

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Organisational voice and employee-focused voice: Two distinct voice forms and their effects on burnout and innovative behavior

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## Abstract

Scholars and practitioners have long emphasised the importance of employees speaking up about workplace issues. Yet, voice research remains divided on fundamental questions such as underlying purpose. Drawing on the Job Demands-Resources Model, this study offers an integrative perspective, building on the idea that the interests of employees and managers are distinct concerning the purpose of voice. This article draws on responses from a cross-sectional national online survey distributed by YouGov, with a survey design that ensured that only those employed within an organisational setting with a reporting structure would be included in the data. The sample size used for the analysis ( $N = 1858$ ) was representative of the UK workforce regarding gender, full- or part-time work status, organisation size and industry. The exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis provides empirical evidence of two alternative and distinct voice forms: organisational and employee-focused. Results show that while organisational voice is associated with significantly higher innovative behaviour and higher levels of burnout, employee-focused voice is significantly

**Abbreviations:** CFA, confirmatory factor analysis; CMB, Common Method Bias; CMV, common method variance; EFA, exploratory factor analysis; HR, Human Resource; HRM, Human Resource Management; JD-R, Job Demands-Resources Model; MLR, Maximum Likelihood with Robust standard errors; OB, Organisational Behaviour; SEM, structural equation modelling; WERS, Workplace Employee Relations Survey.

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and negatively associated with employee burnout. Lastly, our analysis reveals that while the total effect of organisational voice on burnout is positive, employee-focused voice, partially mediating the organisational voice-burnout relationship, exerts a countervailing effect, lowering burnout. Accordingly, organisations are advised to promote both voice forms, given their unique, positive effects, first on the employee (ameliorating burnout) and second on strategically important outcomes (innovative behaviours). Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

#### KEYWORDS

burnout, employee voice, innovative behaviours, job demands-resources model

### Practitioner notes

#### What is currently known?

- Employee voice is embedded in collective structures, for example, unions, employee forums.
- Some workplace arrangements draw out voice, as perceived by individual employees.
- Voice presents a pathway for dealing with concerns about justice and equity or enabling employee self-determination and self-expression.
- Voice is viewed as a mechanism through which employees perform better with strategic endeavours in mind.

#### What this paper adds?

- Provides empirical evidence of two alternative and distinct voice forms based on their purpose.
- Casts light on the differential effects of the two voice forms on burnout and employee innovative behaviors.
- Shows that employee-focused voice acts as a mediating channel mitigating the positive effect of organisational voice on burnout.

#### The implications for practitioners?

- Organisational leaders could usefully consider ways of encouraging self-expression, initiating discussion by focusing on organisational voice.
- Managers should encourage employees to express themselves openly and honestly to one another and to management.
- Employee-focused voice offers a strong strategic imperative for organisations to encourage open and honest expression.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The construct of employee voice has evoked polarised positions not just on definitional issues but also on why and for whom voice matters (Barry & Wilkinson, 2022; Nechanska et al., 2020). Some scholars have proposed that voice presents a pathway for dealing with concerns about justice and equity (Dundon et al., 2004; Klaas et al., 2012) or

enabling employee self-determination (Budd, 2014) and self-expression (CIPD, 2017, 2019), a form of voice we label 'employee-focused voice'. Others view voice as a mechanism through which employees perform better, a position referred to as promotive, or (in this paper) organisational voice (Morrison, 2023; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Research has yet to establish whether employee-focused and organisational voice exist as distinct constructs (Klaas et al., 2012; Morrison, 2011). It is therefore not known whether organisational voice and employee-focused voice exert differential effects on outcomes that matter for the organisation (innovative behaviors) and for the employee (staff burnout).

Our findings close this gap by providing insight into employee-focused voice versus organisational voice. The former is defined as an employee's ability to express opinions, concerns and suggestions that advance employee interests and help them to feel heard (Dromey, 2016; Pyman et al., 2006). Organisational voice, by contrast, is defined as 'promotive behavior that emphasizes the expression of constructive challenge intended to improve rather than merely criticize' (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 109).

Drawing on the job demands-resources model (J D-R) (Demerouti et al., 2001), we distinguish between the two voice forms based on their purpose. We show that each form exerts differential effects on outcomes relevant to the organisation (innovative behaviors) and the employee (burnout). Our work thus addresses three questions.

1. Are employee-focused voice and organisational voice distinct constructs?
2. What are the effects of the two voice forms on burnout and employees' innovative behavior?
3. What role does employee-focused voice play in the relationship between organisational voice and burnout/employees' innovative behavior?

**Our contributions** are three-fold. First, drawing on the J D-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), we propose a measure of voice that captures employees' scope for self-expression and perceived influence, namely, employee-focused voice. Although many alternative voice forms exist in the workplace, including justice-oriented voice (Klaas et al., 2012) and prohibitive voice (Liang et al., 2012), limited research has evidenced the existence and effects of voice *beyond* that whose purpose is to improve practice for the organisation (Mowbray et al., 2015; Nechanska et al., 2020).

Our second contribution is to cast light on the differential effects of employee-focused voice versus organisational voice on outcomes that matter for the person as well as the organisation—namely, burnout: 'a form of occupational fatigue that is characterized by both exhaustion and withdrawal' (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005, p. 259) and employee innovative behaviors, the 'intentional creation, introduction and application of new ideas within a work role, group or organisation' (Janssen, 2000, p. 288). Based on JD-R theory (Demerouti et al., 2001), we show that while employee-focused voice is associated with lower burnout, organisational voice, by contrast, increases employees' levels of burnout. While employee-focused voice offers a potential resource to employees to ameliorate negative outcomes (such as burnout), organisational voice may exact a psychological cost by demanding activities beyond contractual requirements (Demerouti et al., 2001). Our research points to a potential dark side of organisational voice, exacting costs alongside strategic benefits (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Our third contribution, again drawing on the JD-R model, shows that employee-focused voice acts as a mediating channel through which organisational voice has the potential to achieve beneficial outcomes for individuals and the organisation. According to our argument, employee-focused voice represents a form of job crafting, offering individuals resources to offset the demands of organisational voice (Bakker et al., 2010; Tims et al., 2012). By encouraging people to speak up (albeit with organisational improvements in mind), organisational voice may precipitate employee-focused voice, partially suppressing the positive effect of organisational voice on burnout (MacKinnon et al., 2000).

## 2 | THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 | Organisational voice and employee-focused voice: Two distinct constructs

Voice research has evolved in parallel over the last decade or so (Barry & Wilkinson, 2022). One strand, represented in the work of scholars from an OB persuasion, highlights the role of voice in enabling improvements in organisational functioning (Morrison, 2023; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). This line of thinking is derived from unitarist principles, whereby employee needs are overtly or implicitly conflated with those of the organisation. According to this perspective, conflict is dysfunctional, and employees' concerns are not seen as representing 'voice' because there may not be an immediate, or indeed any, benefit to the organisation. Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008 (p. 1191), for example, view voice as 'change oriented ideas and suggestions about work-related issues' and expressly rule out that voice might represent 'personal grievances resulting from perceived injustice.'

A significant strand within HR scholarship suggests a predominant focus on improvement-oriented voice (Knoll & Redman, 2016). This direct form of voice arises in response to carefully crafted channels designed with organisational intentions in mind (Knoll & Redman, 2016; Rees et al., 2013). A core idea is that channels initiated by the employer, such as internal newsletters or social media outlets, align employee and organisational goals by enhancing employee attitudes (Fu et al., 2017). The assumption is that employees will respond positively to voice channels and that by raising engagement and/or commitment levels, people are more likely to make useful suggestions (Farndale et al., 2011; Rees et al., 2013). While this strand of thought differs from the OB literature by highlighting the channels and mechanisms, it is driven by similar unitarist principles. Both perspectives play down distinct employer-employee interests within a structurally imbalanced power relationship (Nechanska et al., 2020).

Perhaps due to the perceived organisational benefits, the above narrative has dominated the voice literature in recent years (Barry & Wilkinson, 2022). Another line of research, falling mainly into the IR intellectual space, takes a broader and more pluralist perspective, arguing that voice is not simply an artefact to improve organisational outcomes but a necessary tool for employees to raise concerns and influence matters that are important for them. Prioritizing voice channels that reflect employees' distinct needs and aspirations may allow organisations to understand conflicting needs in ways that are beneficial in the long term (Mowbray et al., 2015). Without such mechanisms, people may be inclined to withhold information.

As well as being distinct in purpose, the two voice forms spring from different theoretical roots. Organisational voice is driven by a desire to contribute to the organisation (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Being discretionary, that is, encompassing extra-role activity beyond what is explicitly required, employees might construe organisational voice as demanding or even burdensome (Liang et al., 2012). Examples of organisational voice include proposing plans to reduce costs (Burris, 2012) and making suggestions to improve sales (McClean et al., 2018). On the other hand, employee-focused voice, suggestive of support from the organisation, managers and co-workers, presents resources to sustain employee efforts. Examples of employee-focused voice include expressing concerns about work overload, career progress, work/family factors and/or work-related justice. While the former (organisational voice) exerts pressure on the individual, facilitating organisational goals, the latter, enabling self-expression, deepens work relationships. Accordingly, the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001) provides a theoretical backdrop for this study.

In summary, based on the two parallel strands of thought about the purpose of voice, we suggest two distinctive voice forms, theoretically positioned in the light of JD-R theory (Demerouti et al., 2001). Based on unitarist principles, organisational voice is a tool for enhancing organisational functioning. Employee-focused voice, aligned with pluralist traditions, holds that employee interests cannot be subsumed into those of the organisation, and that voice entails vocalizing thoughts and ideas, not necessarily improvement related, without fear of negative consequences, offering a 'sense of being heard' (Dromey, 2016, p. 4). Whether the two constructs, namely employee-focused voice and organisational voice, are empirically distinct remains untested. Accordingly, we hypothesise as follows.

**Hypothesis 1** Organisational and employee-focused voices represent distinct constructs.

## 2.2 | The JD-R model, employee-focused voice and organisational voice

JD-R theory suggests that the work environment presents demands and potential resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti et al., 2001; Lesener et al., 2019). Job demands are aspects of the job requiring sustained effort and are associated with psychological costs. In contrast, job resources are social, organisational or psychological aspects of the job that are functional in achieving work goals, reducing job demands and/or stimulating personal fulfilment. The JD-R model is not categorical about factors constituting job demands versus job resources. One voice form may present a demand, and another offer resources, depending on how employees perceive it. Organisational voice, an extra-role, discretionary activity, is demanding because it adds to a person's workload and introduces new challenges (Nechanska et al., 2020). On the other hand, people are less anxious at work and more likely to secure support where they can talk openly about problems they experience (Arnold et al., 2015). The ability to speak up about feelings and concerns builds relational resources, which increase emotional energy and enhance skills and knowledge so that employees can better deal with job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Since employee-focused voice involves soliciting social support and building relationships with others, we view it as a form of job crafting (Bakker et al., 2010). Job crafting is defined as 'physical and cognitive changes individuals make in their task or relational boundaries' (Tims & Bakker, 2010, p. 1361). Job crafting arises when individuals 'change how often and with whom they interact at work' (Tims & Bakker, 2010, p. 3). Organisational voice, despite being a job demand, has the potential to spark employee-focused voice.

## 2.3 | Organisational voice, innovative behaviors and burnout

Organisational voice has been referred to as suggestion-focused (Liang et al., 2012), emphasising the expression of constructive challenge rather than criticism (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). (Morrison, 2014, p. 174) views voice as 'informal and discretionary communication by an employee... about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change'.

There are several reasons why organisational voice is likely to precipitate innovative behaviors. The creativity and innovation literature is clear that devising original and feasible ideas is unlikely unless there is support from senior members of the organisation (Anderson et al., 2014). Indeed, research shows that people at lower levels of the hierarchy have many ideas about improving organisational functioning but rarely share them with those in a position to take the idea forward (Bernstein, 2012). Encouraging organisational voice communicates to everyone that their insights are welcomed, going some way towards creating the climate that is necessary for innovative behaviors (Anderson et al., 2014).

Second, organisational voice presents the cognitive change needed for an idea to gain traction. Creative and innovative behaviors have long been argued to entail five cognitive activities: preparation, incubation, illumination, evaluation and verification (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Speaking up with suggestions for improvement is likely to pre-empt the crucial preparation stage because doing so involves reflecting on the issue at hand and garnering available knowledge. Without adequate preparation, it is unlikely that the following stages would occur.

Notwithstanding that organisational voice enhances innovative behaviors, it may exact psychological costs (Tims & Bakker, 2010). High levels of demand, such that people perform work beyond what is contractually required can diminish wellbeing and exacerbate burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). As a person becomes increasingly drained and exhausted, they are likely to feel less positive about the organisation and inclined to doubt its higher-level values (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). Consequently, any statements/policy documents in favour of employee interests are dismissed as rhetoric or not noticed at all. Efforts to intensify employees' efforts on behalf of the organisation (organisational voice) without paying attention to employees' needs for resource boost may heighten burnout.

There is limited evidence that individuals faced with high demands do not perform well (Demerouti et al., 2014; Lesener et al., 2019). Adaptive strategies such as selection (cutting down on low-priority tasks) and compensation (organising alternative means to deliver work outcomes) often mask underlying burnout (Demerouti & Bakker, 2006).

Based on the above reasoning, we expect organisational voice, rather than employee-focused voice, to be more strongly associated with innovative employee behaviors. Despite employee-focused voice by definition increasing dialogue across employees, it does not convey the same message as organisational voice that innovation is a strategic priority because its primary purpose is to reflect employee needs. Nonetheless, because the employee-focused voice has not been tested before as a potential antecedent of innovative behaviours, it was necessary to rule its potential effect. Accordingly, we hypothesise as follows.

**Hypothesis 2** Controlling for employee-focused voice, organisational voice is positively related to (a) burnout and (b) innovative behaviour.

## 2.4 | Employee-focused voice, burnout and innovative behaviors

Fundamental differences in the purpose of employee-focused voice, as opposed to organisational voice, raise questions about relative effects. We argue that employee-focused voice helps employees to avoid psychological harm through work, including the exhaustion and cynicism associated with burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Being able to articulate genuine thoughts and feelings at work has been found to ameliorate stress and burnout in several studies (Arnold et al., 2015; Fares et al., 2016; Shaukat & Khurshid, 2021). Individuals preparing to enter arduous professions such as medicine, for example, benefit (in terms of lower stress and higher satisfaction) when encouraged to express their concerns and anxieties with knowledgeable others (Fares et al., 2016). Those performing emotionally charged job roles are less prone to burnout when they can articulate genuine rather than fake emotions to their direct reports (Arnold et al., 2015). Research on the related construct of silence shows that people need regular and honest interactions with others to avoid alienation and distress (Nechanska et al., 2020; Shaukat & Khurshid, 2021). Losing self-expression might be viewed as a form of resource depletion, in turn leading to cynicism and exhaustion.

Authentically expressing oneself to colleagues may provide a resource boost to counteract these negative effects (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). While it takes effort to translate one's genuine feelings and thoughts into language that is fitting for a work context, it is perhaps less laborious and draining as a strategy than restraining oneself from any kind of expression or giving the pretence of emotions that one does not feel (Arnold et al., 2015; Chang et al., 2021). This suggests that an environment encouraging the genuine expression of thoughts and feelings would be a more natural way of acting and therefore offer a resource boost. Second, self-expression will likely build individuals' relational resources by opening channels for productive dialogue with those around them. Lacking relational resources separates people and increases a person's sense of futility and worthlessness (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Shaukat & Khurshid, 2021).

Given the resource boost offered by employee-focused voice, we would anticipate a negative effect on burnout. We also anticipate that employee-focused voice positively affects innovative behaviors. This is because, as a form of job crafting, employee-focused voice is likely to elicit relational resources, which research shows play a positive role in organisational creativity and innovation (Collins & Smith, 2006). Because the focus here is on employee-focused voice rather than organisational voice, it was necessary to rule out the potential role of organisational voice. Based on the above argumentation, we propose as follows.

**Hypothesis 3** (a) Controlling for organisational voice, employee-focused voice is negatively related to burnout, and (b) positively related to innovative behaviour.

## 2.5 | The intermediary role of employee-focused voice

Although organisational voice represents a demand, it is distinct relative to other demands (such as stressful encounters with customers or immovable deadlines). Employees dealing with high demands (organisational voice) might use employee-focused voice to craft their jobs to counteract potential deleterious effects on their wellbeing. Discussion might initially focus on organisational improvements, then lead to topics unrelated to functional improvement. Employee-focused voice precipitated by organisational voice changes how individuals interact with others, increasing the amount of interaction that takes place and increasing the number of organisational members with whom a person interacts (Tims & Bakker, 2010). Employee-focused voice, as a form of job crafting, ensures that work aligns with employee aspirations, making it more 'meaningful, engaging and satisfying' (Le Blanc et al., 2017, p. 50).

While normally one would expect that a mediator would explain part or all of the variance in the relationship between independent and dependent variables, sometimes, 'the direct and mediated effects of an independent variable on a dependent variable have opposite signs' (MacKinnon et al., 2000, p. 3). Although we would anticipate the direct effect of organisational voice on burnout to be positive, its indirect effect, through employee-focused voice, may be in the opposite direction. Put differently, employee-focused voice may (partially) suppress the positive effect of organisational voice on burnout by offering a resource boost (Bakker et al., 2010; Tims et al., 2012).

Based on the above logic, we propose a (partial) mediating role for employee-focused voice in the relationship between organisational voice and burnout such that the direct effect (from organisational voice to innovative behaviors) is positive, while any indirect effect (mediated through employee-focused voice) is negative.

Furthermore, turning to innovative behaviors, we propose that while organisational voice is likely to directly elicit innovative behaviors (as highlighted above), employee-focused voice may play a (partial) mediating role in the organisational voice - innovative behavior association. As mentioned, research shows that relational resources (coming about through employee-focused voice) have the potential to inspire creativity and innovation (Collins & Smith, 2006).

Based on the above reasoning, we hypothesise as follows.

**Hypothesis 4a** Organisational voice has a negative indirect effect (via employee-focused voice) on burnout.

**Hypothesis 4b** Organisational voice has a positive indirect effect (via employee-focused voice) on employee innovative behaviour.

## 3 | METHODS

### 3.1 | Sample

This article draws on responses from a cross-sectional national online survey distributed by YouGov in 2018. Our survey design ensured that only those employed within an organisational setting with a reporting structure in place would be included in the data. In total, there were 2372 respondents (fully anonymized) in the survey. The sample was representative of the UK workforce in terms of gender, full- or part-time work status, organisation size within each sector, and industry. After excluding the questions not being completed, the total sample size used for the analysis was ( $N = 1858$ ).

Using a large, nationally-representative survey increases the chances that results reflect patterns across the wider population (Browner & Newman, 1987). Our study draws on 1858 respondents, suggesting a margin of error of just over 2%, relative to the working population in the UK (<https://yougov.co.uk/about/panel-methodology>). The Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) examines the existence of employee voice channels across the UK workforce (e.g. Wood & de Menezes, 2008). However, research at the national level has yet to examine employee voice as conceptualised in this study, that is, as a construct experienced by individual employees.

TABLE 1 Demographic distribution of the sample (N = 1858).

Category	Count	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	997	53.7%
Female	861	46.3%
<b>Age</b>		
16–24	38	2%
25–39	516	27.8%
40–54	762	41%
55+	542	29.2%
<b>Education</b>		
Below degree	817	44%
Undergraduate degree	506	27.2%
Postgraduate degree	504	27.1%
Missing data	31	1.7%
<b>Management level</b>		
No management responsibility	524	28.2%
Senior or other management	847	45.6%
Board-level management	57	3.1%
Missing data	430	23.1%
<b>Sector</b>		
Private	1413	76%
Public	335	18%
Voluntary	110	6%

Table 1 below showcases the demographic distribution of the sample.

### 3.2 | Measures

Unless otherwise mentioned, responses were on a five-point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ (=1) to ‘strongly agree’ (=5).

**Organisational voice** was based on two scales: Team leader promotive voice, drawing on a seven-item scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998), and manager promotive voice, using three items adapted by Fast et al. (2014) but initially developed by Detert and Burris (2007). One sample item from the former is “In my immediate work group, I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this workgroup”, and from the latter: “I challenge my line manager to deal with problems at work.” Respondents were asked to indicate on a nine-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = “Everyday” to 9 = “Never.”

**Employee-focused voice** was measured based on two scales: Self-expression, measured using a five-item scale developed by Liang et al. (2012), and voice efficacy, measured using a three-item scale developed by Burris et al. (2008). Sample items from the former and the latter, respectively, are: “I can freely express my thoughts with those with whom I work closely”; “Nothing changes even if I speak up to managers”.

**Innovative behaviour** was measured using a six-item scale developed by Scott and Bruce (1994), which includes items such as “I generate creative ideas”. Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from “not at all” to “to an exceptional degree”.



**Burnout** was measured using three items from Maslach and Jackson's (1981) scale of work exhaustion, combined with three items from Macky and Boxall's (2008) measure of work intensification. We used this measure because it captures not just how people feel in burnout situations but as well as how they perceive work related pressures. An example item is: 'I feel burnt out from my work'.

**Control variables.** As we wanted to rule out the effect of potential extraneous variables, we incorporated several theoretically apposite control variables into our analysis. Because the more senior a person is, the more likely it is that they will speak up, we incorporated management level into the analysis. Furthermore, because older people, highly educated and male employees may give more voice, we controlled for these variables (Eibl et al., 2020; Farndale et al., 2011). We also controlled for other variables on the basis that they may offer a resource boost to employees that might overlay the effect of voice on outcome variables. We included: psychological safety, trust in management and employee perceptions of HPWS in the analysis because these variables have been associated with employee burnout and innovative behaviours. More detail about all the control variables is available upon request from the authors.

### 3.3 | Analytical strategy

R (version 4.1.2; R Core Team, 2021) was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics and reliability were analysed using the 'psych' package (Revelle, 2021). Exploratory factor analyses were run using the native 'stats' package, while confirmatory factor analyses were run using the 'lavaan' package (Rosseel, 2012). To test the hypotheses, we utilized structural equation modelling (SME) with Mplus 8.6. Mplus is a powerful software that allows us to apply the MLR estimator to check the 'scaling correction factor' and fit indices of the proposed model and also use a Sandwich estimator in the subsequent structural and path analyses (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017; Preacher et al., 2010). This method, therefore, helps provide a conservative estimation of the relationships between variables (Lin et al., 2022). Mplus is also advanced in ways that it helps to deal with missing data. We thus adopt this method (missing value coded as -1) to test our hypotheses because there are two control variables (management level and education) that contain some missing values (shown in Table 1).

## 4 | RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, correlations and alphas are shown in Table 2.

### 4.1 | Testing the effects of common method variance (CMV)

As the core variables of the study were self-rated by employees, we performed several post-hoc tests to evaluate the potential concern of CMV. First, we tested the multicollinearity of the core variables. The results showed that when employee burnout and innovative behaviour are regressed on employee-focused voice, organisational voice and other control variables, the VIF ranged between 1.055 and 3.414, ruling out significant multicollinearity issues (Hair Jr. et al., 2009). Second, we also conducted Harman's Single-Factor test to test the effect of CMV. The results revealed that the percentage of variance was 36.292—falling below the cut-off value of 50% (Booth et al., 2020), thereby ruling out the method bias of the core variables. Therefore, the quality of the collected data was ensured for our subsequent analysis.

To examine the question of whether employee-focused voice and organisational voice represent distinct constructs (as opposed to different aspects of a single broad voice construct), we conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the voice-related constructs utilized in the study (self-expression,

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Gender	1.47	0.499	-														
2. Age	2.01	0.795	-0.084**	-													
3. Education	2.93	0.792	-0.108**	0.764**	-												
4. Mlevel	1.67	0.548	-0.173**	0.020	0.027	-											
5. Trust	2.610	0.904	-0.060*	0.001	0.037	-0.076**	(0.92)										
6. PS	2.651	0.820	-0.014	-0.015	0.007	-0.088**	0.695**	(0.75)									
7. HPWS	2.967	0.781	-0.041	0.002	0.030	-0.108**	0.761**	0.613**	(0.89)								
8. TLPV	5.213	2.035	0.105**	0.048	0.046	-0.244**	0.148**	0.193**	0.158**	(0.90)							
9. MPV	5.231	2.138	0.078**	0.032	0.000	-0.278**	0.220**	0.252**	0.228**	0.671**	(0.89)						
10. Self-exp	2.411	0.880	0.027	-0.046	-0.043	-0.043	0.584**	0.581**	0.512**	0.254**	0.314**	(0.90)					
11. Efficacy	2.807	1.092	-0.028	-0.049	-0.032	-0.093**	0.722**	0.640**	0.683**	0.156**	0.254**	0.526**	(0.89)				
12. OV	5.222	1.907	0.102**	0.039	0.028	-0.274**	0.250**	0.288**	0.252**	0.954**	0.851**	0.378**	0.274**	(0.00)			
13.EV	2.609	0.863	0.005	-0.045	-0.036	-0.127**	0.749**	0.697**	0.697**	0.329**	0.454**	0.781**	0.925**	0.480**	(0.00)		
14. Burn	3.033	0.807	-0.020	0.108**	0.106**	-0.080**	-0.413**	-0.355**	-0.374**	0.081**	0.005	-0.324**	-0.397**	0.020	-0.390**	(0.94)	
15. IB	2.934	0.792	0.108**	0.075**	0.106**	-0.283**	0.214**	0.266**	0.245**	0.453**	0.444**	0.215**	0.228**	0.495**	0.314**	0.022	(0.81)

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ; Standardized internal consistency reliability estimates (alphas) appear in parentheses along the diagonal.

M-level, Management level; PS, Psychological safety; Organisational safety, Organisational voice, (OV,  $r = 0.00$ ); Employee-focused voice (EV,  $r = 0.00$ ), because they are standardized regression scores).

TABLE 3 Results of two-factor loadings of the voice forms items.

Variable	Organisational voice	Employee-focused voice
Self-expression	0.09	<b>0.64</b>
Voice efficacy	-0.09	<b>0.83</b>
Promotive team voice	<b>0.74</b>	0.09
Promotive manager voice	<b>0.91</b>	-0.09

Note: Employee-focused voice was moderately correlated with organisational voice ( $r = 0.41$ ). The figures in bold denote the factor loadings for the two voice forms.

voice efficacy, manager promotive voice, team promotive voice). An EFA using principal axis factoring and promax rotation (shown in Table 3) provided evidence for two factors (based on the number of eigenvalues greater than 1 and the scree plot) that accounted for 61.4% of the total variance in the four measures. The first factor was defined by substantive loadings for the self-expression (0.64) and voice efficacy (0.83) measures but negligible loadings for team promotive voice (0.09) and manager promotive voice (-0.09). The second factor displayed the opposite pattern: high loadings for manager promotive voice (0.91) and team promotive voice (0.74), but negligible loadings for voice efficacy (-0.09), and self-expression (0.09). The two factors correlated moderately ( $r = 0.41$ ). Thus, the results of the EFA support distinct employee-focused voice and organisational-focused voice constructs that are moderately correlated.

We conducted CFA using maximum likelihood estimation via the lavaan package in R to assess the fit of the two models. The first model represents voice as a unitary construct in which each of the four voice measures is expected to load onto the single factor. The Chi-square test for this model was statistically significant at a Type I error rate of 0.01 ( $\chi^2 = 371.21$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that differences between the implied model covariance matrix and observed covariance matrix are unlikely to be due to chance. However, this is expected given the large sample size. The model also performed poorly in terms of fit indices, clearly failing to meet the rule of thumb cut-off values (see Schreiber et al., 2006) on incremental measures of fit such as (CFI = 0.751) and (TLI = 0.253), as well as absolute measures of fit such as (RMSEA = 0.36; 90% confidence interval = 0.33–0.39) and (SRMR = 0.13).

The second CFA tested a model comprised of two correlated factors: self-expression and voice efficacy load on one factor and team promotive voice and manager promotive voice load on the other. The Chi-square test for this model was statistically significant at a Type I error rate of 0.01 ( $\chi^2 = 7.75$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .005$ ). Furthermore, all of the previously mentioned fit indices indicated acceptable levels of fit (CFI = 0.995; TLI = 0.973; RMSEA = 0.069, 90% confidence interval = 0.03–0.12; SRMR = 0.01). With respect to the loadings of each variable, we found that each variable loaded highly and in the correct direction on its intended factor (see Table 3), with a covariance of 0.41 between the two factors. Finally, comparing this model with the first model suggested the two-factor model had a significantly better fit (difference in  $\chi^2 = 363.46$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hypothesis 1 was therefore supported.

The EFA and CFA results support that employee-focused voice and organisational voice represent distinct factors. Next, to examine differences in the consequences of the two voice constructs, we used Mplus 8.6 to estimate SEMs of both direct and indirect relationships between organisational voice/employee-focused voice and outcomes with one whole model testing. The estimation results for this model are presented in Figures 1–3 and Tables 4 and 5.

We tested all the working hypotheses as one whole model, following the steps proposed by Hayes (2013), using 10,000 times bootstrapping and controlling for all the controls (shown in Table 4). Before applying the bootstrapping method, we conducted the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality tests to examine if the scores of the dependent variables followed an approximately normal distribution. The results indicated that the distribution of scores for employee voice ( $D = 0.050$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), burnout ( $D = 0.090$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), and innovative behaviour ( $D = 0.091$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) violated this assumption. Thus, we elected to use the bootstrapping method for our model as it is powerful for comparing non-normal data with differential variances (Johnston & Faulkner, 2021). In addition, we also applied the MLR estimator to check the “scaling correction factor” and the fit indices of the one whole model (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). The

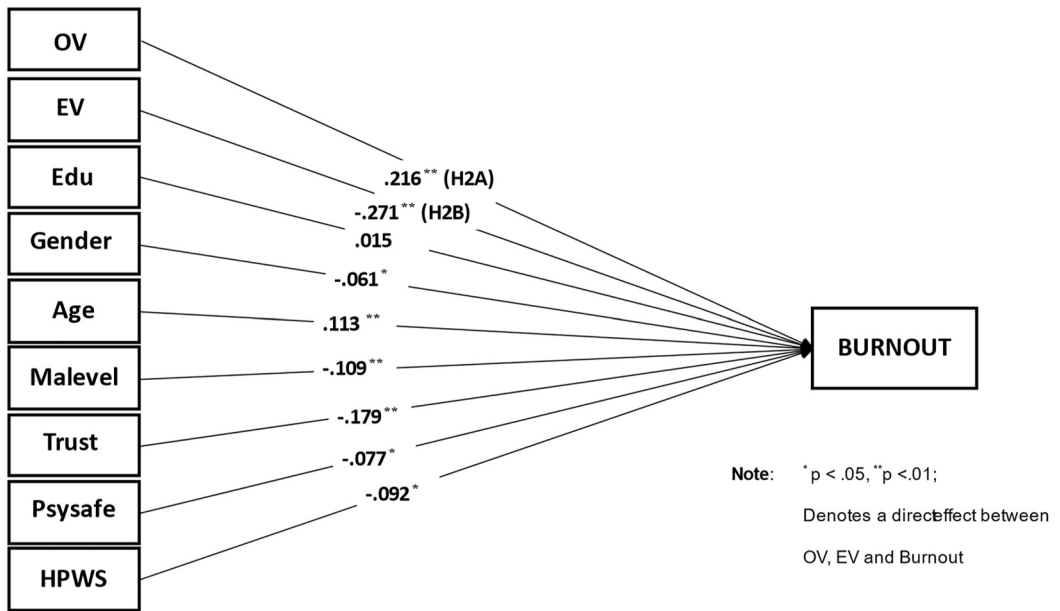


FIGURE 1 One whole model 1 - Direct relationships between organisational voice (OV), employee-focused voice (EV) and burnout.

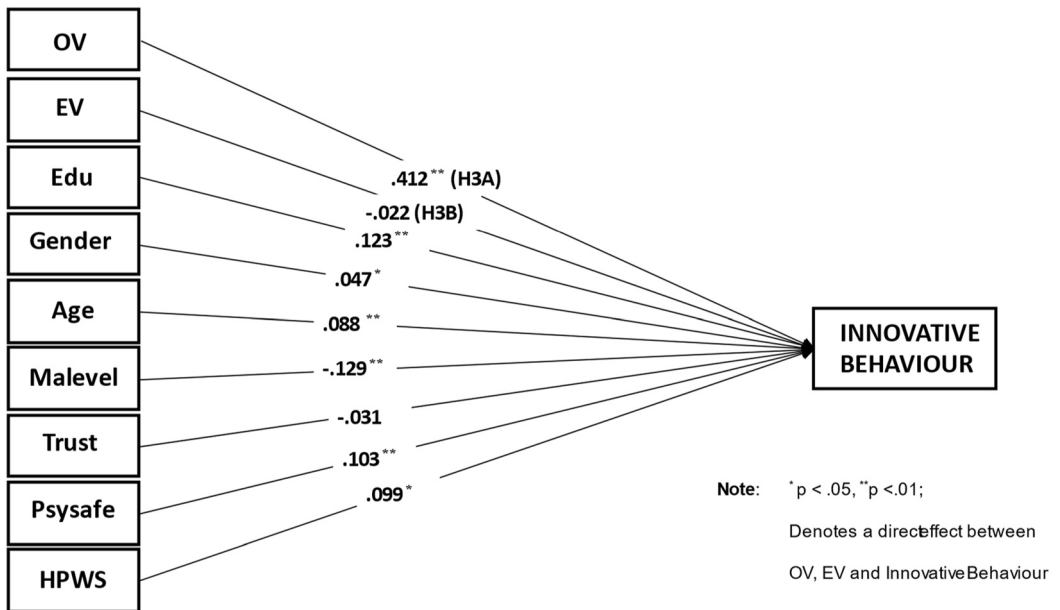
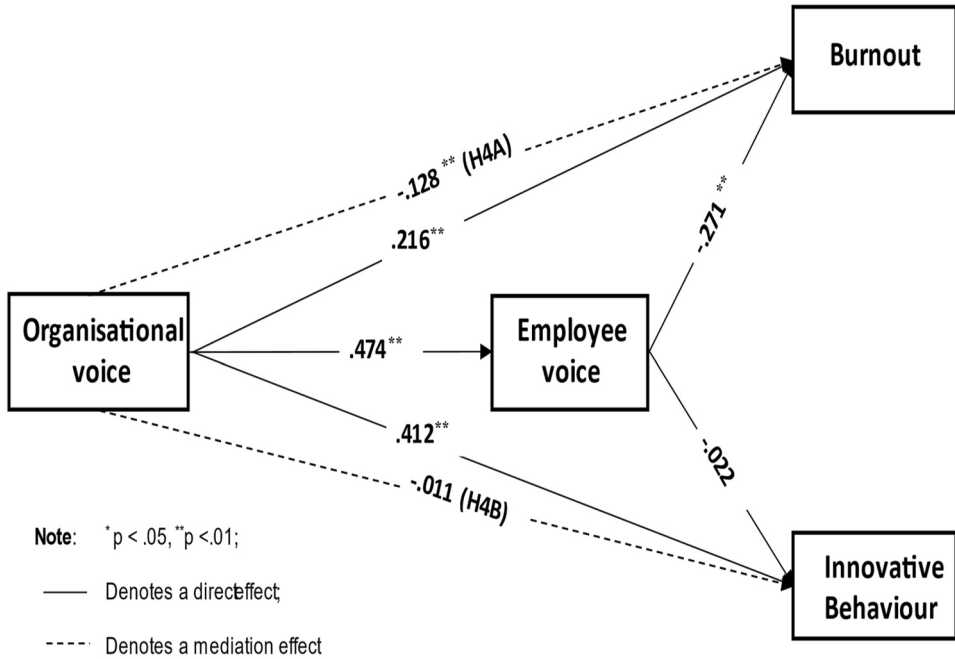


FIGURE 2 One whole model 2 - Direct relationships between organisational voice (OV), employee-focused voice (EV) and innovative behavior.

results indicated that the whole model demonstrated an acceptable fit with the data ( $\chi^2 = 242.602$ ,  $df = 59$  ( $p < 0.01$ ); CFI = 0.911; TLI = 0.897; RMSEA = 0.086; SRMR = 0.047).

The results of estimation (Hypotheses 2a and 2b—Figure 1 and Table 4) showed that organisational voice was positively and significantly related to burnout ( $\beta = 0.216$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and to innovative behavior ( $\beta = 0.412$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).



**FIGURE 3** One whole model 3 - Mediating effects between organisational, employee-focused voice, and innovative behavior and burnout.

The results of 10,000 times bootstrapping also revealed that its 95% confidence interval (CI95%) was 0.156, 0.277; and 0.362, 0.462, respectively, excluding zero. Hypotheses 2a and 2b were therefore supported.

Likewise, the results of estimation (Hypotheses 3a and 3b—Figure 2 and Table 4) indicated that while employee-focused voice had a significant and negative effect on burnout ( $\beta = -0.271, p < 0.001$ ), it was non-significantly and negatively associated with innovative behavior ( $\beta = -0.022, p > 0.05$ ). The results of 10,000 times bootstrapping also revealed that while its 95% confidence interval (CI 95%) in the relationship between employee-focused voice and burnout was  $-0.364, -0.174$ , excluding zero, its 95% confidence interval (CI 95%) in the relationship between employee-focused voice; and innovative behaviour was  $-0.105, 0.62$ , including zero. Therefore, Hypothesis 3a was supported, and Hypothesis 3b was rejected.

For the mediation results of estimation (Hypotheses 4a and 4b—Figure 3 and Table 5), it was revealed that the indirect effect of organisational voice on burnout via employee-focused voice was significantly mediated ( $\beta = -0.128, p < 0.001$ ), and its 95% confidence interval (CI 95%) was  $-0.176, -0.082$ , excluding zero. Hence, Hypothesis 4a received support.

However, the indirect effect of organisational voice on innovative behavior via employee-focused voice was negative and non-significant ( $\beta = -0.011, p > 0.05$ ), and its 95% confidence interval (CI 95%) was  $-0.050, 0.029$ , including zero. Hence, Hypothesis 4b was rejected.

TABLE 4 Results of the voice forms on outcomes.

Paths	Coefficient (standardized estimates)	Se	95% confidence interval (CI <sub>95%</sub> )	Conclusion
<b>BURNOUT ON</b>				
[OV, H2A]	0.216	0.031**	0.156, 0.277	Supported
[EV, H3A]	-0.271	0.048**	-0.364, -0.174	Supported
Education	0.015	0.026		
Gender	-0.061	0.025*		
Age	0.113	0.025**		
Management level	-0.109	0.026**		
Trust in management	-0.179	0.047**		
Psychological safety	-0.077	0.042*		
HPWS	-0.092	0.043*		
<b>IB ON</b>				
[OV, H2B]	0.412	0.026**	0.362, 0.462	Supported
[EV, H3B]	-0.022	0.043	-0.105, 0.62	Rejected
Education	0.123	0.022**		
Gender	0.047	0.023*		
Age	0.088	0.023**		
Management level	-0.129	0.024**		
Trust in management	-0.013	0.043		
Psychological safety	0.103	0.036**		
HPWS	0.099	0.039*		

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ ; H = Hypothesis.

TABLE 5 Results of indirect/mediated relationships.

Paths	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect/Mediated effect	95% confidence interval (CI <sub>95%</sub> )	Conclusion
<i>Hypothesis 4A</i>					
OV → EV → burnout	0.087**	0.216**	-0.128**	-0.176, -0.082	Partial mediation
<i>Hypothesis 4B</i>					
OV → EV → IB	0.401**	0.412**	-0.011	-0.050, 0.029	Rejected

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .

## 5 | DISCUSSION

Scholars and practitioners have long emphasised the importance of employees speaking up about workplace issues. Yet, voice research remains divided on fundamental questions such as underlying purpose (Barry & Wilkinson, 2022; Nechanska et al., 2020). This study offers an integrative perspective by building on the idea that the interests of employees and managers are distinct concerning the purpose of voice. Drawing on the JD-R model (Demerouti et al., 2001), we empirically substantiate the existence of two alternative voice forms, one focussed on organisational improvement and the other reflecting employees' needs to express themselves and to see the consequences of having a voice.

We further reveal that the two voice forms have differential effects on organisational versus employee interests, namely, innovative behaviors, which are instrumental for innovation at the organisational level, and employee

burnout, which has implications for employee wellbeing (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Organisational voice is associated with significantly higher innovative behaviour and burnout. On the other hand, employee-focused voice is not significantly associated with higher innovative behaviors; however, there is a significant and *negative* association between this voice form and employee burnout. Speaking to this tension, further analysis (in line with Hypothesis 4a) reveals that employee-focused voice presents a mediating channel in that its negative *indirect* effect partly compensates for the positive *total* effect of organisational voice on burnout (discussed further below).

In support of our first hypothesis, based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, we uncover that a two-factor model had a significantly better fit with the data (see Table 3) than a model assuming voice to be a single, unified construct. This means that organisational and employee-focused voice should be viewed as discrete constructs. Rather than being mutually exclusive, the two voice forms ebb and flow in response to workplace conditions.

Turning to our second hypothesis (2a), based on the JD-R model, we suggested that organisational voice might leave employees vulnerable to negative outcomes such as burnout. Organisational voice, long recognized as a discretionary behavior (Morrison, 2023; Nechanska et al., 2020; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998), presents a job-related demand associated with psychological costs (Bakker et al., 2010; Demerouti et al., 2001). Much of the innovation literature holds that speaking up with suggestions for change presents emotional risk (potentially incurring the displeasure of colleagues) as well as a cognitive challenge (Anderson et al., 2014; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). For example, working through the phases necessary for a creative idea to come to fruition could be stressful without adequate resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Tims & Bakker, 2010). Accordingly, we found that the *total* effect of organisational voice is indeed significantly and positively associated with employee burnout.

Turning to hypothesis 2b, we suggested, and found, that organisational voice was positively associated with innovative behaviors. We posited two reasons for this. First, organisational voice makes it clear that improvement-oriented ideas are welcomed and that senior members value suggestions for employees regardless of their level of seniority. This creates the climate needed for innovative behaviors (Anderson et al., 2014). Second, organisational voice facilitates the preparation phase of the innovation process highlighted by Csikszentmihalyi (1996). That people continue to perform to a high level even in demanding situations is supported by J D-R theory, showing that employees use adaptive strategies (such as selection or compensation) to deal with the demands they face, continuing to achieve in line with organisational goals (Demerouti et al., 2014).

In line with hypothesis 3a, results show that employee-focused voice alleviates burnout. We argue that this is because employee-focused voice offers a resource to employees (Demerouti et al., 2001). Speaking up openly and honestly to colleagues fosters relational resources, meaning that individuals have a source of support when they seek advice or want to talk (Bakker & Demerouti., 2007). This-form of voice may help the individual secure the resources they need to overcome difficulties releasing pent-up pressure and reducing the potential for employee burnout. On the other hand, contrary to our expectations, we did not find a significant relationship between employee-focused voice and innovative behaviours. Employee-focused voice does not necessarily lead people to behave innovatively. This is most likely because its purpose is to encourage self-expression, which entails discussing matters beyond strategic functioning.

A significant contribution of our work is to show that employee-focused voice partially mediates the relationship between organisational voice and burnout. This means that employee-focused voice serves to offset the potential damage that organisational voice (in its direct form) might engender for employee burnout. Although this appears contradictory, it can be explained through job crafting (Le Blanc et al., 2017). Organisational voice, while presenting a demand, simultaneously offers opportunities for employees to affect positive change in work practices potentially allowing employees to craft their jobs (Le Blanc et al., 2017). Viewed in this way, it is perhaps less surprising that organisational voice gives rise to employee-focused voice, which weakens the pressure that organisational voice exerts on staff burnout.

On the other hand, we did not find support for hypothesis 4b, which argued that organisational voice would have a positive indirect effect through employee-focused voice on innovative behaviors. Put differently, and following on

from findings reported for hypothesis 3b, we did not find a significant mediating effect for employee-focused voice in the organisational voice-innovative behavior association. This means that while employee-focused voice plays a role in counteracting employees' levels of burnout, it cannot be relied upon to enhance innovative behaviors. As discussed, the primary purpose of employee-focused voice is for employees to raise concerns and have an influence at work. This form of voice may therefore have a long-term rather than a short-term benefit for the organisation, through preventing the withholding of information (silence), ameliorating degrading conditions and/or reducing turnover.

Taken together, our findings suggest that to achieve optimal outcomes for employee and organisation, it is necessary to emphasize both forms of voice. Doing so means that organisations can gain the strategic benefits associated with innovative behaviors, while simultaneously avoiding over-stretching employees by demanding more of them rather than can be reasonably replenished.

## 5.1 | Practical implications

A first step would be for HR and other leaders to understand employees' experiences of voice in the organisation, in particular, if organisational voice or employee-focused voice is at the forefront, whether there are pockets of strength in some parts of the organisation rather than others and what effect this may incur for employee wellbeing as well as strategically apposite factors such as innovative behaviors. This would suggest regularly probing through appropriate means so that HR and other leaders understand where further work is needed.

Organisational leaders could usefully consider ways of encouraging self-expression, initiating discussion by focussing on organisational voice. This means that rather than preventing discussion from moving away from ideas directly applicable to organisational functioning, managers might encourage informal interaction for employees to express themselves openly and honestly to one another and the manager.

It is important that employees can see where their thoughts and ideas have been acted on. While this will not necessarily be possible for everyone, there are undoubtedly ways of reinforcing how changes have been made as a result of staff raising concerns and ideas, through social media channels, for example, or through making the application of staff ideas an agenda item in formal and informal discussions.

Line managers and supervisors should be trained to encourage both forms of voice and offer reward and encouragement reflecting employees' experiences of voice. This includes appreciating some potentially negative consequences arising from the direct effects of organisational voice on staff burnout. Although employee-focused voice does not significantly enhance the organisation's capacity to release innovative behaviors, it offers a strong strategic imperative for organisations to encourage open and honest expression. This has beneficial effects by lowering reported burnout. We are aware of at least one large corporate using their understanding of the two voice forms to redesign performance appraisal and supervisory/management development practices to reflect the importance of employee-focused voice.

## 5.2 | Limitations and future research directions

This is a large-scale study representative of the UK economy. Despite drawing on responses from nearly 2000 employees, the data are based on a single source (employees), opening the prospect of CMB. To rule out this possibility, we conducted post-hoc tests, which suggested that this is not a concern. Another factor is that our study design did not allow us to match employee responses with other sources, such as line managers. On the other hand, employees are the appropriate referent group for our key dependent variable, burnout, since only individuals can give an opinion about their potentiality to suffer from work-related demands. Along similar lines, it has been argued that creativity



and innovative behaviours are more appropriately measured by asking employees rather than soliciting the opinion of supervisors since only employees know what their creative thoughts are (Janssen, 2000).

Next steps could be to analyse what factors lie behind the two voice forms, what the effects might be on other outcomes such as staff engagement and whether there are contingencies such as leadership and/or personal differences that might impact the association between the two voice forms and the dependent variables of interest. Finally, it would be valuable to explore how the two voice forms arise, and exert influence, within an organisational setting.

## 6 | CONCLUSION

This study, a large-scale employee voice survey targeted at a representative sample of the UK economy, closes the research gap identified earlier in this paper in several ways. First, by drawing on J D-R theory, we uncover that organisational voice and employee-focused voice are distinct constructs, the former presenting demands and the latter offering resources. Furthermore, organisational and employee-focused voice exert differential effects, first on burnout (increased by organisational voice, ameliorated by employee-focused voice) and second on innovative behaviours (facilitated by organisational voice). Finally, we reveal that despite having a positive *total effect* on burnout, organisational voice has an indirect negative effect, through employee-focused voice, on burnout. Our findings suggest judicious use of both voice forms is optimum for organisational functioning.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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