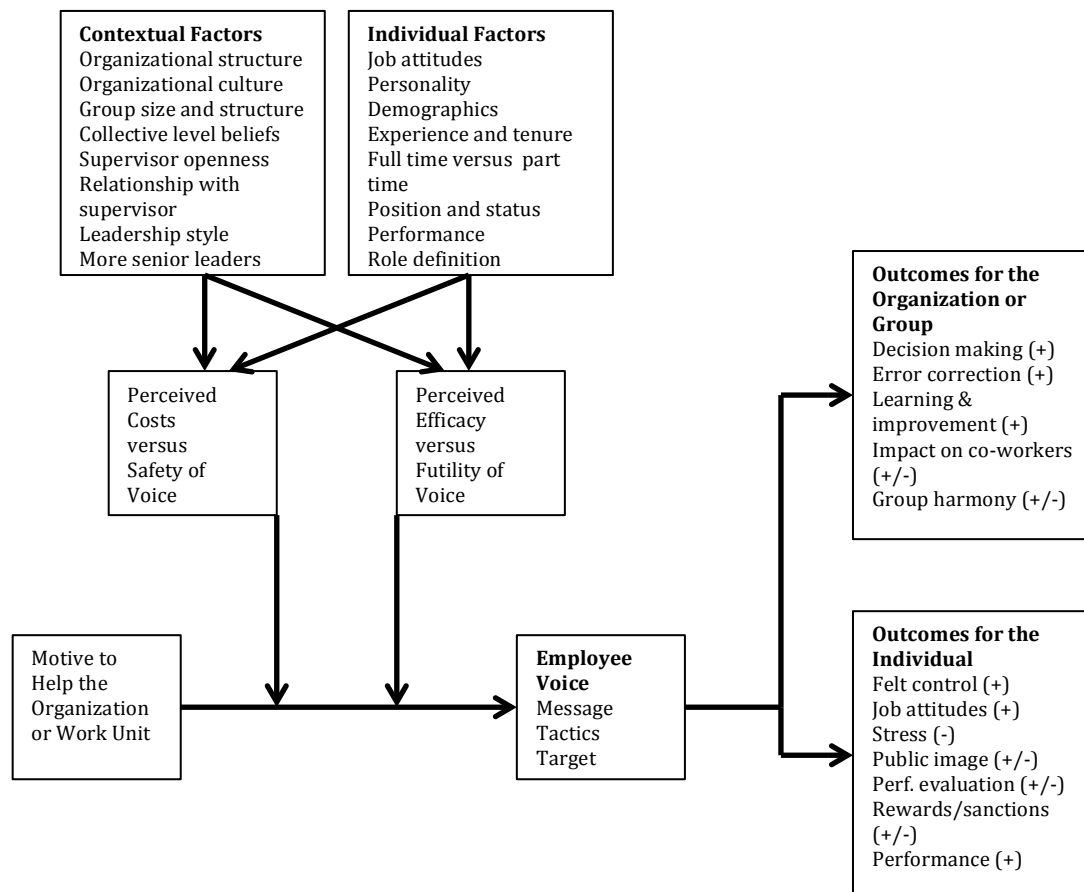
The overall aim of this research was to address the core problem that organisations appear to make decisions based on incomplete information. The main research question addressed by the current research project was "How do employees talk about voice and under what conditions will they give voice or remain silent?" Within this overall research question were a number of subsidiary questions that were devised to explore the main findings from Study One of the current research project and to address gaps in the extant research literature on employee voice. These questions were:

- "What impact does organisational context and climate have on employee voice?"
- "What types of people get heard more readily at work?"
- "Is it safe to give voice at work and does it make any difference?"
- "Does the way voice is packaged make a difference to whether it is heard?"
- "What is the impact on organisations when voice is welcomed or not welcomed?"
- "What does it feel like when voice is welcomed or not welcomed and how do these feelings influence employee behaviour?"

This chapter will now set out and discuss the main findings from the current research project and their bearing on the main research question and subsidiary questions detailed above. Many of these findings were evident across both Study One and Study Two, and these will be highlighted as and when appropriate. In the majority of these cases the findings from Study One, the Q Study, were

developed and enriched by Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, so that a fuller and more nuanced set of findings was made possible. Study Two also produced some interesting findings in its own right and these will also be discussed in detail.

Morrison's (2011) Model of Employee Voice (see below), which was first introduced in Chapter 2 as a template to address the material around the antecedents and outcomes of voice, has been employed as a useful way to organise the findings from the current research project.



**Figure 6.1: Model of Employee Voice (Morrison, 2011)**

## **6.2 The Main Findings And Their Bearing On The Research Questions**

### **6.2.1 Contextual Factors**

#### **6.2.1.1 Hierarchy, Bureaucracy, Member Focus And Busyness**

The Thematic Analysis revealed a shared belief amongst the participants that certain features of the organisational context had a significant influence on employee voice. Hierarchy and bureaucracy were thought to impact negatively on voice, as it was hard to get voice to travel upwards, seats at the top table were reserved for the most senior people, and governance meant that people often didn't know where to take their voice. This is not a particularly surprising set of findings, as many people who have worked for large organisations will attest. It also supports the propositions of theorists such as Kakabadse (1979), who said that the number of levels in the hierarchy, the extent of bureaucracy and the centralisation, or otherwise, of decision-making, would all help shape the way in which organisations operate. In the context of employee voice, the suggestion is that hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations that make decisions at the centre would find it harder than other organisations to properly invite, welcome and hear the voice of their staff.

Hierarchy was thought by some participants to represent the natural order of the workplace, but it led to a lack of transparency and limited the number of people whose voice got heard. Bureaucracy, for some participants, meant that people found it hard to navigate the complex system of processes, committees and special project groups to get their voice heard, and this challenged the notion of voice flowing naturally around the workplace. It was also made worse by the complexity of the organisation, which meant that people couldn't easily find their way around the organisational structure, and by its size, which meant



that negative voice behaviour sometimes went uncorrected, because the checks and balances around such behaviour that are evident in smaller organisations were not present.

The nature of the business also seemed to influence voice negatively, and this supports the proposition of Morrison and Milliken (2000), who said that the market in which an organisation operates could have an impact on voice. These researchers looked, among other things, at the maturity, stability and competitiveness of the market in which the organisation operates, but some participants in Study Two of the current research project believed that it was the nature of the business itself that had a negative impact on voice. The organisation in question was a trade union and professional body, whose business was to represent the voice of its members, and this business focus influenced voice through what was described as a collective sensitivity by senior managers to criticism from union members. According to some participants, this sensitivity meant that the senior team was also sensitive to criticism from their staff. One outcome of this was that great efforts were made to placate union members and this, inevitably, increased the workload of employees at all levels. This notion of busyness is explored further in the next paragraph.

The busy nature of the work meant that managers didn't always have time to listen, and people didn't have time to share their ideas because there was too much day-to-day work to do. Although an obvious point on the face of it, this idea has not been explored in the literature on voice to date. Some people were also reluctant to express new ideas for fear of the extra work that might be involved in introducing and embedding ideas. Again, the research literature has

considered fear as a potential barrier to voice, but there has been no examination to date of the fear of taking on more work as a result of voice.

To return to the main research question, hierarchy, bureaucracy, member focus and busyness represent some of the conditions under which employees will remain silent. The irony here is that the bureaucratic processes put in place to encourage voice might have the opposite effect, and that member or customer focus might lead managers to pay less attention to their staff, precisely because they are so intent on hearing the voice of their members and customers.

Organisations need to examine the efficacy of their processes for encouraging voice and recognise that informal voice channels may be much more effective and better used by people. They also need to apply the same energy to hearing the voice of their staff as they do to hearing their customers. Hierarchy invariably means that voice is louder for people who are higher up, but it must be remembered that those who do the job will often have the best knowledge and the best ideas on how to make improvements to the work. Finally, organisations have to find ways to protect the time of their employees so that new ideas can emerge, and must support the implementation of new ideas by providing the resources for the extra work such changes may bring in the short term.

#### **6.2.1.2 The Impact Of Climate On Voice**

The Thematic Analysis suggested a number of ways in which participants described the climate of the organisation. Climate can be thought of as the shared and enduring perceptions of psychologically important aspects of a work environment. It has received some attention in the literature on voice, although this body of research is still quite limited. For example, Dutton et al (1997)

investigated climate in terms of justice, fairness and tolerance of dissent, while Morrison and Milliken (2000) proposed a climate of silence, and Morrison, Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2011) found that group voice climate had a strong influence on decisions to speak out at work.

Participants in the current research project said that staff were treated well and stayed, which resulted in a large number of long-serving staff, especially managers, who, according to some participants, could have a negative impact on voice by being complacent and blocking change. The organisation also tried hard to listen as evidenced by the range of processes it had in place to hear the voice of its staff. As stated earlier, however, these processes did not always work in the way they were intended. Another common theme among participants was that the organisation was somewhat risk averse and accepting of hierarchy, which some believed came from the nature of the profession it represented.

The range of participant perspectives demonstrates the difficulty of thinking about climate as a straightforward concept, which is uniform across the organisation. For many participants climate was determined by where one sat within the organisation, specifically which department they worked for.

Empirical research has for some time acknowledged the influence of departmental climate on voice behaviour. For example, Vakola and Bouradas, (2005) found that supervisors' attitudes to voice created a 'micro' climate which strongly influenced voice behaviour, and Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008a) showed that group climate factors such as autonomy and egalitarianism impacted on voice.

A common observation among participants in the current research project was the perceived existence of a "silo mentality" which referred to the belief that

departments worked independently of each other and rarely collaborated.

People may have believed that departmental climate was different but there was little concrete evidence of this, because of a lack of exposure to other departments. These differences in climate were attributed largely to the manager and how he/she set the tone for the departmental culture.

One interesting perspective, although a minority view, from the qualitative data was that national culture, specifically Englishness, might impact on people's engagement with voice at work. In particular, a "grin and bear it" mentality, comfort with hierarchy and a desire not to draw attention to oneself could prevent employees from giving voice, regardless of how welcomed it was and how well the systems for voice worked. The influence of national culture on voice has received very little attention in the research literature to date, which means that it is not yet clear how well the conditions for voice might travel between nations.

To return to the main research question, climate at departmental, organisational and even national level represents another one of the conditions under which people will give voice or remain silent. Climate appears to be a multi-faceted construct so it may be misleading to think of a single climate that properly represents how things work in the workplace. Organisations may strive for uniformity but need to recognise that departmental differences seem to have quite a profound impact on voice. Organisations may have common policies, a set of behavioural competencies and an espoused management style, but all of these are subject to the interpretation of those people, particularly managers, who work with them. Rather than trying to police the uniform application of such policies and approaches it could be more valuable for organisations to

understand and work with the differences that exist within the workplace, instead of trying to contain them.

### **6.2.1.3 Managers And Senior Leaders**

Study One, the Q Study, identified a community of opinion that suggested managers were heard more readily than other staff at work. This finding was taken further in Study Two, the qualitative study, and revealed more about voice for senior leaders and middle managers. Senior leaders in the organisation for Study Two were described by participants as approachable and informal, yet disrespectful and dismissive, deferred to and not challenged, and out of touch with the shop floor. This range of beliefs reflects a group of people with a very high profile and significant power, and there was a sense from participants that this power was often left unchecked, resulting in behaviour that would not be accepted elsewhere in the hierarchy. Research has suggested that a leader's experience of heightened power means they behave differently. For example, Tost, Gino and Larrick (2014) found that leaders are often more dominant verbally, which suppressed team members' communication and damaged performance. Conversely, the empirical work of Edmonson (2003) found that leaders who downplayed power and status differences made it easier for their staff to give voice.

The majority of participants in Study Two said that it was unwise and unsafe to express any challenge to the senior team because of the risk of humiliation and other repercussions. As a consequence, it could be argued that senior leaders only heard positive and supportive voice, which meant that decisions were made based on incomplete information, which could have been a potential problem for

the organisation. It would be worthwhile conducting further research to find out how much of a problem this could be for organisations in general.

If senior leaders behaved in this way, did this have an impact on lower management grades? Some participants in Study One, the Q Study, believed that managers had more voice but most participants in Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, thought this wasn't necessarily the case. Participants described middle managers in various ways. The first thing to note was that there was no single 'house style' of management, which refers back to the influence of departmental climate discussed in the section above. Secondly, participants felt that some managers weren't interested in their voice and merely went through the motions of inviting it. Milliken and Lam (2009) found that managers would not waste their time following up on what might turn out to be insignificant concerns. Burris (2012) found that managers tended to disregard the voice of those who spoke out too frequently on the same issue, particularly if the message was too challenging and change-oriented. One could speculate for the participants in Study Two, therefore, that their managers were going through the motions of welcoming voice when they privately believed it was not that important or it was too challenging.

Some participants described their managers as being insecure, defensive and lacking in confidence, and they did not seek voice from their staff because this voice, if challenging, could further undermine their confidence. This seems to support the research of Fast, Burris and Bartel (2014) who found that managers with low managerial self-efficacy were less likely to solicit voice from staff, were more likely to negatively evaluate those who spoke up, and were less likely to implement others' ideas. Others thought their managers were poorly supported

and caught in the middle of pressure coming from above and below, which could imply that their interest in voice was limited to passing messages down from above and to acting as gatekeepers by deciding which ideas left the team and were promoted further up the hierarchy.

Most empirical research on voice depicts managers as influential people whose voice is louder and more readily welcomed than the voice of others. There has been little thus far to distinguish between the behaviours of middle managers and senior leaders. The current research project has highlighted the possibility that there are significant differences between the voice behaviour of managers and leaders. This suggests there would be value in taking a more nuanced approach to studying management voice in the future by researching the experiences of managers at different levels instead of treating managers and leaders as one homogeneous group.

To return to the main research question, the behaviour and style of managers and senior leaders represent another one of the conditions under which people will give voice or remain silent. Organisations need to ensure that the behaviour of senior leaders is not left unchecked as this could have implications for the perceived safety of people giving voice to the top team, and this supports the research of Detert and Trevino (2010) who found that voice to 'skip-level' leaders (two or more levels above), was deemed unsafe. Organisations should also reflect on the relative power and influence of their middle managers. For many employees, the line manager will be the first port of call when giving voice. If that person lacks the influence or even the will to advocate that voice then it could be argued that many good ideas and opinions would go unheard, which

would mean that important organisational decisions could be made with incomplete information.

#### **6.2.1.4 Mechanisms For Voice**

Participants in Study Two referred to the processes the organisation had in place for communicating with staff and hearing their voice. Communications were perceived to flow down the organisation more successfully than they went back up. Formal systems for voice and special projects were thought to not always work as effectively as they could. Some participants described being superficially involved in decision-making, and there was a feeling that informal and low-key initiatives for voice were more effective but were largely absent from the workplace.

The downward flow of information involved the organisation broadcasting out to its staff about developments, achievements and changes ahead. This was sometimes thought to be formulaic and bland. An important view, albeit a minority one, was that this way of broadcasting was out of step with how younger people communicate with each other. This is potentially a very important point, and more empirical research would be useful to determine the communication styles, patterns and preferences of younger workers. This research could perhaps be in the form of interviews with focus groups, or it could look at patterns of use of social media by different demographic groups. If younger workers are shown to communicate differently among themselves this presents a challenge to organisations, who may have to adjust their way of communicating in order to be heard by all of their workforce.

The upward flow of voice was believed by many participants in Study Two to be more difficult. Organisations will often have systems and processes in place for



voice but these may favour certain types of people over others. For example, there was a belief among participants that extroverted people got heard more. This was not because they shouted loudest but because the agenda driven nature of most meetings meant that more reflective types missed out as the business had moved on while they were still formulating their thoughts.

The successful flow of voice in the workplace cannot be measured by the number of processes and systems in place, yet it's possible that organisations may be adopting that sort of 'tick box' approach. For example, the organisation in Study Two was often criticised by participants for introducing 'grand gestures' on voice, such as special cross-functional consultative groups and organisation-wide initiatives to capture voice about particular issues such as red tape. Participants felt that these gestures didn't often make a difference and could have been avoided by informally listening to people in the first place. The feeling was that these issues were regularly discussed at team meetings and among colleagues so this information should have been advocated upwards by line managers as a matter of course.

There also appeared to be some confusion over whether the organisation was informing, consulting or involving its staff, and this led to some participants being mistrustful of the organisation because there was a disconnect between what they were asking for and what they did with that input. People were giving their opinions about important issues but saw little evidence of these views being taken on board when decisions were made. Organisations should be explicit about how employee voice, when requested, would be used to shape the decision-making process.

To return to the main research question, the mechanisms in place to invite and hear voice represent more examples of the conditions under which people will give voice or remain silent. Ironically, there may be a disconnect between the proliferation and sophistication of these mechanisms and the extent to which people actually speak out at work.

#### **6.2.1.5 Connectedness**

If formal processes are not as effective as hoped for, where do people go to get their voice heard? Participants in Study Two talked about needing to be politically 'savvy' enough to make the right connections elsewhere in the workplace. This involved routinely sidestepping the line to get to the right people, who were often, but not always, more senior. Line managers were often perceived to lack the influence and the will to push ideas forward so people looked elsewhere. According to Detert and Trevino (ibid) voice given to immediate supervisors is considered to be safe but futile, and when giving voice to more senior managers, employee voice is less safe and, in some cases, less futile. Many of the participants in Study Two thought it was a waste of time giving voice to their line manager, but did not think it was necessarily unsafe to take their voice higher. However, opinions voiced directly to senior people did seem to carry a degree of risk so people would tend instead to routinely look for others to champion their voice to the senior team.

To return to the main research question, connectedness is another example of the conditions under which people will give voice or remain silent. People with stronger and broader networks of influence were more likely to give voice and be heard. Organisations need to be more mindful of informal networks and

somehow tap in to them, as these could be the places where authentic voice is heard.

## **6.2.2 Individual Factors**

### **6.2.2.1 Tenure**

Study One, the Q Study, revealed viewpoints about voice that were shared according to length of service. Longer servers thought that voice was a natural right and responsibility for people at work. Newer employees, on the other hand, were over-represented in a community of opinion that thought giving voice was less safe. Data from Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, unpacked these findings further and found that long servers were thought to be better connected and had a propensity to block change, while newer employees were believed to have a much quieter voice.

Longer servers were thought to have an advantage in getting their voice heard as they understood the landscape better and sometimes had direct access to the places where decisions were made. Longer servers inevitably had more history in the workplace, which meant that they might have worked directly in the past with people who had gone on to climb up the hierarchy. This meant they had friends in high places, assuming that their relationships were good with those people. As noted earlier, however, longer serving people, particularly managers, were described as being complacent and blocking change. It could be the case, therefore, that long servers used their connectedness to help maintain the status quo rather than pushing for change. This is only speculation and further research would be valuable here to understand more about the links between length of service and resistance to change. This further research could be a mixed methods study, perhaps involving an experiment where the dependent variable

was resistance to change and the independent variable was length of service, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews about change with people of varying lengths of employment service.

New employees often described how their expectations upon joining were quickly adjusted as they came to realise that their voice was not particularly welcomed. New starters were given no special treatment and were expected to find out for themselves how things were done. There was no attempt to capture the voice of new joiners and there was a belief that people didn't want to hear about their ideas or experiences from other jobs and workplaces. This meant that, according to some participants, new employees often lost heart, and this seems to have impacted on their behaviour going forward, as new starters said they often withdrew their ideas and simply got on with the job at hand.

Length of service is routinely used by researchers into voice as a variable that needs to be controlled in their studies. This suggests that tenure impacts on employee voice but there has been little if any attempt to understand if this is true and how it actually impacts on voice. The current research project has shed some light on beliefs about the behaviours of people according to tenure, namely that longer servers have the capacity to block change and new ideas, and they are heard more because they know where to go to get things done. Further research is merited in this area to find out if and how length of service influences voice.

When considering the main research question, tenure seems to be a good example of one of the conditions under which people will give voice or remain silent, as people seem to behave differently around voice according to how long they have been employed in the workplace. Organisations need to understand

these differences more clearly, as the behaviour of long servers and new starters is likely to have an impact on the number of ideas that find their way to the top and help the organisation to survive, change and prosper. They need to ensure the voice of their new entrants is not lost but is somehow captured, examined and, if appropriate, disseminated more widely.

#### **6.2.2.2 Gender**

In Study One, the Q Study, women were over-represented in a community of opinion that believed it was not safe to give voice at work. This finding was explored further in Study Two but it was found that most participants believed gender was not an issue in getting one's voice heard. This could be because the organisation in which Study Two took place had a predominantly female workforce and some participants referred to this fact when talking about how men and women were heard equally.

There has been very little empirical research on the role of gender in voice, although Morrison and Milliken (2000) suggested that differences in gender, ethnicity and age between the top management team and the workforce would lead senior managers to mistrust the voice of their staff. This proposition has not been explored in subsequent research on voice.

When considering the main research question it does not seem that gender has much impact on whether people give voice or remain silent, but it would be instructive to look at other organisational settings to find out if these findings are played out in other workplaces with a more even gender split.

#### **6.2.2.3 Grade**

The impact of seniority on voice has already been considered for senior leaders and middle managers (see Section 6.2.1.3 above). This section will, therefore,

focus on the experiences of people at lower grades. Study One, the Q Study, found that people who didn't manage others were more likely to think that voice was the preserve of other groups in the workplace and that their own voice was not invited or heard. Data from Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, revealed a pattern of beliefs about how the voice of junior staff was routinely disregarded.

In Study Two, most participants saw an inequity between grades in terms of their access to voice opportunities. Beyond this, examples were given of how junior staff were disparaged and put in their place when expressing their ideas, opinions and suggestions. Some participants believed that, by ignoring the voice of junior people, the organisation was missing an opportunity, because the people who did the job had the best knowledge and ideas on how to improve things.

Empirical research on employee voice has also largely ignored this apparent inequity according to grade, preferring instead to concentrate on managers and their impact on the voice of others. Further research, ideally using mixed methods, is needed here because, if only the voice of more senior grades is being properly heard, this could mean that decisions are being made without complete information and without input from a range of different sources, and this could be a problem because it might lead organisations to make the wrong decisions.

When considering the main research question it would appear that grade has an impact on whether people give voice or remain silent. The organisation in Study Two was thought by some participants to be hierarchical and grade-conscious, perhaps mirroring the profession it represented. It could be useful, therefore, to look at other organisational settings to see whether this inequity according to grade is evident there.

#### **6.2.2.4 Personal Dispositions**

Beyond length of service, gender and grade, are there any other individual differences that mean the voice of some people is heard more readily? Empirical research on the effects on voice of personal dispositions is quite scarce and has focused almost exclusively on extroversion. For example, LePine and Van Dyne (2001) found that extroversion and conscientiousness were positively correlated with voice, and Grant, Gino and Hofmann (2011) found that extroverted unit leaders responded less well than introverted unit leaders to proactive behaviour from their staff and that this, in turn, affected their unit's performance.

Participants in Study Two of the current research project were asked what types of people got heard more readily at work. This question provoked a range of responses, including biographical differences such as grade, tenure and gender, which have been discussed in Sections 6.2.2.1 to 6.2.2.3 above. They also referred to certain personal dispositions, which they believed had an impact on whether people got heard at work.

Passion and positivity were dispositions frequently mentioned by participants, and these are constructs that have yet to be considered by empirical research. The climate of the organisation in Study Two seemed to encourage positivity, as it was described as sensitive to criticism and bad news wasn't able to travel very far (see Section 6.2.1.2 above). Positive voice was welcomed precisely because it seemed to support the status quo, while challenging and critical voice remained largely ignored. Positivity meant, for some participants, a 'can-do' attitude and a solution-focused message, which would lead to an improvement in the service to members. Positive people seemed to be more highly valued while 'moaners and grumblers' were usually sidelined.

Passionate people may have been heard more readily because passion, when linked with positivity, was thought to be an attractive trait. Passion also seemed to lead to more voice because passionate people were likely to have more to say on a subject precisely because they felt so passionately about it. Passion without positivity, however, meant the person might have been thought of as a troublemaker.

Extroverted people were also thought to have a louder voice and, according to some participants, were better able to use the voice mechanisms in place because they suited their preferred style of expression. What this meant was that the systems and processes for voice appeared to favour those who were confident, assertive and quicker on their feet. There was a suggestion by some participants that extroverts did not necessarily have the most useful and important things to say, but it was their voice that was heard most clearly, whereas the opinions and ideas of quieter and more reflective people were often overlooked. It follows from this that organisations should avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to encouraging voice, otherwise they risk hearing the voice of only those who can work comfortably with and exploit the voice mechanisms put in place.

Some participants also believed that resilient and fearless people were heard more. Research to date has considered fear as a barrier to voice, but there has been no examination of fearlessness, toughness and resilience as potential facilitators of voice. This is worthy of further empirical attention because organisations who invest in developing the resilience of their staff could, by doing so, encourage more voice. For example, a correlational study could be undertaken to look at the relationship between resilience and voice, although



this would be quite limited as it would be cross-sectional and based on self-report with its well-documented problems (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Perhaps longitudinal field research could be carried out to strengthen the resilience levels among different staff groups by various development activities, then to measure the impact this had on their levels of engagement with voice.

To return to the main research question, it would appear that certain personal dispositions such as passion, positivity, extroversion and resilience represent some of the conditions under which people will give voice or remain silent. Most of these are intimately linked with the organisational climate, which seemed to value these dispositions over others. More research is warranted here to find out how well these dispositions travel across other workplaces and climates. One important implication for organisations is that they need not only to consider the personal dispositions of those who are heard more readily, but also the characteristics of those whose voice is lost. Like the organisation in Study Two, workplaces may have voice mechanisms in place which only work for certain types of people, but what of the people who are quieter, more reflective and more fearful? Failing to hear the voice of these people means the organisation may be making decisions based on incomplete information, as only the voice of certain types of people is heard.

### **6.2.3 Safety And Futility**

#### **6.2.3.1 Safety**

Morrison and Milliken (2000) were among the first researchers to propose safety as an important antecedent of voice at work. What they were suggesting was that people make decisions on whether to give voice based on a number of factors, including their perception or how psychologically safe it is to do so. Since

this initial proposition, empirical research has had a good deal to say about safety and voice. For example, Detert and Edmonson (2006) reported that 70% of their survey group thought that speaking up at work was unsafe, Walumbwa and Schaubroeck (2009) proposed that an ethical leadership style helped to create a climate of psychological safety where people felt comfortable in speaking out, and Detert and Trevino (2010) found that people thought that it wasn't always safe to give voice to managers higher up the hierarchy. In addition, Morrison, Wheeler-Smith and Kamdar (2011) found that beliefs about the safety of voice within the workgroup made a difference to whether people spoke out or not, and Liang, Farh and Farh (2012) concluded that a perceived lack of psychological safety meant people did not engage in what they termed 'prohibitive voice' which means expressing concerns about practices and behaviours that are harmful to the work unit or organisation.

It seems clear from these examples that people weigh up whether it is safe to speak out before doing so. Study One, the Q Study, also found a community of opinion that said it was unsafe to give voice at work. If people question the safety of voice, what exactly do they fear might happen to them? This is an area of enquiry that has not been properly explored to date, and Study Two of the current research project can help to shed some light on this.

There was a pattern of responses in the qualitative data that said people generally felt safe to give voice in their teams but feared the consequences of giving voice elsewhere, particularly when their voice was challenging and critical. Participants discussed the fear of saying the wrong thing in the wrong place or doing the wrong thing and stepping out of line. This seems to be more a fear of breaking protocols than anything else, and it could well be that people in

the study felt hamstrung by the bureaucracy surrounding voice, which meant they couldn't be sure when giving voice that they were doing it in the right way, to the right people and in the right place.

Some participants feared public humiliation, retribution and being put in their place, and it was felt to be particularly unsafe to give voice to senior leaders in public fora because of the risk of a public dressing down. Some feared being singled out and thought collective voice was safer. Many participants could not articulate their fear beyond the immediate situation, although a small number thought challenging voice could be career threatening.

These examples would seem to suggest that safety is a multi-faceted construct because it refers to protection from fear of a number of different consequences. This deserves further attention from empirical research, as a more generic notion of safety will not help organisations to address properly the sources of fear for their staff. In terms of the main research question, perceptions of safety and fear are yet another example of the conditions under which people will give voice or remain silent. What the current research project has done is to open up the well-rehearsed notions of safety and fear and suggest they may be more complex than at first imagined. This could, of course, be germane only to the organisation in Study Two, so it would be valuable to find out if these feelings about fear and safety are found in other organisational settings.

#### **6.2.3.2 Futility**

If people fear giving voice because it's deemed unsafe, what do they then do as a result? Many people, presumably, would simply stop voicing or would only give voice in a positive and supportive way. Others might risk the consequences of speaking out but might conclude that, ultimately it was a waste of time, as they

weren't being heard, perhaps because the message they were giving was too challenging and critical. This brings in the notion of futility, which was also proposed as an important antecedent for voice by Morrison and Milliken (ibid), but which has received much less empirical attention than safety. Dutton et al (1997) researched how middle managers presented issues to senior managers and found that poorly conceived communications were a waste of time, but issues that didn't imply criticism or change and that were supported by data were not futile as they had a good chance of being heard. Detert and Trevino (2010) found that their participants thought giving voice to one's line manager was futile, which is why they often risked the danger of expressing their opinions higher up, which was not thought to be such a waste of time but was much less psychologically safe.

In Study One of the current research project, the Q Study, there was a shared viewpoint that voice was never a waste of time, that everybody had something useful to say and that everyone's opinion counted for something. Data from Study Two, the Thematic Analysis did not support this. Many participants thought that giving voice was often a waste of time, particularly when that voice was directed at one's line manager. This supports the research of Detert and Trevino (ibid) described above, and the participants in Study Two talked about how they routinely sidestepped their managers to get their voice heard, as they did not trust their managers properly to advocate their voice upwards. Other participants thought that a certain type of voice, namely critical and challenging voice, was not only a waste of time but was potentially unsafe too. This may link to the aforementioned sensitivity to criticism of the organisation and its senior team.

In terms of the main research question, a sense of futility can be thought to be an important condition when deciding whether to give voice or remain silent. Put bluntly, what is the point of setting up mechanisms for voice when people consider it a waste of time? There was a common perception among participants that some people simply weren't interested in giving voice unless it was on a subject that had direct and personal implications for them. This may or may not be true but it is dangerous for organisations to assume their people are not giving voice because they have nothing to say. The main reason for their collective silence could be, instead, a resigned acceptance that nothing ever changes as a result of expressing their ideas, opinions and suggestions so they simply stop voicing.

#### **6.2.4 Employee Voice**

##### **6.2.4.1 Packaging The Message**

There was a viewpoint expressed in Study One, the Q Study, that voice had to be of a high quality before it got heard. This idea was followed up in Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, and the data revealed a more nuanced set of findings which unpacked the notion of the quality of the message in a number of ways. There was a strong sense from most participants in Study Two that voice had to be packaged properly, and they described a broad range of approaches and creative techniques they had used to package their voice to give it the best chance of being heard.

This is a theme that has barely been considered in the research literature to date. One exception is the research into issue selling conducted by Dutton et al (ibid), which said, among other things, that an issue would be heard if it had not been previously rejected, if it was supported by data and it contained a solution to a

problem, if it didn't imply criticism of senior managers, if it didn't imply change for the organisation, and if the issue-seller was known to and had rapport with the senior manager.

Participants in Study Two believed that voice that had the best chance of being heard was voice that was positive, in tune with the audience, using the right language, and evidence based. Criticism and challenging voice were thought by the majority of participants to need the most sensitive packaging. Positive voice was usually well received, but there was a distinct danger that the organisation was receiving a piecemeal picture if it only heard positive things. Good messages were also attuned to the needs of the audience, in terms of level of detail, empathy and an appreciation of their priorities. Voice was also heard more clearly if it used language that resonated with the organisation, and evidence based business cases, which saved costs and enhanced customer service were among the most welcome. Finally, difficult messages had a chance of being heard if they were packaged in a way that saved face for the manager.

On the surface these are simple and straightforward tips on how to communicate effectively. It comes as some surprise, therefore, to find that empirical research has paid almost no attention to how voice is packaged because, at least for the participants in Study Two, sensitive and careful packaging often made the difference between voice being heard or ignored. In terms of the main research question, although packaging isn't one of the conditions under which people decide to give voice or remain silent, it is an important consideration that people take into account once they have decided to speak out. Organisations need to ensure they raise awareness of these issues with their staff and train them to

become more effective at communicating otherwise important messages could be lost because they are simply not packaged in the right way.

#### **6.2.4.2 The Too Difficult Box**

Sometimes, regardless of how well the message is packaged, it is not heard because it is too unpalatable for the audience. This suggests that certain voice is 'off limits' to organisations because it is too challenging, too change-oriented or simply too different. There was a shared viewpoint in Study One, the Q Study, that said people needed to be politically astute and to trust the listener before saying what they thought, especially if their views were different from the majority. Data from Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, supported this idea and developed it by suggesting that different ideas, and challenging and change-oriented voice were not welcomed and not heard.

A number of participants in Study Two shared a belief that new ideas and different thinking was welcome within the workgroup but rarely outside it. Some people thought the main barrier to pushing through different thinking was the inertia and suspicion of longer serving managers who had the capacity to block change. Other people thought it was difficult to have different opinions even within the confines of their team. In such situations it was tempting to agree with the dominant logic of the group in order to gain acceptance, and this supports the findings of Heerdink, Van Kleef, Homan and Fischer (2013), as detailed in Chapter 4, who concluded that those who thought differently and who had fewer opportunities to speak out were more likely to keep quiet.

Challenging voice was also said by some to belong in the 'too difficult box'. If packaged sensitively, challenge and criticism had a chance of being heard, but this was set against a backdrop of organisational sensitivity to criticism, which

was discussed earlier in Section 6.2.1.2. These beliefs support the findings of Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011), who concluded that challenging voice was only welcomed when accompanied by other behaviours, such as altruism and courtesy. They also reinforce the research of Burriss (2012) who found that managers often perceived challenge as threatening, unless it came from a loyal employee who wanted to improve things.

Voice that suggested change was also often poorly received. The climate of the organisation has been described as risk averse and reactive, which suggests that change would be avoided as it threatened the status quo and would only be taken on board as a last resort when something had gone wrong and needed fixing.

Empirical studies have found that challenging voice and different thinking is often shut down, but this research has been rather thin on the ground. It would be valuable and instructive to find out what happens over time to people with different ideas, and interesting to speculate on the impact on the health and growth of organisations who fail to hear voice that is different and challenging. More research is needed in this area. Organisations need to open up to different ways of thinking about problems and critically review the way they do things. Not all different ideas are good ideas, but there needs to be a proper dialogue to find out whether things could be done differently. In terms of the main research question, having a voice that is different and challenging is a good example of the conditions under which people will decide to speak out or remain silent.

#### **6.2.4.3 The Journey Of An Idea**

Many participants in Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, spoke about how free they were to express their ideas within their teams, but how frustrated they



could become if their ideas left the team (which was by no means certain) and what happened to them on their journey around the organisation. Ideas often got stuck at team level, and some participants attributed this to a lack of influence and advocacy from the team leader. When an idea did leave the team it often got changed along the way, by being diluted, engineered, manipulated and even stolen. This meant that if it reached the senior team it could look quite different, and the originator of the idea was rarely invited to the top table to give their own account of it.

There has been little, if any, empirical research on what happens to voice as it travels up and around the organisation. It is important to address this absence of research because senior leaders may believe they are hearing the unadulterated voice of the originator, but this may be quite different to what appears in front of them. If the idea has been developed and improved along the way then that can only be positive, but if it has been neutered to make it more palatable then the senior team may be making decisions based on information that isn't complete, which could mean that those decisions are worse as a result. In terms of the main research question, if a person's idea gets stuck in the team or gets changed along its journey, that could lead them to decide to keep their ideas to themselves in the future. In this way, the journey of an idea can be seen as a condition under which people decide to give voice or remain silent.

### **6.2.5 Outcomes For The Organisation Or Group**

There was a community of opinion in Study One, the Q Study, that believed that voice makes a positive difference to organisations, and this was developed further in Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, where people were asked what difference, if any, voice made to their organisation. Participants in Study Two

often found difficulty in articulating the difference voice made to their workplace, beyond a belief that a person whose voice was heard would give more of themselves at work, which could only be of benefit to the organisation as a whole. A small number of participants shared a belief that the organisation might lose data about the performance and behaviour of its people when it was considered unsafe to give voice about such matters.

Many researchers have theorised about the implications of voice and silence for organisations. Morrison and Milliken (2000) provided a useful summary of these implications and said that voice not welcomed or heard would damage the quality of decisions, would impede innovation, would prevent error detection and correction, and would compromise the organisation's ability to learn.

Empirical research is beginning to show clear links between voice and work unit performance. For example, Mackenzie, Podsakoff and Podsakoff (2011) found a positive relationship between moderate levels of voice and unit performance, and Detert, Burris, Harrison and Martin (2013) showed how voice flowing to the unit leader from within and from outside the team led to improvements to unit performance.

Participants in the current research project generally agreed that voice was a good thing for organisations but, as stated earlier, could not easily articulate a clear link between the two. This inability to see a clear line of sight between voice and organisational performance could be construed as a condition under which they decided to give voice or remain silent because, if they couldn't easily see how their voice was making a difference, they might decide to keep quiet instead of speaking out.

### **6.2.6 Outcomes For The Individual**

There was a shared viewpoint in Study One, the Q Study, which described the positive benefits of voice to the individual, and said that giving voice was a natural and authentic thing to do and it could be good for a person, particularly when it led to positive change. This viewpoint was explored further in Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, by asking people how it felt when their voice was heard at work.

Most participants believed that being heard was personally satisfying and rewarding, especially when one's voice led to positive change. For many people this feeling meant they gave more of themselves, by going the extra mile, helping others and working beyond their job requirements. This is obviously good news but it might only be a temporary effect if it goes unnoticed and unrewarded by the organisation. Others talked about being more engaged in their work when their voice was welcomed. A small number of participants said that being involved and consulted meant they were more likely to support any decisions that were made, even if they personally disagreed with them, because at least they had been heard along the way.

When voice was not welcomed, however, people described feeling belittled and put in their place. These feelings meant that they might stop giving voice, withdraw their discretionary extra role behaviour, consider leaving or sometimes simply carry on regardless and give voice in a more defiant way.

These negative consequences could easily harm an organisation, as a workforce who have started to care less and are doing the bare minimum would, inevitably, impact on its ability to survive and grow. When people talk about leaving but don't take that step, this could leave a group of disaffected people who don't

necessarily want to be there but who, in the case of the organisation in Study Two, are apparently so well treated that they simply don't leave. The research literature has not addressed intention to leave: it has merely looked at relationships between voice and labour turnover rates. For example, McClean, Burriss and Detert (2013) found that turnover rates were higher where employee voice behaviour was high but where access to resources, influence and change orientation were low. It would be valuable to carry out more research into the possible links between denial of voice and intention to leave.

To return to the main research question, an individual's experience of how their voice is welcomed or not welcomed will likely be a factor they take into account when they decide to give voice or remain silent in the future. More than this, however, if people decide not to voice, the data from Study Two suggest they will also decide not to engage in extra role behaviour.

### **6.3 Strengths And Limitations Of The Current Research Project**

#### **6.3.1 Strengths Of The Current Research Project**

The current research project was characterised by a number of significant strengths that are worthy of further comment here. It asked the question "How do employees talk about voice and under what conditions will they give voice or remain silent?" To answer this question the researcher adopted a Critical Realist Position, as he assumed a pre-social reality existed but this could only be partially known because it sat behind the subjective and socially located knowledge he could access through his participants. This meant that he deliberately eschewed the positivist position adopted by many researchers in the field of employee voice.

The current research project was carried out over two studies, and adopted an Authentic Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Strategy (Teddlie & Yu, 2007), where the results from Study One informed the methodology employed and questions asked in Study Two, with data from both studies triangulating so that some of the same questions were asked of different groups in various different ways. This meant that the researcher was able to explore the findings from Study One in more depth through the qualitative data he gathered from Study Two. In this way, there was a clear synergy between the two studies and the overall findings were richer as a result. The Mixed Methods Strategy was considered to be robust, as it satisfied the key quality criteria for Mixed Methods. These are sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance (see Chapter 3, Section 3.8.3).

Q Method was carefully selected as the preferred methodology approach for Study One as it is particularly suited to looking at different representations of a construct, in this case voice and silence at work. The research in this area has tended to overlook individual perspectives in favour of more generic research, which has attempted to devise models and rules to help explain and predict voice and silence. Study One of the current research project, on the other hand, took a more idiographic approach to investigate participants' viewpoints about voice and silence. The Q Study in the current research project had good validity because the concourse for the study was derived from the verbatim statements of people who were interviewed as part of a pilot study to develop the concourse.

Thematic Analysis was carefully selected as the preferred qualitative approach for Study Two because it looks at themes and patterns in what different people

say about an issue and it looks at commonality and difference across participants. Thematic Analysis was also used in the pilot research for Study One, and its outputs fed directly into the creation of statements for the Q Study. The interview questions for Study Two were carefully constructed by the researcher and checked for coverage and clarity with his supervisory team. The questions were drawn explicitly from gaps in the current literature, from the guiding definition and model of voice (Morrison, 2011) and from the findings from Study One. The researcher conducted a thorough and comprehensive Thematic Analysis of the data from the interviews, adhering strictly to the 6 phases recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Study Two of the current research project had good ecological validity and transferability, and reasonable generalisability, although this was compromised somewhat because it took place in a single organisational setting (see Chapter 3, Section 3.8.2).

The current research project involved participants who were adults working for UK organisations. Students were not used as participants at any point in the project because of the risk that they might have lacked direct experience of what they were being asked about, namely giving voice at work. Data were drawn from Study One, a Q Study involving a probability sample of 80 working adults, to develop the questions and the sample for Study Two, a Thematic Analysis of the data from interviews with a purposive sample of 15 adults who worked at different levels in the same organisation (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4).

The decision to conduct the research for Study Two with participants from the same organisation was driven, in part, by opportunity and convenience, but also because organisational and departmental context and climate are believed to have a significant impact on voice and silence. The setting for Study Two was a

knowledge intensive work environment based in the UK, rather than in US work organisations, often with low skill, routinised and low status roles in industries with notoriously transient workforces, which is where much research into employee voice has taken place to date.

The current research project adhered to the principles embodied in the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (Oates, Kwiatkowski & Morrison, 2010). This code posits four core principles of ethical research: respect for the autonomy and dignity of persons, scientific value, social responsibility and maximising benefit and minimising harm (see Chapter 3, Section 3.9).

### **6.3.2 Limitations Of The Current Research Project**

The current research project was characterised by a few important limitations and constraints that are worthy of further comment here. To begin with, although the data across the project were rich, they were not hard data on outcomes such as performance and employee turnover. Such hard data are often cited as outcomes of voice behaviour in quantitative research, but the researcher was constrained by the unavailability of such data in both studies of the current research project. Secondly, although voice was desirable for participants, it was not considered to be critical for doing their jobs unlike, for example, the participants in the research by Edmonson (2003) who were cardiac surgery teams who needed to communicate effectively to help the quick and smooth implementation of new technology that would help save patients' lives.

Another matter for consideration with the current research project was that it was a cross-sectional study, which only offers a snapshot of a phenomenon at a particular point in time and cannot demonstrate causation, only that two or

more variables are related to each other in some way. Most research into employee voice is also cross sectional in nature, as field research in organisations is rarely longitudinal.

The choice of Q Method for Study One was a good choice because it is suited to looking at different representations of a construct, in this case voice and silence at work. However, it has been described as a "qualiquantological" approach (Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1990), which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. This means it is not possible to apply the normal criteria of validity and reliability in the usual way. The Q Study has already been shown to have validity because of the care with which the concourse was developed and the opportunity for participants to express their opinions. However, it cannot claim to have reliability in the normal sense because it was only carried out once.

Other things to be taken into account in the Q Study were that the statements for the concourse were drawn from interviews with a reasonably homogenous sample, who were older, longer-serving workers employed by large, established organisations, which could be a problem because they may have had a particular experience of voice that might not be shared with younger, less experienced workers in organisations that were less well-established. In addition the participants were incentivised for taking part in the Q Study, and the survey was administered on-line which meant that there was no control over the way the sample engaged with it nor any opportunity for the researcher to offer support or debriefing along the way.

There were other matters for consideration in Study Two, the Thematic Analysis, which deserve further elaboration here. The setting for Study Two was a trade



union and professional body, a knowledge intensive work environment based in the UK, rather than a US work organisation with low skill, routinised and low status roles in industries with notoriously transient workforces, which is where much research into employee voice has taken place to date. Nevertheless, it was a single organisational setting, and this means that, in common with other case study research, the generalisability of the findings would be compromised.

Generalisability refers to the extent to which the findings from Study Two can be assumed to hold for other populations beyond the sample of participants who took part in the research. Ecological validity can contribute to this, as the data were gathered in a way that was relatively meaningful to real life. However, an interview with a researcher is not an everyday event so it must be conceded that, in spite of the researcher's best efforts, the ecological validity, and thus the generalisability, of Study Two was compromised.

Another quality criterion for qualitative research is member checking, which involves checking the analysis of the data with the participants who took part in the research. This is done by presenting a report of the findings, and asking the participants to comment on its trustworthiness and authenticity. This did not happen, because the research was sponsored by the Director of Human Resources of the host organisation, and the researcher was simply asked to submit an executive summary of the data analysis to the sponsor. Although the sponsor expressed interest in the analysis, the researcher did not have access to the original participants once the research had been concluded.

One other thing to be taken into account in the Thematic Analysis was that the participants were volunteers who may have had strong views on the subject of employee voice, as it would be unlikely that someone would volunteer to take

part in the research if they had nothing to say on the topic. In this way, in common with other research using volunteers, the sample could have been biased. Also the sample consisted of 15 participants, which the researcher decided was a large enough sample group once he had transcribed and coded the interviews. It was at this point in the analysis that the researcher decided the data had reached saturation point and he was able to be reasonably confident that no further interviews would produce any different codes that hadn't already been used. The problem is that the idea of saturation could be quite contentious because every additional participant has the potential to say something new and unexpected.

A final issue to consider in the current research project was that there were power differences evident between the researcher and the participants across both studies. These were less of an issue for the study One (although the researcher did set the statements for the Q Survey) but are worth commenting on for the qualitative interviews that were undertaken as the pilot for Study One and as the chosen methodology for Study Two.

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), there are a number of power characteristics of the interview, which are often neglected when considering the ethics of qualitative research. For example, the researcher defined the interview situation by setting the topic, asking the questions, following up on the answers and ending the conversation. The researcher took care in devising the questions for Study Two, and did not allow the participants to set the agenda, except for asking them if there was anything else they wished to talk about that hadn't been covered.

The researcher also presented himself as an occupational psychologist and this could have increased the power differences for some participants. The researcher was an outsider to the organisation, although he had undertaken consultancy work there in the past. The organisation regularly imports external expertise to address some of its issues so it is fair to imagine that some participants saw the researcher as an external expert, brought in to investigate the problem of voice and silence, in spite of his clear assertions that he was conducting the interviews for his thesis.

There were other ethical challenges present in the interviews and their interpretation. For instance, the questioning was invariably one-way and participants rarely questioned the researcher. The interviews were also not ends in themselves, unlike good conversations, as the researcher was seeking descriptions of experiences, which he could then interpret according to his research interests. Finally the researcher held a monopoly of interpretation over the participants' statements, and this was not addressed by member checking, as stated above.

#### **6.4 Implications For Future Research**

The current research project has produced a number of interesting and unexpected findings, which have extended the reach of empirical research into employee voice and silence. These have already been discussed in some detail and can be summarised as follows:

- Voice did not appear to travel around the workplace in uniform and predictable ways. It may move through more informal channels, it might get stuck at team levels and it may change as it moves further up the organisation

- There were many potential barriers to people giving voice, which included fear of breaking protocols, sensitivity to criticism, busyness and a 'one size fits all' approach by the organisation
- Certain types of people seemed to get heard more. These included senior managers, long serving staff, and people who were passionate, positive, extroverted and resilient
- Other types of people seemed to get heard less. These included newer staff, junior grades, younger staff and quieter, more reflective types
- Positive and carefully packaged messages seemed to be more welcomed, while challenge, criticism and different thinking was rarely invited
- Voice welcomed appeared to lead to people giving more of themselves at work, while voice unheard seemed to lead to disaffection and, for some, an intention to leave

The overall findings from the current study have produced a range of further research questions. These questions have already been discussed and threaded through the narrative of Section 6.2 above, and will be reproduced in summary form here under the same headings used in Section 6.2.

#### **6.4.1 Future Research Into Contextual Factors**

There are a number of opportunities for further research into contextual factors and their impact on voice. These can be captured best in the form of research questions. Empirical research into the following questions would be valuable to organisations and academics alike:

- "What is the impact of 'busyness' on people's desire to give voice and an organisation's ability to listen to that voice?"

- "To what extent does fear of taking on more responsibility stop people giving voice and sharing their ideas?"
- "Does sensitivity to criticism act as a barrier to voice and is it possible that sensitivity exists at an organisational level?"
- "Does national culture impact on voice? More specifically how well do notions of voice travel across national boundaries?"
- "What happens to organisations when their senior leaders only hear positive and supportive voice from their staff?"
- "What are the differences in voice behaviour between middle managers and senior leaders?"
- "What are the preferred communication styles of younger workers and how can organisations reflect this?"

#### **6.4.2 Future Research Into Individual Factors**

The current research project has suggested a number of research questions into individual factors and their impact on voice:

- "Is there a relationship between length of service and resistance to change?"
- "How does length of service impact on voice behaviour?"
- "Do men and women differ in their voice behaviour in any systematic ways?"
- "How grade-conscious are organisations and what impact does this have on voice behaviour?"
- "What are the personal dispositions that influence how a person's voice is heard?"
- "Are fearless and resilient people more likely to give voice at work?"

### **6.4.3 Future Research Into Safety And Futility**

There are two research questions that should be asked about safety and futility and their impact on voice:

- "Are safety and fear multi-faceted constructs?"
- "What do people fear when they say they fear giving voice at work?"

### **6.4.4 Future Research Into Employee Voice**

The current research project has produced further research questions into the nature of employee voice:

- "How can voice be packaged to give it the best chance of being heard?"
- "What is the voice behaviour of people who think differently from others?"
- "What is the impact on organisations if they fail to hear the voice of those who think differently from others?"
- "How do messages change as they travel towards the top of the organisation?"
- "If voice is filtered as it travels to the top, what impact does this have on organisational decision making?"

### **6.4.5 Future Research Into Outcomes For The Individual**

There are two research questions that should be asked in relation to outcomes for the individual:

- "What is the impact of voice not welcomed on intention to leave?"
- "How does intention to leave affect engagement and discretionary extra-role behaviours?"

## **6.5 Implications For Practice**

The current research project has suggested a number of important implications for practice. These implications have already been discussed and threaded through the narrative of Section 6.2 above, and will be reproduced in summary form here under the same headings used in Section 6.2. Recommendations will be made for what organisations and occupational psychologists should do to improve practice in key areas.

### **6.5.1 Implications For Practice Around Contextual Factors**

The current research project has produced a number of implications for practice under the heading of contextual factors. These can be summarised as follows:

- Informal voice channels may be more effective and better used than more formal voice mechanisms. Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to conduct a proper examination of the efficacy of their systems and processes for hearing voice and can suggest ways to tap into informal voice channels, as this may be where authentic voice is best heard.
- Organisations need to audit the ways they seek the voice of their customers and employees to see if there is a difference between the two, and to decide if the best features of each approach can be used across the two groups.
- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to critically evaluate the coverage of their voice mechanisms to see if voice is given differently according to hierarchical levels. If certain grades are over-represented they need to find ways to hear the voice of those grades who are not speaking out.

- There needs to be an examination of which sorts of messages get heard. If new ideas are not forthcoming from staff, organisations need to find ways to protect the time of their employees so that new ideas can emerge, and must support the implementation of new ideas by providing the resources for the extra work such changes may bring in the short term.
- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to recognise the effect that departmental differences might have on voice, and to acknowledge that policies and processes for voice are subject to the interpretation of those people, particularly managers, who work with them. Organisations need to understand and work with the differences that exist within the workplace, instead of trying to contain and police them.
- Organisations need to ensure that the behaviour of their senior leaders is not left unchecked, as this could have implications for the perceived safety of people giving voice to the top team. Occupational Psychologists can help organisations in this endeavour by acting as objective and critical outsiders.
- Organisations should reflect on the relative power and influence of their middle managers. If these people lack the influence to advocate the voice of their staff then many good ideas and opinions could go unheard, which would mean that important organisational decisions could be made with incomplete information.
- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to be explicit about how employee voice, when requested, is used to shape the decision-making process. If it is not clear whether people are being informed, consulted or involved in decision-making there is the possibility that



voice will be lost going forward, as staff might perceive a disconnect between what they were being asked for and what the organisation did with that input.

### **6.5.2 Implications For Practice Around Individual Factors**

The current research project has produced a number of implications for practice under the heading of individual factors. These can be summarised as follows:

- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to properly invite and capture the experiences and ideas of new entrants, then to decide if and how to disseminate that input more widely.
- Organisations need to examine the voice behaviour of longer serving managers and staff, particularly around ideas for change, and decide if this has a negative impact on the organisation's ability to change and progress.
- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to identify groups of people who benefit from or are excluded from the voice mechanisms they have in place. If certain types of people are being routinely excluded from giving voice then organisations need to critically evaluate the systems and processes they have in place, and adapt them to suit the various needs and preferences of different sorts of people.
- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to understand the potential importance of resilience and mental toughness for voice, and can help to provide personal development opportunities for staff in this area.

### **6.5.3 Implications For Practice Around Safety And Futility**

The current research project has produced two implications for practice around safety and futility. These can be summarised as follows:

- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to tackle the behaviours that cause some employees to consider that voice is not safe. These behaviours might be exhibited by managers and senior leaders, and Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to tackle this by acting as objective and critical outsiders, and taking a coaching approach with leaders and managers as appropriate.
- Organisations may assume their people are not giving voice because they have nothing to say, but this could be a dangerous assumption to make. The main reason for their collective silence could be a resigned acceptance that nothing ever changes as a result of expressing their ideas, opinions and suggestions so they simply stop voicing. Occupational Psychologists can help to properly evaluate the difference, if any, that voice has made to the health and growth of the organisation. If no difference is found, then a full and critical review of voice mechanisms needs to take place.

### **6.5.4 Implications For Practice Around Employee Voice**

There are implications from the current research project for practice around employee voice:

- Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to assess which sorts of voice get heard most. It may be that there is an unspoken preference for positive voice, for example, in which case there is a danger that piecemeal information is being used to make important decisions. Put

simply, Occupational Psychologists can help organisations to make sure that critical and challenging as well as positive voice are able to move freely up to the top.

- Organisations need to raise awareness among their staff of the importance of packaging messages in the right way to give them the best chance of being heard. Occupational Psychologists can help to train staff to become more effective at packaging their voice in this way.
- Organisations need to open up to different ways of thinking about problems and critically review the way they do things. Not all different ideas will be good ideas, but there needs to be a proper dialogue to find out whether things could be done differently.

#### **6.5.5 Implications For Practice Around Outcomes For The Individual**

The current research project has identified some behavioural outcomes when voice is not welcomed. The implication for practice is as follows:

- Organisations must ensure they genuinely welcome the voice of their staff. A failure to do this could mean that these same staff stop giving voice, withdraw their discretionary extra role behaviour, and leave. These negative consequences could easily harm an organisation, as a workforce who have started to care less and are doing the bare minimum would, inevitably, impact on its ability to survive and grow.

#### **6.6 Conclusions**

This research project broke new ground as the researcher believes it was the first UK mixed methods study of employee voice and silence and, as well as looking at the antecedents of voice, it looked beyond this into how messages were packaged, who they were targeted at, and what difference, if any, voice

made to organisations and the people who work for them. It produced a number of important answers to the research questions, that helped to address gaps in the extant research literature and took voice research into new territories. It suggested numerous opportunities for new research into voice and described a range of important implications for practice.

This research project has highlighted a range of conditions under which people will decide to give voice or remain silent. It is not enough for organisations to introduce mechanisms for voice and assume everyone will join in. Different types of people will engage differently with the systems in place, and when people disengage it doesn't necessarily mean they have nothing to say. They may have decided, instead, that it's not safe or it's a waste of time to share their thoughts. This may be linked to the climate of the organisation where, for example, positive voice is welcomed but critical and challenging voice is not. This could mean that senior leaders have a view of the organisation that is at odds with what is actually going on.

The main implications of this research for work organisations and occupational psychologists, therefore, are that the climate of the workplace and the mechanisms in place for voice could mean that the voice of certain types of people is louder, and that certain sorts of messages are heard more readily than others. This could lead organisations to make decisions based on incomplete information and could lead to the disengagement of those people who are not heard. For these reasons alone, continued research into voice and silence deserves to be more widely heard.

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## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PILOT STUDY

Can you describe what you do?

What is it like to work there?

How do you feel about speaking your mind at work?

How does it feel when you voice your opinions at work?

Have you ever chosen to remain silent on issues of importance to you at work?

How does it feel when you stay silent?

How does your organisation encourage you to share your ideas, opinions and knowledge?

How does your line manager encourage you?

Does your behaviour at work reflect the way you are outside of work?

How did you find your voice as you were growing up?

***Note: other subsidiary and follow up questions were asked depending on the nature of the answers given.***

## APPENDIX 2

### POETQ SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS FOR ON-LINE Q SORT

Welcome to POETQ and thank you for agreeing to take part in this study exploring your experience of voice and silence at work.

Most organisations ask their employees for their ideas and opinions yet most employees prefer to remain quiet. Why is this? We may think it's a waste of time or even that it's not safe to speak up where we work. We may think our organisation is not really interested in what we have to say, in spite of all the mechanisms they may have in place to hear our voice. There has been a lot of research carried out on the reasons why people may remain silent about such issues at work, but very little has been done to understand how it feels to somebody when they decide to voice their concerns and suggestions or, conversely, how it feels to keep quiet. This study aims to shed some light on this issue.

This study is designed to be simple to complete and there are instructions throughout to support you in responding to the questions set out on this site. If you are stuck at any point then click the help button in the top right hand corner and guidance here should assist you.

Rather than lots of tick-box questions, this survey involves sorting statements about voice and silence at work. The sorting leads to the production of a grid that represents your perspective. We will then take this and compare it with others taking part.

The survey usually takes between 15 and 25 minutes to complete. If you need to leave the survey at any point then simply make sure that you have completed that section of the survey and pressed the next button in the bottom right hand corner. Upon re-entry you will return to the last place you saved data from.

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time up to the point at which the data are analysed. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

## APPENDIX 3

### LETTER OF INVITATION FROM HR DIRECTOR

#### HOW YOUR VOICE IS HEARD AT (NAME OF ORGANISATION)

##### Colleagues

We have worked hard at (name of organisation) to put in place systems and processes that allow you to share your ideas, opinions and suggestions with us. We want to find out how effective this has been. Successful organisations welcome input from their staff so that they can make better decisions based on information from many sources, and one of the most important information sources is you.

To this end we have commissioned an external researcher, Mark Holloway, to interview staff at all levels to find out how well your voice is heard at work. We would like to invite you to take part in this study. If you decide to take part, you will be interviewed one to one by Mark Holloway for around sixty minutes. Interviews will take place in June, July and August in private meeting rooms in your workplace.

The main questions you will be asked at interview will include the following, although these are only a guide:

*"Can you tell me about how you share your ideas, opinions and suggestions at work?"*

*"What do you think your manager thinks about hearing your voice?"*

*"How does (name of organisation) encourage your ideas, opinions and suggestions?"*

*"Do you think that everyone at (name of organisation) has an equal chance to be heard?"*

*"How can you present your ideas so they have the best chance of being heard?"*

*"In your experience, is it worth sharing your ideas, opinions and suggestions or is it a waste of time?"*

*"What does it feel like when you give voice to your ideas, opinions and suggestions at work?"*

Your answers will be recorded on an audio recording device and the interviews will be written up in full, at which point the original recordings will be destroyed. The only people who will have access to your data will be Mark Holloway and two co-researchers, all of whom work for the School of Psychology at the University of East London.

Your identity will be protected at all times and it will not be possible to trace back what was said by you when the research is completed. Your responses will be anonymised, your name will be removed and you will be referred to as Participant A, B, C etc.

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

I hope you decide to take part in this important study. If you are interested in participating please contact Mark Holloway direct at [m.r.holloway@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.holloway@uel.ac.uk) and he will arrange to meet with you.

Director of Human Resources

10th June 2015

## APPENDIX 4

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

**University of East London  
School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ**

#### **University Research Ethics Committee**

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

**Catherine Fieulleateau, Research Integrity and Ethics Manager, Graduate School, EB 1.43  
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD  
(Telephone: 020 8223 6683, Email: [researchethics@uel.ac.uk](mailto:researchethics@uel.ac.uk)).**

#### **The Principal Investigator(s)**

Mark Holloway  
University of East London  
School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ  
Telephone: 020 8223 4178 (work) 07584 358762 (mobile)  
Email: [m.r.holloway@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.holloway@uel.ac.uk)

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

#### **Project Title**

An Exploration of Employee Silence in the Workplace

#### **Project Description**

The main aim of this research is to help work organisations to make decisions based on a fuller body of information, which includes the ideas, views, opinions and suggestions of their staff. This research will look at the language people use when they talk about giving voice or remaining silent at work. It will explore the conditions under which people feel able to give voice and the barriers that might lead them to choose silence instead.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be interviewed one to one by the Principal Investigator for around sixty minutes. He will ask you about your experiences of speaking out or remaining silent on important issues at work.

#### **Confidentiality of the Data**

Your responses will be recorded on an audio recording device and the interviews will be written up in full, at which point the original recordings will be destroyed. The only people who will have access to your data will be Mark Holloway, Principal Investigator, Dr Pippa Dell, First Supervisor and Dr James Walsh, Second Supervisor. All work for UEL's School of Psychology. Your identity will be protected at all times and it will not be possible to trace back what was said by you when the research is completed. Your responses will be anonymised, your name will be removed, you will be referred to as Participant A, B, C etc and your organisation will not be referred to by name.

#### **Location**

Interviews will take place either in a private meeting room at your own workplace or, if preferred, in an interview room at the University of East London School of Psychology.

**Remuneration**

You will not be remunerated for taking part in this study.

**Disclaimer**

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time during the research. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

**Annexe 2**

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

**Consent to Participate in a Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants.**

**An Exploration of Employee Silence in the Workplace**

I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the programme has been completed. These are Mark Holloway, Principal Investigator, Dr Pippa Dell, First Supervisor and Dr James Walsh, Second Supervisor. I understand that my identity will be protected at all times and it will not be possible to trace back what was said by me when the research is completed. My responses will be anonymised, my name will be removed, I will be referred to as Participant A, B, C etc and my organisation will not be referred to by name. It has been explained to me what will happen once the experimental programme has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me and for the information obtained to be used in relevant research publications. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) .....

Participant’s Signature .....

Investigator’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) .....

Investigator’s Signature .....

Date: .....

### **Annexe 3**

In our interview we will be discussing a number of topics related to employee voice and silence in the workplace. These will include:

- How managers behave and how this impacts on voice
- How organisational culture influences decisions to speak out
- How managers make decisions and barriers to making good decisions at management level
- Expectations on opportunities for voice on joining the organisation
- How organisations can help staff feel safe to voice
- How different groups, such as women, people from different classes and ethnic groups experience voice
- How people who think differently talk about voice

## APPENDIX 5

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR QUALITATIVE STUDY

#### INTRODUCTION

##### Opening Question

Why were you interested in taking part in this research?

##### Prompt Questions

What is it like to work at the (name of organisation)?

What were your expectations when you joined (name of organisation)?

#### THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

##### Opening Question

Can you tell me a little bit about how you share your ideas, suggestions and opinions at work?

##### Prompt Questions

When was the last time you shared an idea, opinion or suggestion at work?

How often do you share your ideas, opinions or suggestions at work?

Why do you share your ideas, opinions and suggestions at work?

Why don't you share your ideas, opinions and suggestions at work?

Have you ever been silenced at work?

Have you ever chosen to remain silent?

Do you ever keep quiet to protect others?

Do you think voice and silence are contagious at work?

#### THE IMPACT OF MANAGERS' BEHAVIOUR ON EMPLOYEE VOICE

##### Opening Question

How do you think your manager feels about you sharing your ideas, opinions and suggestions?

##### Prompt Questions

What advice would you give your manager to encourage you to speak out more at work?

How do managers here let you know your voice is welcome?

What do you think about how managers make decisions at (name of organisation)?

How do you feel if your manager doesn't have the authority act on your ideas and suggestions?

In your experience, what sorts of managers are interested in hearing what people have to say?

Are they interested in what you have to say? If not, why is it difficult for them to show interest?

Do you think powerful people behave any differently here?

What is your view about extroverted and introverted managers?

Is it important for you to get on with your manager if you want your voice to be heard?

#### THE IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT ON EMPLOYEE VOICE

##### Opening Question

How would you describe the culture of (name of organisation)?

##### Prompt Questions

How would you describe the culture of your department?

Does this culture encourage you to share your ideas, opinions and suggestions?

Do you think people are treated fairly at (name of organisation)?

What are the conditions under which you will give voice to your ideas, opinions and suggestions?

What, in your experience, are the barriers to giving voice at (name of organisation)?

How are decisions made here?

Is it safe to express yourself at work? If not, how could (name of organisation) make you feel it's safe to do so?

Are there times when it's better to say nothing?



## **THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL FACTORS ON EMPLOYEE VOICE**

### **Opening Question**

What types of people get listened to here?

### **Prompt Questions**

Do you believe that everyone at (name of organisation) has an equal chance to be heard?

Do you need to be the right sort of person to speak out at work?

What do you do if you think differently to those around you?

Is it OK to express your ideas and opinions if they are different?

What do you think about how women are heard at (name of organisation)?

What do you think about how people from different classes are heard at (name of organisation)?

What do you think about how people from different ethnicities are heard at (name of organisation)?

## **THE IMPACT OF MESSAGE AND TARGETS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF VOICE**

### **Opening Question**

How can you present your ideas so they have the best chance of being heard?

### **Prompt Questions**

Is it OK to be challenging or is it best to just tell managers what they want to hear?

What happens if you are too challenging?

Have you ever taken an idea, opinion or suggestion to someone other than your manager?

Did it feel safe to do this?

Did it feel like a waste of time?

## **THE IMPLICATIONS OF VOICE AND SILENCE FOR ORGANISATIONS**

### **Opening Question**

How does (name of organisation) benefit from encouraging the voice of its staff?

### **Prompt Questions**

In your experience, is it worth sharing your ideas or is it a waste of time?

Do you think people have the right to speak out at work? Do they need to earn this right?

Do you think people have a responsibility to speak out at work?

## **THE IMPLICATIONS OF VOICE AND SILENCE FOR INDIVIDUALS**

### **Opening Question**

What is it like when you give voice to your ideas, opinions and suggestions at work?

### **Prompt Questions**

Is it good for you to express your voice at work?

How do you feel if your voice isn't welcomed?

What do these feelings lead you to do?

Do you think people who give voice are rated more highly here than those who keep quiet?

Do you think people who speak out are labelled as troublemakers?

### **CLOSE**

Is there anything else you would like to talk about that we haven't covered?

## APPENDIX 6

### RANDOMLY ORDERED Q STATEMENTS FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

- You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work (-)
- It's easy to share information where I work (+)
- If I have a good idea at work I know what to do with it (+)
- Managers will make better decisions if they take staff opinions on board (=)
- I can be myself at work (+)
- People should discuss things face to face more often at work (-)
- It's easier to say what you think if you're a manager (-)
- It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told (-)
- Messages can easily get distorted where I work (-)
- Choosing to stay silent can send out a powerful message (=)
- People where I work are interested in what you're thinking (+)
- It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said (+)
- If you prefer to keep quiet at work that's up to you (=)
- I will keep quiet at work if I think I don't know enough about the subject (=)
- It's really frustrating to keep quiet about things at work (-)
- I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work (+)
- There is an open style of management where I work (+)
- My manager likes hearing my ideas (+)
- I feel that my opinion matters at work (+)
- You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind (-)
- I can ask my manager about anything I want (+)
- I speak up at work if I feel strongly enough about something (=)
- We talk about the same problems all the time at work without resolving them (-)
- Keeping quiet is a good way to protect yourself at work (-)
- It feels completely natural to say what I think at work (+)
- Creativity is valued where I work (+)
- Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful (=)
- You get credit for your ideas and suggestions where I work (+)
- There are always people who will see the downside in something (=)
- It's boring if you can't share your ideas at work (=)
- We are encouraged to learn from each other where I work (+)
- It takes more than words to change people's attitudes (=)
- It's hard to speak up at work if your views are different (-)
- Everyone at work has something useful to say: it doesn't matter who they are (=)
- If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder (-)
- I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can (=)
- Speaking your mind at work will help people to understand your situation (=)
- Where I work there is always someone to talk to if you need to (+)
- People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions (=)
- If you speak up at work you'll be labelled as a troublemaker (-)
- Nobody gains anything from complaining at work (=)
- Speaking your mind at work could damage your career (-)
- I feel empowered when I speak my mind at work (=)

- Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss (-)
- You need to be outgoing and open to speak up at work (=)
- My organisation takes action on what we say (+)
- I tend to keep quiet for an easy life (-)
- If you've got something to say at work then say it (=)
- There are lots of ways I can have my say at work (+)
- Bottling things up at work is bad for your health (-)

## APPENDIX 7

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY

#### Annexe 1

**University of East London  
School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ**

#### **University Research Ethics Committee**

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the programme in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

**Merlin Harries, Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE)  
External and Strategic Development Service (ESDS)  
University of East London, Docklands Campus, London E16 2RD  
(Telephone: 020 8223 2009, Email: [m.harries@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.harries@uel.ac.uk)).**

#### **The Principal Investigator**

Mark Holloway  
University of East London  
School of Psychology  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London E15 4LZ  
Telephone: 020 8223 4178 (work) 07530 713101 (mobile)  
Email: [m.r.holloway@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.r.holloway@uel.ac.uk)

#### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

#### **Project Title**

An Exploration of Employee Silence in the Workplace

#### **Project Description**

The main aim of this research is to explore the nature and functions of employee silence to discover more about why people choose to stay silent on matters of importance at work and whether this represents a good adaptation by helping people to survive in the workplace. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be presented with a set of 50 statements that describe people's opinions about various aspects of voice and silence in the workplace, and then asked by the researcher to sort these statements according to how strongly you agree or disagree with them. You will also be asked to write brief notes on why you organised the statements in the way you chose. The whole session is expected to last no longer than 30 minutes and the researcher will be on hand to answer any questions throughout the session.

#### **Confidentiality of the Data**

Your responses will be recorded on a Q Sort Grid and will be transferred to an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Programme at which point your original data will be destroyed. The only people who will have access to your data will be Mark Holloway, Principal Investigator, Dr Carla Gibbes, First Supervisor and Dr James Walsh, Second Supervisor. All work for UEL's School of Psychology. Your identity will be protected at all times and it will not be possible to trace back to your responses when the research is completed.

**Location**

Q Sort sessions will take place either at your own workplace or, if preferred, in a meeting room at the University of East London School of Psychology.

**Disclaimer**

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time during the process. Should you choose to withdraw from the programme you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

**Annexe 2**

**UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

**Consent to Participate in an Experimental Programme Involving the Use of Human Participants**

An Exploration of Employee Silence in the Workplace

I have the read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what it being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the experimental programme has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the programme at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)  
.....

Participant’s Signature  
.....

Investigator’s Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)  
.....

Investigator’s Signature  
.....

Date: .....

### Annexe 3: Statements to be used for Q Sort Sessions

- You need to work out who you can trust before you speak your mind at work (-)
- It's easy to share information where I work (+)
- If I have a good idea at work I know what to do with it (+)
- Managers will make better decisions if they take staff opinions on board (=)
- I can be myself at work (+)
- People should discuss things face to face more often at work (-)
- It's easier to say what you think if you're a manager (-)
- It would be nice to be consulted sometimes instead of just being told (-)
- Messages can easily get distorted where I work (-)
- Choosing to stay silent can send out a powerful message (=)
- People where I work are interested in what you're thinking (+)
- It feels good when you help to change things by what you've said (+)
- If you prefer to keep quiet at work that's up to you (=)
- I will keep quiet at work if I think I don't know enough about the subject (=)
- It's really frustrating to keep quiet about things at work (-)
- I'm quite happy to stand up for myself at work (+)
- There is an open style of management where I work (+)
- My manager likes hearing my ideas (+)
- I feel that my opinion matters at work (+)
- You need to understand the politics at work before you speak your mind (-)
- I can ask my manager about anything I want (+)
- I speak up at work if I feel strongly enough about something (=)
- We talk about the same problems all the time at work without resolving them (-)
- Keeping quiet is a good way to protect yourself at work (-)
- It feels completely natural to say what I think at work (+)
- Creativity is valued where I work (+)
- Keeping your thoughts to yourself at work is not helpful (=)
- You get credit for your ideas and suggestions where I work (+)
- There are always people who will see the downside in something (=)
- It's boring if you can't share your ideas at work (=)
- We are encouraged to learn from each other where I work (+)
- It takes more than words to change people's attitudes (=)
- It's hard to speak up at work if your views are different (-)
- Everyone at work has something useful to say: it doesn't matter who they are (=)
- If I keep quiet about my concerns at work people will get away with murder (-)
- I will avoid confrontation at work whenever I can (=)
- Speaking your mind at work will help people to understand your situation (=)
- Where I work there is always someone to talk to if you need to (+)
- People should just get on with their jobs and not worry about giving their opinions (=)
- If you speak up at work you'll be labelled as a troublemaker (-)

- Nobody gains anything from complaining at work (=)
- Speaking your mind at work could damage your career (-)
- I feel empowered when I speak my mind at work (=)
- Speaking up about things at work is just making a fuss (-)
- You need to be outgoing and open to speak up at work (=)
- My organisation takes action on what we say (+)
- I tend to keep quiet for an easy life (-)
- If you've got something to say at work then say it (=)
- There are lots of ways I can have my say at work (+)
- Bottling things up at work is bad for your health (-)

## APPENDIX 8

### EXAMPLE OF A CODED INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Q: So thank you for coming along and I'll start by asking you a question why were you interested in taking part in research in this research?

A: OK I suppose the erm the thing that resonated for me was the from a voice perspective about having a voice within the organisation erm it's something that I'm particularly interested in from a manager's perspective about giving voice to the team but also I find there are certain erm areas within the work environment that I find it particularly easy to have a voice and perhaps probably quite a prominent voice but there are elements of the organisation where I am pretty mute (***voice is different depending on where you are***) erm and come out of situations wanting to kind of kick myself erm because in retrospect there's quite a lot I have to say or wanted to have said but didn't (***missing the boat with voice***) so it's a kind of a two it's about me understanding about voice to staff but also from a personal perspective as well

Q: OK so managers have problems with voice as well

A: Managers have problems with voice (...) from a personal perspective I have problems with voice going up and I also have problems with staff feeling that staff don't contribute as much as they'd like to all the frustration when they don't when you think they've been given the opportunity to (...) (***staff don't take opportunities to voice***)

Q: Is that contributing to you or in other forums?

A: Erm in the (...) in forums where I'm I'm present and erm my staff are present and I know that they could contribute to things that are being discussed and don't I haven't erm (...) so yes so both

Q: If I was to ask you to say a bit more about the situations where you as a manager are able to give voice and times when you're not

A: Erm do you mean on behalf of my (...) on behalf of my staff or (...)

Q: Probably you as an individual how well you're heard as a person

A: As a person I think that's about distinguishing between the manager's role and how much you're heard as a person erm I think it's about feeling feeling safe I feel much easier to give a when I'm in very familiar surroundings with people



with people I have a lot to do with on a regular basis (***voice feels safe in familiar surroundings***) but I think that you (...) I sometimes find myself in situations where it's not familiar it's quite formal and erm and I find that erm I can give you a good example I'm giving a paper to a (named management team meeting) and am only being allowed to respond to questions rather than being allowed erm (...) to sort of free free flow to sort to speak erm as things come into your mind that it's quite formal erm and cause I find it quite difficult and so if you're in a formal environment and you're kind of you're not allowed to speak freely and you only need one knockback and that will that I'm kind of shot you down if that makes sense so erm (***formal fora can inhibit voice***)

Q: What sort of meetings?

A: Sort of (named management team meeting) yeah where things are more formal erm so (named management team meeting) where you might not be familiar with the people that you're dealing with or you might not deal with them in such a formal way you might meet them you know (***voice feels safe in familiar surroundings***) you might have a meeting with them one-to-one but then you know you have a very formal round table situation but also erm in meetings where you have a erm a kind of governance structure that we might not be familiar with from a staff perspective but it's very formal governance so it's a bit like that because it's the (named members) etc (***formal fora can inhibit voice***) and it's about sort of adjusting your delivery depending on the audience and that can sometimes be difficult (***packaging message to suit the audience***) it's about erm we don't I think we're all different in terms of what we find comfortable when giving voice and so putting people in formal very formal unfamiliar situations they might have a lot to say or a lot to contribute to they find it so unfamiliar and formal that that they just sit back and shut down (***formal fora can inhibit voice***)

Q: And do those situations exist quite often is it quite often that there is a formal air when you're able to give voice?

A: I think that's where I struggle to give voice yes yes absolutely you're so worried about following process that you (...) you almost miss the moment you know things have moved on by the time you think when is it going to be alright

to say something now you've missed your gap or you or when should I say something or is it all right to say something erm because it's a kind of formal formal environment (**fear of breaking protocol impacts on voice**)

Q: OK so can you tell me a little bit about how you share your ideas your opinions and your suggestions at work what's the way you go about it?

A: Erm in terms of a familiar team I can do that very vocally in team meetings erm one-to-ones erm emails (**sharing ideas in the team**) that usually if I have to deliver something to a more senior group I'll do that on paper and I'll feel quite comfortable doing that on paper (**comfort in written communications**) and if I'm then asked to share the opinion vocally I find it very difficult because again it's about a sort of formal environment but hierarchy it's about hierarchy as well it's about not necessarily feeling comfortable having voice erm (...) I'm much happier giving a critique or written paper than erm than you know saying it verbally (**formal and hierarchical fora inhibit voice**)

Q: So I understand now what you mean because you said earlier I can only respond to questions and that means you've submitted a written paper to a forum they've read it you come in they ask you questions...

A: Yeah yeah so does that make sense?

Q: Yeah is that how decisions are made around here?

A: Yeah it seems yeah absolutely erm and it's that kind of erm you having your own ideas and it's not a kind of two-way discussion or process erm this is how you communicate and erm don't you're not able to have a voice to feed into that (**formal means answering questions not discussing**)

Q: But generally speaking do you like to share your ideas work?

A: I like sharing them I don't always feel comfortable sharing them but I think sometimes we work in an environment where the people feel they're familiar with the situation they feel comfortable so there they get they get a voice (**voice feels safe in familiar surroundings**) and erm things are set up so that people who are more erm more reflective kind of miss the boat because things move on quite quickly so erm if you don't have a voice and you don't have it quickly things are kind of moved forward (**reflectors miss the boat**) in a I don't know whether we're very good at reflecting on all the different mediums and ways of people

having a voice and adjusting how are you how are you (**one size fits all approach to voice**) if you take an average (name of organisation) team meeting you know we work through the agenda we discuss things and then we move on decisions are made we move on that doesn't necessarily give voice to people who want to go mmm I'd like to think about that then come back (**meetings don't allow for reflection**)

Q: So in team meetings it's much more (...) free and there is time for reflection trying out ideas?

A: Mmm probably not in team meetings there's time for preparation so you're prepared when you go in about what you're going to discuss but actually if because of someone's opinion you might try and change your viewpoint if you don't have a voice then and say something anything quick and think on your feet then you've moved on decisions have been made things have moved on (**meetings don't allow for reflection**) and actually it's not that you didn't have an opinion it was that you took a long while to perhaps come round to that way of thinking we move we move forward and decisions are made and plans are drawn up and and (...) (**reflectors miss the boat**)

Q: And what's your opinion of the decisions that are made in that kind of way?

A: Erm I don't know whether other people necessarily feel that you've got ownership of them that you can feel that you (...) yeah you don't feel a part of them because you go away but also then if you go away and reflect and you've then got an opinion that isn't isn't the same as the outcome that's decided in the meeting what what voice have you then got to change it at a later time and I think that that I don't know that's minimal (**reflectors can't own decisions**)

Q: OK but do you have to support the decision?

A: Yeah I think so yeah especially when it's made by management (laughs) yes we do (**supporting decisions you don't agree with**)

Q: Have you ever been silenced at work?

A: Erm (...) have I been silenced I have raised erm (...) how do I put this I've raised issues that have not been taken very well and because the reaction has been quite erm (...) if I say aggressive that's an overstatement but because something hasn't been received very well and the person has responded in a

fairly aggressive (***people can respond aggressively to feedback***) what's the other word my response is I'm not going to take that any further because I I don't feel comfortable with somebody else's being uncomfortable and reacting to me in a way that's that's quite I just I'll just it felt like even though you weren't actually silenced it felt like you were being silenced because somebody didn't take your opinion on board it was just bleuuurgh so yeah that feels that feels like being silenced so somebody isn't prepared to take it it's not criticism but isn't prepared to take feedback and because they're not prepared to take that feedback they respond in a way that's quite full-on (***people can respond aggressively to feedback***) so you just step back and don't take the issue any further (***stepping back from aggression***) so you and not following protocol when you don't quite know what the protocol was so it's not time for you to say that I guess that's just process ignorance of process but yes (***fear of breaking protocol impacts on voice***)

Q: And is that a regular occurrence?

A: Erm not not now no I think that was under a that has been under a previous management structure where you are you know you were silenced because you said something that isn't in tune with what the manager's thinking erm (***need to be in tune with manager to get heard***) and that used to happen on a fairly regular basis now I think we are in from a team perspective in quite a different place erm (...) so not on a regular basis no

Q: OK do you ever keep quiet to protect other people?

A: (...) Yes (...) I'm just trying to think of an example yes I would say I did and protecting other people protecting other people from being anxious protecting other people from being hurt erm protecting other people from bad news erm (...) so yeah (***protecting people from bad news***)

Q: Do you think that's something that a manager should expect to do?

A: No no but I don't think as an organisation we are not very good at delivering news bad news so I think that we kind of perhaps collude in the erm you know the culture of not treating people as grown-ups and that they might be able to take take that (***protecting people from bad news: they can take it***) as it's a bit erm it's perhaps you do it sometimes when you're not clear about the message

so you know that there's a message but you're not entirely clear what the message is so you just hold on to the message and actually you should be erm (...) delivering the message **(lack of clarity means hold on to message)**

Q: So you mentioned the organisation not being very good at delivering bad news

A: Mmm yeah sometimes not very good at delivering things and not treating people with as I said not appreciating you have the capacity for all sometimes the people are gonna be anxious about things that's absolutely part of the process **(protecting people from bad news: they can take it)**

Q: What about erm criticism how does criticism find its way around the organisation?

A: I don't think it finds its way around very well actually but I don't think culturally and I know I'd absolutely erm put myself in that I think it's it's become better and I think that erm sometimes being open to criticism is kind of wrapped up in feedback formal feedback processes erm and that erm we're open to feedback we're open to criticism **(problems accepting negative feedback)** because we are we use feedback but actually it's not always one and the same thing if you get somebody to fill out a form it doesn't then mean that people are good at taking the criticism or the feedback which ever way you want to call it erm but it is quite formalised **(formal processes for negative feedback)** actually it could be a lot more informal and we could be better at erm at having an organisational culture of accepting kind of erm feedback and maybe that's something that that top-down bottom-up I don't know you know **(informal negative feedback not welcomed)** maybe I think (name of organisation) makes some grand gestures erm if we dealt with things more on a more casual feedback way more criticism way then we wouldn't need to escalate into you know **(grand gestures on voice and feedback)** we're having a project on change changing things if we were better at listening to people in the beginning when people were feeding back about processes or the way things are done then we wouldn't need to hold these working parties changing things that actually people who are working on a day-to-day basis have been feeding back for months and months and months it's only when we've got a project that's led by a senior

manager that looks into this but if we listen to people on a day-to-day basis it might not escalate up to the grand gesture (***importance of listening informally***)

Q: Can you give an example of that?

A: Erm I will I don't want this to sound like a criticism for the actual I think some good things have come out of the project but we've got this kind of cutting through the red tape project erm which has had some really good outcomes but actually there are things that came out of that that are age old and there are people who I work with that have been saying you know it would be good if we could do it this way but it would've been nice if someone had listened to people saying could we do it this way without it having to escalate into a big project (***escalation to grand gesture could be avoided***) and that's better feedback mechanisms are not seeing it as criticism seeing it as kind of like well let's listen to a better way of doing this there has to be a better way of feeding in about change without it being (...) (***managers are sensitive to criticism***)

Q: You're pointing upwards a lot are you saying therefore that decisions are made up there?

A: Yeah I think sometimes they are instigated from up there I think that they then do get buy-in from across the organisation absolutely you know they go out and say right we're consulting about this now because it's become a problem but if you listen a little bit more to what's going on down here on a day-to-day basis it doesn't escalate into a problem and it doesn't then need to be led erm without being a project so that (...) it gets it gets the same thing done it's I don't know when and how there are mechanisms for doing it may be a quicker way (***grand gestures take time: quicker to listen in the first place***)

Q: Is it because decision-making has to happen at a particular level?

A: Possibly yeah maybe maybe that is what you know it has to be led or or change has to be led from there

Q: So are you saying that this organisation is responsive to erm criticism but it likes to respond in its own way?

A: I think it takes a while to respond is what I suppose I'm saying and then it becomes a large exercise erm and it takes a while to recognise the criticism is taking place and that recognition comes from the senior management

perspective and that actually criticism of feedback can happen much more erm organically if we don't call it criticism we call it something about feeding in and having people having a voice and erm yes erm and about people having control over day-to-day things that matter to them erm I think that's probably something the organisation I feel that they could do do better (**grand gestures take time: quicker to listen in the first place**)

Q: And and you mentioned control there do you think that's an issue in voice?

A: Yeah I do I think that they're erm very I think that they're linked because if you don't feel you've got any control over something you're not likely to make an issue of it or or have a voice or try try and have a voice because if you don't feel you can control it a lot of people will say what's this because you've got other things that are out of your control (**no control = no voice**) so there's probably not many people in the organisation jumping up and down about what they can't control because we're all too busy doing our day jobs (**too busy to worry about what you can't control**)

Q: OK thank you erm (...) you said at the start erm that you wanted to talk about managers the manager's perspective and if I can get you to think about your own line manager how do you think that person feels about you sharing your own ideas opinions and suggestions at work?

A: Erm really well I think now it's not always been the case but at the moment yeah (...) they do I think they listen I think they're also honest about erm hearing what we're saying and then saying that that's a great opinion but we're that's not that's not something we can take on board at the moment (**good manager listens and is honest if nothing can be done**) feeding back we have a voice and then erm do you good and there you can say things and vent but it's all very well saying to people yeah course we want to have your opinion but if that doesn't go anywhere and they're not really listening (**managers ask for voice but don't listen**) it's it's like taking it the next step isn't it and then if they're really listening they can tell you that actually they've heard what you said but actually at this moment in time that might be a valid opinion I can't do it we can't influence or change or to see that it can as long as they're feeding back to you about that voice or what you're saying but yeah I think she's pretty good erm (...)

**(good manager listens and is honest if nothing can be done)** I don't know whether that extends to the wider team or whether there's just a select few that always have voice and that in the wider team that's not necessarily always the case don't know but again it's administrators and people who are working on a day-to-day basis **(voice for a select few)** with because you've got sort of different structures haven't you so (...)

Q: So are you saying that you as a manager are more readily listened to then?

A: Perhaps yeah I would say that yeah **(managers may have more voice)**

Q: And do you think that's the way that it is here?

A: Yeah maybe that is the way that it is I don't yeah think erm again there will always be people at different grades on these bigger panels to feed back into them but on a day-to-day basis I'm not sure that the same is true across-the-board

Q: What do you mean by that sorry?

A: So when things are looked at because they're not working they have a working party which will always have people at different grades but on a day-to-day (...) basis is everybody being heard in the same way I don't think they are **(lower grades not heard day to day)** because (...) but then maybe then again are they are they having to they all have the same erm opportunity and that are there certain people who will always take up that opportunity to have voice more or is it that there are certain people but everybody's got the same opportunity but that the mechanisms for voice aren't right for the silent majority or it might be the way we're asking people giving them a voice isn't right for everybody I don't know **(one size fits all approach to voice)** we've got we've got the staff survey which again is a formalised way of kind of feeding back erm every couple of years **(mechanisms for voice)**

Q: So you said earlier that it's hard to be reflective in certain situations because they've gone through the agenda and that people experience that quite often here

A: From my peers yeah I think that there are I don't know if it's the nature of the work that we do but there are there are quite a few reflectors in our team and if they're put in a situation where decisions need to be made erm there's not a lot



of narrative that goes with that I think that they do they sometimes struggle and there ought to be another way and maybe you know from a business perspective that's not right for this organisation but erm I do see that kind of agenda driven process quite often so people struggle with it (**reflectors miss the boat**)

Q: Can you think of a solution to that?

A: (...) It's about that I think it's about mixing up ways of getting feedback from people having voice and not speaking up and and reviewing feedback and having voice erm if you're just sticking to one way of doing things going forward you just get more of the same people not the same thing but the same people who will always have a voice (**one size fits all approach to voice**) I don't know I do I come across people who have and maybe it's to do with personalities and situations but you don't feel I've got a voice and therefore because they haven't got a voice they feel quite despondent (**lack of voice = despondency**) and then you think well actually you've got the same voice as everybody else in the organisation but actually is it because they're not voicing in the right way (**packaging the message**) you know it's not it's not that they don't have anything to say or they're quite happy not having anything to say because there will always be an element of people who have nothing to say about it and that's absolutely fine (**some people don't want voice**) as well it's the ones that kind of (...) they have got something to say but actually they're saying it in a negative way rather than a positive way because they wanna say it but it just turns back as a complaint I suppose how do we channel that people complaining into something positive because complaining is having your voice it's just having a very negative voice I mean it's about turning that into a positive voice (**positive voice is heard**)

Q: Do you have an answer to that?

A: Erm yeah I think it's about different mechanisms for and also challenging let's well if you feel that way about it you've obviously got an opinion and at the moment it's a negative opinion what could we do so the voice is about what can we do to give you a voice it isn't about saying you've got a voice its about saying what can we do about giving you a voice (**positive voice is heard**) how would you like to communicate (...) to the wider team at the moment you're

communicating it but you're communicating in a very negative way to a small number of people that potentially has a scattergun effect you know kind of negativity scattergun it tends to be in certain areas of the organisation or certain departments perhaps who don't feel that they're **(one size fits all approach to voice)** so yes it's about not really going you've got a voice so use it but saying well you've clearly got an opinion how would you like to voice without saying there are already mechanisms in place so use them because it's obviously not working because the mechanisms are already there **(positive voice is heard)**

Q: You said erm that erm moaning can be contagious...

A: Yes scattergun (laughs)

Q: And you said there are particular departments where this happens does this organisation have different cultures depending on where you are?

A: I don't know I think erm I think quite a lot of it's to do with are you all is there a certain level of the department where people are unheard is there below that kind of how do you make sure it's not been picked up **(grade affects how your voice is heard)** it's not been communicated up I don't know they obviously there are departments they have particular reputations for being negative and you go outside and there's a set of people having a fag and having a moan probably that's fine maybe that's just letting off steam but erm yes those kind of oh things can't be quite can't be that good so but I don't know I think there is a management thing because I've seen in my department how things have changed when you bring in different management again it's about modelling behaviour as well erm if if the way of communicating is moaning then it's alright to do it I don't know maybe it's modelling management that's not a solution necessarily just an observation **(managers should model good voice behaviour)**

Q: That's really interesting what does (...) how can a manager behave that lets you know they're interested in your voice what do they do?

A: Time it's something I've learned because again that goes back to about you can listen it may sound cliched but listening and hearing are two very very different things and even if erm somebody is giving an opinion but it can be a very useful one but if you haven't got the time to feed back to action it you lose it you know that opinion and all that that particular voice because you haven't got time then

to move it forward (**managers need time to listen, reflect and take action**) so you need to make sure or managers need to make sure they've got the time (...) because they generally do want to hear what people have to say because if you give it a voice give people a voice and it's just a tick box exercise then (...) I suppose it's then about seeing your erm you have an opinion seeing that that's been taken to you know it either comes to fruition or it's thought about its discussed it's erm the benefits the pros and cons are gone through so it's kind of broken down a little bit (...) yeah (**voice as a tick box exercise is futile**)

Q: Anything else that a manager can do to show you that they're interested you mentioned giving time and erm you also mentioned genuine genuinely inviting voice any any other behaviours that would let you know your voice is welcomed?

A: Erm I think it's about seeing it kind of erm actioned seeing it followed through and giving you credit for your opinions as well so erm not running away with them (**managers taking credit for others' ideas**) that's important I think it's also about challenging you know being challenged in terms of your opinion that's when you know somebody's really listening not challenge you in a you know negative way but they kind of yeah OK or or they wanna know more they ask you to elaborate on what you said (**challenge means manager is listening to you**) and also to take ownership you had that opinion and why is that so allowing us to take ownership and work it through those kind of erm (...) (**take ownership of your voice: don't just dump your complaints**)

Q: OK OK thank you you also mentioned erm a while ago about in some parts of (name of organisation) it's easier to be heard than others can I ask you about your work environment your your work team how would you describe the culture of that particular department or team?

A: OK erm we've got very (...) clear erm core values in the team what we do is that we tiptoe around each other quite a lot sometimes that can result in kind of passive I can't think of any other way of describing it passive aggressive behaviours that erm because we're afraid to challenge and we don't take criticism very well (**afraid to challenge and criticise in team**) it's quite a sensitive bunch erm that we do quite a lot of kind of checking in with each other but (...) we selectively we select we hear the bits that all the good bits and we

don't necessarily want to hear the bad bits because we don't know how to deal with the bad bits so we block the bad bits out and we don't challenge or (...) investigate further (**blocking out bad news**) erm so on the surface it it's great we're all checking in with each other we're all doing that but for me personally if you dig a little deeper you're checking in you're doing all the right things I'm not sure you're actually listening to the bad stuff because when we hear it we don't know what to do with it so we'll stop somebody's voice if it's a kind of a erm yeah

Q: What do you mean by checking in?

A: Well you know are you having a good day are you fine lots of that you know but we don't wanna hear from anybody if you aren't fine we wanna hear that they're fine that's not listening (laughs) that just checking in when somebody is fine and we're really good at that but that's where and it's only you know only a minor criticism in that we're all very good and I think a lot better than some other departments in doing that kind of you know but if if if you don't want to know when somebody is not fine you shouldn't ask whether they're fine you need to be able to hear when it's not (**afraid of bad news in the team**) and I think that's why and I and we recognise that that's probably where we need to do some work and we also need to do some work about (...) around accepting criticism because we're all too nice to each other yeah (**sensitivity to criticism**) that's basically what I mean (laughs) but then challenging each other a little bit more and getting below kind of erm cause you know what's really getting beneath what's really going on

Q: How closely do you think your team culture mirrors the culture of (name of organisation)?

A: I think we're quite (...) erm it's been quite interesting because we've had some new members of the team come in from external organisations I've been here for quite a long time so and I've been in the same department for quite a long time erm and the new members of the team have kind of come in and gone gosh you lot are so sensitive and but also they've identified that they've never been spoken to in the same way that they have been by other departments (**department cultures are different**) erm and whether that's just a cultural thing because of what they do for a living erm and they're used to more sort of

challenging but I think we are quite different because of what we do in terms of erm member focus and erm so I don't know about other departments erm like (named department) and they're like apples nuts and bolts I don't know they're so different quite a rigid kind of structured erm what's the word (...) **(culture driven by work of the department)**

Q: Do you think the culture of the organisation encourages the sharing of suggestions and ideas?

A: Erm I suppose it goes back to my original point that I think they do it at a corporate level I don't think it's very organic and I don't think erm that if somebody made a suggestion then again this kind of a formal way of doing it it's all on the intranet it's all on line sort of the suggestion of the week **(mechanisms for voice)** like yeah I guess that gives people a voice who might otherwise not have it but it's just OK if I want to say to somebody erm in another department you know can we meet on the Tuesday Tuesday is really bad because there's something else going on on Tuesday we don't need to procrastinate but just listen to people don't take it as a criticism take it as a suggestion I think that's probably where we could do more erm and again I think that that comes from people being a bit more it sounds like a cliché but being a bit more resilient to criticism or to change suggestions **(sensitivity to criticism)**

Q: And what about you as a manager how open are you to erm constructive criticism from your staff?

A: Better than I was definitely erm I've always wanted to make things alright erm so the thought that I wasn't making erm that that that the team weren't happy would cut to the quick and so the criticism that the team weren't happy I found it very difficult to accept that something could be generally alright **(sensitivity to criticism)** but there is something going on that erm but I'm much better at that now I think I'm much better at asking asking for feedback and criticism **(learning to accept criticism)** and I've also become much better at the time thing you know time for prep time for reflection afterwards not just moving from one thing to the next and then going oh I haven't done the notes from the last meeting and I don't know what it is that I said that we would do erm and from that making time you do you go from that position to make you just wanna get

through it (***time as barrier for accepting criticism***) so you don't want criticism because that makes it even more difficult to get through what you wanna do a list of things to do but once you plan and you've got time for reflection and you've got time to action the points you actually become more open because you have got time actually if you want to if you if you want to go through with some of the things that you want to discuss when you go like that you're more open because you've got more time and you know it's not like you bring something in and it's a curve ball and you can't cope with it because you because you're trying to juggle everything else (***time makes you more open to voice***) is just and I mean the very fact that you're sitting there and going actually I've got time to (...) people are much more able to provide you with that feedback because you're asking for it you're not going yeah you give me what's your 360° because you've got so much to get on with you're asking the question (***time makes you more open to voice***) so you're thinking you're doing 360 but actually you're not because you're (...) it's very difficult to give constructive criticism to a manager it's really hard and I think that we can do lip service but actually to genuinely do it I know it's hard so it must be hard for potentially hard (***managers are sensitive to criticism***) but if you ask somebody why they're not doing it you're perpetuating the reason that they're not doing it in the first place you know if they haven't got a voice to tell you it then you asking them why they're not doing it you haven't changed you haven't changed your approach or your culture or your (...) (***one size fits all approach to voice***)

Q: Do you think that this organisation is generally sensitive to criticism?

A: (...) Erm I think it is yes I think it strives I think that comes from striving to be really brilliant and when you strive to be really brilliant criticism can be more difficult it shouldn't be because it should help you become brilliant but I don't think it copes very well with criticism from its members (***organisation sensitive to criticism because it strives to be brilliant***) erm I think if it coped better with criticism from its members it would be stronger in its reaction to criticism I think that there is a erm somebody criticises and there is the automatic default in that you run round like a headless chicken you can't quite cope with the criticism erm and you act really quickly on it (***organisation responds too quickly to criticism:***

*doesn't reflect*) and you're worried about it I want to get it fixed erm actually criticism can be a time for standing back and it's fine for our members to erm to not like everything that the organisation does if we're clear about why we're doing things for what reason just because somebody doesn't like it wanted to criticise it doesn't mean that we're necessarily doing something wrong (*organisation should stand firm in the face of criticism*) but the way we react to our members criticising kind of gives the impression that we think that we are doing something wrong and you see the Facebook kind of because we have social media and people's ability to feedback is instant it can be quite damning (*social media needs instant response*) although in public wanting to fix it gives the impression that we are doing something that we're not proud of whereas if you say we had a think about that we've had time to reflect on that and actually this is our response I think I mean I know that our department is you know we don't like members criticising what we're doing and I sometimes would like to say well is it because of the mechanisms that click into place once the complaint is made (*formal mechanisms for complaints*) you know it feels all kind of like we should be like OK somebody doesn't like the way we are doing something we can learn from it but it's not about it being about I mean we shouldn't assume because someone has criticised what we're doing that that criticism is always valid it's valid in that somebody is allowed to make that criticism but it's not necessarily valid in terms of our processes (*member criticisms aren't always valid*) and the way that we're managing expectations we're not (...) particularly good at managing expectations

Q: The expectations of your members?

A: Yeah members and our staff sometimes yes we do our default mode doesn't always get the impression that you're strong in where you stand (*organisation should stand firm in the face of criticism*)

Q: OK erm so we talked about erm your interest in this research we've talked about how you erm go about sharing ideas how your manager responds and the organisational culture erm I want to go back to something you said earlier which was you talked about a certain type of person getting heard more often in this organisation what types of people get listen to here?

A: Confident people yeah (...) yes **(confident people get heard)**

Q: Can you say a bit more about that?

A: Erm erm again this might be to do with the erm mechanisms or avenues for people to give voice and because you know it's erm if you're confident quick and erm you have a voice and then you continue to have a voice because you'll be the one that gets called in because you have a voice it's kind of cyclical so yes **(confidence breeds confidence)**

Q: So are people who give voice rated more highly in this place then?

A: Yeah the vocal ones yeah without a doubt **(people who voice are rated more highly)**

Q: And you seem to be saying the way in which the mechanisms for voice are set up means (...) being reflective doesn't help you

A: Not always no no

Q: What about if you have ideas that are different from those around you what do you do if you think differently?

A: Personally erm in a safe team I would be more able to to bring those up but more generally erm if they are different and you've got somebody louder who's got a different voice then I will back off that's me personally **(if you think differently back off)** that's not necessarily erm I don't think I've ever been in a situation whereby (...) somebody has been a spokesperson for somebody else no that's not true it has happened but I don't often see erm this situation we've got people who are more confident have been here for a long time kind of moderate and say could you just let because somebody there has got something to say **(longer servers heard more)** and it's usually because they've got seniority anyway but erm I'd like to see a bit more moderating and ownership and help and support for people who perhaps are more reflective **(reflectors miss the boat)** or not as confident to say erm (...) actually (laughs) but that's difficult again because that's sometimes somebody's manager or somebody who is more senior erm yeah **(senior people heard more)**

Q: And are you also saying that senior people are more likely to be heard here?

A: Yeah I think so but I don't know whether that's not common across most organisations **(senior people heard more) (same in other organisations)**



Q: Why is that?

A: Is it that well how did they get to more senior positions in the first place is it because they've got you know better ability to be heard because it's kind of which came first scenario erm and then the structure erm perpetuates it I don't know **(people with voice get promoted)**

Q: What do you think?

A: I think yeah probably I just try and think of a senior manager you know their ability to get their point across (laughs)

Q: Erm so confident people quick people and more senior people...

A: Yeah quick I think it's the quick thinkers but that's a great asset for somebody who thinks quickly but also not having experience of people who take a little bit longer to formulate ideas but (...) **(quick thinkers get heard more)**

Q: Do you think decisiveness is a trait that's erm a positive thing then?

A: Mmm not always (...) it depends on the circumstance sometimes you need to be decisive but I don't think every situation requires you to be decisive I think it's a good trait you have to be sometimes you just have to think on your feet and people who therefore are better able to do that get the voice and should have the voice probably but then you can't then apply that to everything there will be situations where a bit more reflection is required **(reflectors miss the boat)** or you know would benefit from a bit more reflection **(quick thinkers get heard more)**

Q: Erm and what do you think about how women are heard at (name of organisation)?

A: That's such a hard question because we are predominantly female so therefore if you asked this question say at Ford erm it it would have some better context erm women because women are women but we are predominantly women **(workforce is mainly women)** I don't work on a day-to-day basis with a lot of men to be fair so erm yes I think we have a voice in the organisation erm **(women are heard equally)** if you wanted to analyse it a bit more then a lot of the senior posts within the organisation are men you know in a very female weighted organisation **(more men in senior posts)** that's across (name of profession) as well so erm I don't feel I'm in situations often where there are

men and women in the room and women don't get a voice I don't think it's an issue **(women are heard equally)**

Q: Do you think there is an issue around people of different classes being heard in (name of organisation)?

A: (...) No but again is that because we're not representative across the board is there a swing in one particular direction so therefore I think we'll do I know about people's class are we classless is it something that we think about is it something we should think about when I'm in a room with somebody do I know what class they are I don't I can't judge somebody's class by their accent and therefore no it probably doesn't I mean unless I was to be judgemental about the fact that somebody was in a particular class they were from a particular ethnic or they had a particular accent or erm and that would be me making the judgement rather than me knowing what class somebody was from so I don't think it enters into a lot of my thinking **(social class is not an issue for voice)**

Q: And you mentioned ethnic origin there do you think that people from different ethnicities are heard equally at (name of organisation)?

A: Mmm that's really difficult for me to answer because obviously I'm white we can talk about class though erm but yes we are I mean supposedly a bit top down and again cause I see people of all ethnic backgrounds having a voice whether that's disproportionate I don't know you know you can always think of examples to to back up what you're thinking I mean my manager is black we've got senior managers from various ethnic backgrounds but is that just because that's my manager my immediate line of vision does that mean that everybody gets a voice I don't know **(BAME workers have equal voice)**

Q: OK another area I'd like to move into if I may is thinking about how you package what it is you've got to say and I wonder if you have any views on this I wonder how how can you present your ideas here so they have the best chance of being heard?

A: You need a champion **(champions will help get your voice heard)**

Q: You need a champion OK

A: Although you don't need a champion you are (...) better off having a champion you know you have an idea and you want it to be heard then you share it with

somebody who then says he'll do the work and will give your voice a different you know whether it's some minor operational thing or whether it's an idea erm yes you're better having a champion which is a voice for your own voice isn't it by default you get a voice a louder voice than your voice and you get a bigger voice **(champions will help get your voice heard)**

Q: Erm and I guess when you say (...) use the word champion it's an informal kind of..

A: Yes yeah there are no formal champions (laughs) it's just a term that fits the scenario yeah you you have somebody who buys into your idea or what you want to have a voice about or a wider voice and that for me is you know that's OK because I find certain situations difficult so therefore having somebody to champion is something that fits into my but yes you get a bigger voice **(champions have a bigger voice)** and that's what we're what I'm told from management is if you have an idea who's going to back it who are you going to have there who's going to be your voice you never have an idea in a vacuum **(you are expected to find a champion)**

Q: And when you say when you use the word champion do you immediately think of somebody in particular?

A: Depends on what the issue is

Q: It always depends on that?

A: Yeah not always sometimes you know there are people who are on the same thought process so therefore they are more likely to be erm (...) and there are people who are more naturally inclined to facilitate somebody else's voice because they haven't got any other personal agenda or conflicting agenda you know that they're going to take it on its own merits rather than think about the politics of it so yeah **(different sorts of champions)**

Q: So a champion would be positioned better than you

A: Yeah yeah

Q: And it might be above or it might be..

A: No it's usually above **(champions are more senior)**

Q: What does that tell me about the way in which decisions are made in this organisation?

A: Top down (laughs) **(decisions are made at the top)**

Q: OK so you need a champion erm (...) is there a way in which you can present your message to that person?

A: Again it would depend on the person some people want it all in black and white on paper for others it would just be a concept or an idea some people you go to with the idea and they'll work it up **(package the message to suit the audience)** or you'll be part of their kind of erm overall erm others will allow you to to coach you to have a voice which is I suppose it's the preferable way of doing it but that's that's maybe one or two people you would go to who will help you you know there will be a champion but they'll help you to have your own voice whereas some people will be your voice and others will take it and it will be their voice you know so it just really depends **(different sorts of champions)**

Q: Erm if I look at (name of organisation) as a whole now you talked about the culture you talked about the way in which decisions are made you talked about the systems that are in place for voice how do you think this organisation benefits from hearing the voice of its staff?

A: Erm I think if you don't hear your staff you you don't know what you don't know do you so you don't listen you just get more entrenched in the same way of doing things erm and you don't change you don't evolve you don't move forward erm (...) **(impact of silence: no change or progression)** going back to the point that I made before it's also you don't change and you don't move forward but you then you also open yourself up potentially to the (senior group of people) not listening because people will always have a voice it might not be heard in the right way and it becomes sometimes a negative force rather than something that you harness **(positive voice is heard)** and erm use to inform change erm (...) so yes you know you lose out so much well people are on the ground aren't they you know they're doing stuff and they're experiencing things erm and can contribute to different ways of working if you don't listen to that you're you're losing so much valuable data and information and yeah it will kind of it'll turn to a negative I think **(impact of silence: loss of data)**

Q: And you seem to be saying that voice is inevitable anyway

A: Yeah yeah I think it is for most people not for everybody some people as I've said previously are quite happy and have an opinion but don't actually want to be asked and if you ask them too often they you know get prickly (laughs) and that's fine and there will always be a percentage of people who just want things to happen and don't necessarily want to inform change (***some people don't want a voice***) but I think everybody has a voice it's how it's used possibly or acknowledged so I'm not going to take on everything that everybody says in terms of their opinions because they're gonna be conflicting anyway half the time but it's about hearing it and then using it or or not using it but explaining why (***good managers listen and are honest if nothing can be done***)

Q: OK and when you're heard as an individual what does it feel like?

A: It's really positive really positive erm I think being heard erm even if it's not actioned being genuinely heard it's not as positive than if you have an idea and it's actioned and you can see it come to fruition or even if you have an idea and it's acknowledged and it's not dismissed then that it can be it's not as positive I'd be lying if I said it felt as positive but it but it feels still feels positive a positive experience (***being heard is positive even if not acted upon***) you know if you're given a voice but it's not listened to that's a negative that again it's a negative you know it's like going through tick boxes and processes ask somebody's opinion but you don't actually think you're going through the motions but you don't do anything that's a negative (***voice as tick box exercise is futile***) but if you have an opinion and it's acknowledged accepted but perhaps then move over it that's still positive

Q: Is this place the kind of place that gives voice but never listens?

A: No that that's definitely an overstatement I think it sometimes gives voice in a bit too formal a way (***voice mechanisms are too formal***)

Q: OK and how do you feel if your voice isn't welcomed how does that make you feel?

A: Erm rubbish yeah it is because it makes you feel you step back a bit (***negative impact of voice not welcomed***) because for some people it's not easy to give voice on a scale of 1 to 10 there will be people who find it really easy and it's just ideas and just throwing things out there and it doesn't matter whether anybody

listens they're going to say it anyway and there will be other people down here on the scale who find it really really difficult if they're not listened to they're not going to do it in a positive way again they'll do it in another in another channel a negative channel so yeah no it doesn't feel good when you're not listened to  
***(voice not welcomed is tough for those who don't find voice easy)***

Q: And what about you erm you said it feels rubbish what does that feeling lead you to do?

A: Well it's up to you taking the opportunities in the future it doesn't stop you having an opinion it doesn't stop me having an opinion but again it might mean they don't particularly voice them in a positive way erm maybe in a negative slightly negative way or you might have discussions with other people but actually what does that do to influence you know you're having these discussions but you actually you're still having them in a way in an informal way but then they have no impact on no influence so you do it again ***(voice not listened to means you voice in a negative way)*** to go back to that losing losing valuable kind of information or feedback so yeah I mean if I'm not listened to it doesn't stop me talking (laughs) if people are interested I might just not do it in a constructive way I do it in an either lost cause way over in the pub or in a you know just talking about stuff letting off steam erm or you might you might do it in a kind of negative (...) way yeah you might do it people might do it anonymously you know or waiting till your big vent you know you're not heard on a day to day basis so it kind of spills out you know ***(voice not welcomed means you vent and it boils over)*** maybe in an appraisal or a one-to-one you go oh I'm not happy but actually if you were heard on a regular basis when you get to your appraisal it should just be part of a bigger process ***(voice needs to be heard on a day to day basis)***

Q: And is that another example of the bigger gesture whereas if people listened to you earlier on...

A: Yeah I think again that the organisation is better at doing that in one-to-ones but also you know why leave things for a one-to-one you might have a one-to-one once a month and you've got a list of things to talk about actually when you have a one-to-one you might sometimes struggle to find things to talk about

because on a day-to-day basis you're talking and you're listening (***voice needs to be heard on a day to day basis***) and so you know you sit down you've got an hour let's talk about something else so yeah it could be potentially a positive but sometimes those one-to-ones do feel and appraisals do feel they're important because they're your absolute baseline aren't they and I suppose if you take that baseline away there might be people who didn't get on but it shouldn't be the only it shouldn't be the main event (***importance of mechanisms as a baseline***)

Q: So everybody's heard in some kind of way in this organisation even if it's just through one-to-ones

A: Yeah yeah but then if you're just heard in a one-to-one if it just stops there it's back to that glass ceiling is that positive (***voice doesn't float upwards***)

Q: OK is there anything else you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered?

A: No I don't think so no

Q: OK well thank you very much for your time