

Introduction to Employee Relations

Employee Voice

Employee Voice

Definition:

- ‘the ability of employees to express their views, opinions, concerns and suggestions, and for these efforts to influence decisions at work’ (Dromey 2016, p. 4)

Different Forms of Voice

- Organisation voice: positive benefits for the organisation as individuals share ideas to improve organisational performance
- Individual voice: individuals communicate concerns of importance to them; fundamental human right required for work to have meaning, to feel valued and recognised
- New forms of voice: CIPD's campaign for a future of work that is human centred; intrinsic value; value to both org and people
- 'Silence': employees unwillingness/inability to voice concerns

Different Forms of Voice

- CIPD Report (2017): 7 forms of voice in the literature
 1. Self-expression: channel for individuality and freedom
 2. Well-being: to express emotions/therapy
 3. Morality: inner voice
 4. Relationship building: social identity and belonging
 5. Power: being silent/silenced
 6. Service: representation; intermediaries
 7. Commodity: something of economic value that can be traded
 - ‘In the unitarist paradigm there is an implied commoditisation of voice’

Class Discussion

- Why would employees be motivated to express their voice in the workplace?

Importance

- Improving organisational effectiveness
- Providing workers with dignity and respect
- Preventing marginalised voices
- Increasing workplace diversity
- For fairness and transparency
- For employee well-being

Voice and Job Satisfaction

- Job satisfaction facilitates expression of voice (Fredrickson 2004)
- Can change jobs for the better, increasing job satisfaction
- Increases confidence, increasing job satisfaction

Voice Channels

- One-to-one meetings with line managers*
- Employee representative groups
- Suggestion schemes
- 'open door' policies
- Informal channels (email, telephone)
- Social media

Voice Channels

- Trade unions ([cited in CIPD 2017](#)):
 - shift in recent decades from indirect voice (e.g. through trade union) towards direct voice (Dromey 2016)
 - Workplace Employment Relations Survey (2011) showed employer preference for direct employee voice preferring to consult directly with staff, rather than through TU's (van Wanrooy et al 2013)
 - Why is direct voice preferred?
 - Decreases barriers between employers and employees; will decrease when dealing with each other in a direct way instead of through TU
 - Better able to respond to 'heterogeneous interests' of employees when workers are treated as individuals rather than as a collective (Storey and Bacon 1993).
 - Why would indirect voice be preferred?
 - Independence
 - Ability to address issues that impact a large group of the workforce (such as organisational change) (Pyman et al 2006).

Common Issues Raised

- Work pressure
- Organisational change
- Job insecurity
- Conflict
- Bullying
- Discrimination
- Sexual harrasment

Employee's Experiences of Voice

Key findings of CIPD study (February 2019) – survey of employees across workforce in UK, based on 2372 respondents:

- 'limited scope' for expressing concerns
- Place in hierarchy impacts voice
- 'Voice efficacy'
- 'Voice safety'

Barriers and Enablers

- Leadership and management attitudes, behaviours and styles
 - Do leaders/managers inspire trust?
 - Do leaders/managers encourage voice?
- Psychological safety
 - ‘feelings about taking risks and sharing thoughts’ (Edmondson 1999)
- Organisational climate
 - Open, supportive, empowering through communication, reward and recognition

Group Exercise

- Discuss your own experience(s) of voice within an organisation(s) you have worked in.
- Discussion prompts:
 - What mechanisms for voice, if any, were used? Not used?
 - Which mechanisms are most effective? Least effective?
 - What is your experience/perception of 'voice efficacy'?
 - What is your experience/perception of 'voice safety'?

Implications for HR Practice

- Create mechanisms for employee involvement in decision making
- Employee assistance programmes
- Leadership/Management training and development
- Egalitarian practices
- Reward and recognition of employees who voice concerns
- Protection for employees who voice concerns
- What else?

Additional Reading

Read CIPD Report (February 2019):

‘Talking About Voice: Employees’ Experiences’