Emotional Intelligence Effects on Constructive Voice and Destructive Voice: A Moderating Role of Inclusive Leadership

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Abstract. Empirical studies revealed that constructive voice produces innovation, but destructive voice yields discord in work environments. Emotional intelligence creates one’s attitudes, which affects employee voice behaviors. Inclusive leadership offers support behaviors that are favorable to subordinates speak up with solutions or new ideas, and mitigate defamations or grumbles. Participants were 214 subordinate-supervisor dyads who were surveyed in China. As expected, inclusive leadership moderated significantly the relationships of emotional intelligence on two-dimensional employee voice. We discuss the limitations and directions for future research.

Introduction

Previous studies stated that employee voice is an individual, discretionary, openly mutual communication with an insider, and it attempts to influence work practices or policies (e.g., Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014) [1]. In line with Maynes and Podsakoff’s (2014) categorization, constructive voice (CV) refers to employee speak up with opinions, new ideas or solutions toward supervisors to improve organizational performance, whereas, destructive voice (DSV) represents subordinates express harsh comments or bad-mouth regarding work-related issues toward insiders. Practically, followers are likely to weigh up the costs and gains before they voice, in terms of speaking out may receive negative results from authorities in workplace. Emotional intelligence (EI) as an intelligence of manage one’s emotions, which produces certain attitudes to making decisions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990) [2]. Further, Inclusive leadership (IL) describes leaders administrate with openness, availability, and accessibility, that allow employees perceive in-group status and organizational support (Carmeli et al., 2010) [3]. Based on the mechanisms of emotional response, self-efficacy serves oneself emotional regulation strategies. Together, we expected that IL moderated the relationships between EI and two-dimensional employee voice behaviors.

There are several contributions for present study. First, previous studies highlighted the indicator of voice in proactive but less destructive aspect, thereby we investigated CV and DSV to fill this gap. Second, past works emphasized specific emotional states on voice, but limited their efforts to integrated ability of emotions. Thus, we introduced EI to complete the literature regarding the emotion-voice relationship. Third, we investigated IL as a moderator to explore EI affects voice behaviors draw on cascading model and social exchange theory.

Hypotheses Development

EI involves seizing and inferring the information behind emotions, thereby, employees who have great understanding emotions are unlikely to be elicited by affective response, and would mitigate harsh comments. Likewise, individuals who are able to interpret others’ emotions correctly may possess strong social skills, that they are easy to establish a high-quality relationship with each other in work environments. High leader-follower relationship stimulates employees speak out with a new way or improvement-oriented information to fix problems. Further, individuals who have high regulation of emotions are more likely to extract positive information from negative messages than those have low (Law et al., 2004) [4], that may promote employees speak up with productive information. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: EI is positively associated with CV.
Hypothesis 1b: EI is negatively associated with DSV.

Prior work recognized that self-efficacy is a vital aspect of self-regulation (Gist & Mitchell, 1992) [5]. Consistent with Hollander’s (2012) [6] work, IL enables employees perceive organizational support due to the characteristic of availability, thus enhances their self-efficacy. Consequently, IL might improve employee’s abilities of managing their own emotions via enhancing self-efficacy, that increase employees voice constructive information. Drawing on social exchange theory, IL provides support behaviors which boost employee perceive organizational support, as return, they would increase speak up with productive information. On the other hand, employees would likely to response favorably if they perceive fairness in workplace (Jawahar, 2007) [7]. Accordingly, employees would reduce express hurtful comments while leaders provide an open communication with each other in workplace. Therefore, we proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: IL moderated the effects of EI on CV, such that when IL was high, the positive relationship between EI and CV will be stronger than when it is low.

Hypothesis 2b: IL moderated the effects of EI on DSV, such that when IL was high, the negative relationship between EI and DSV will be weaken than when it is low.

Methods

In this research, EI and IL were estimated by subordinates, whereas, CV and DSV were assessed by their immediate supervisors. For the employee respondents, the average age was 30.93 years (SD = 4.257); 57.9% were female; 91.6% had achieved at least an undergraduate degree; the average for occupational experience was 7.88 years (SD = 4.202). All variables’ scales of rating were evaluated by 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “1 = totally disagree” to “7 = totally agree,” except the assessment of IL.

**Emotional Intelligence**

The measurement of EI (16-item) was developed by Law and colleagues (2004). A sample item includes “I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.” We obtained a value of .981 for composite reliability (CR).

**Inclusive Leadership**

The measurement of IL was using a 9-item scale developed by Carmeli et al. (2010). The scales were evaluated by a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “1 = not at all” to “5 = to a large extent.” A sample item was “The manager is open to discuss the desired goals and new ways to achieve them.” We obtained a CR value of .982.

**Constructive Voice**

The five-item of CV scales were developed by Maynes and Podsakoff (2014). A sample item is “This employee often speaks up with recommendations about how to fix work-related problems.” We obtained a CR of .866.

**Destructive Voice**

We investigated DSV using a 5-item scale developed by Maynes and Podsakoff’s (2014). A sample item includes “This employee often bad-mouths the organization’s policies or objectives.” We obtained a CR value of .919.

**Control Variables**

We controlled for a set of demographic variables to investigate the robustness of the assumptions; it is comprised of age, gender, educational level, and occupational experiences, which were associated with voice behavior (Morrison, 2011) [8].
Results

We conducted hierarchical moderated regression models to investigate the assumptions. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the key variables (without control variables) are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation for key variables.

| Variables | Mean | S.D. | 1   | 2   | 3   |
|-----------|------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. EI     | 5.629| .715 |     |     |     |
| 2. IL     | 3.029| .962 | −.065|     |     |
| 3. CV     | 4.329| .576 | .279**| .276**|     |
| 4. DSV    | 3.83 | .707 | −.121**| −.331**| −.292**|

Note. N = 214. EI = Emotional Intelligence, IL = Inclusive Leadership, CV = Constructive Voice, DSV = Destructive Voice. **. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

The results are presented in Table 2 with unstandardized beta coefficients. Model 1 shows that EI positively related to CV ($\beta = .274, p < .01; F = 5.045, p < .001$). Hypothesis 1a was supported. Model 4 shows that EI negatively associated with DSV ($\beta = -.350, p < .001; F = 3.536, p < .01$). Hypothesis 1b was supported.

Table 2. Results of hierarchical moderated regression analyses for voice behaviors

| Variables | Constructive Voice | Destructive Voice |
|-----------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Age       | −.231              | −.204             |
| Gen.      | −.237              | −.220             |
| Edu.      | .834               | .831              |
| Exp.      | .219               | .199              |
| EI        | .274**             | .271**            |
| IL        | .291***            | .285***           |
| EI $\times$ IL | .139*             |                   |
| $R^2$     | .108               | .192              |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | .087             | .168              |
| $F$       | 5.045***           | 8.186***          |
| $F$ chng  | 10.580**           | 21.418***         |

Note. N = 214. Variables are standardized. Gen. = Gender, Edu. = Educational Level, Exp. = Experience, EI = Emotional Intelligence, IL = Inclusive Leadership

Model 3 posits that IL moderated the positive relationship between EI and CV ($\beta = .139, p < .05; F = 7.794, p < .001$). The simple slope test of moderating effect shows that when IL was high, the relationship between EI and CV was strongly positive and significant ($\beta = .403, p < .001, +1$ SD), whereas the positive relationship between EI and CV was insignificant when IL was low ($\beta = .125, ns, −1$ SD). Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was supported.

Likewise, the results from Model 6 shows that IL as a moderating role effects the negative relationship between EI and DSV ($\beta = −.162, p < .05; F = 7.940, p < .001$). The simple slope test presents that in high IL, EI was negatively related to DSV and weaker ($\beta = −.501, p < .001, +1$ SD), but it was insignificant when IL was low ($\beta = −.177, ns, −1$ SD). Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was supported.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several shortcomings to our findings. First, our data were taken from the same industry, such that we cannot guarantee the assumptions are suitable in other industries. Therefore, in future research, scholars may investigate them in other fields.

Second, employees are less likely to express publicly disparaging comments or grievances within the workplace, especially when supervisors are on the scene in China. In future research, investigation with DSV should be using multiple resources to examine the supervisor as a valid evaluator.
Third, past works recognized that power distance affects the effectiveness of interpersonal leadership, and it impacts on employee voice behaviors. In future research, scholars may examine the extent to which power distance effects on IL and employee voice.

Conclusion
The present study investigated the two-way interaction with CV and DSV. Our findings demonstrated that a conjunction of EI and IL is beneficial to employees speak up with constructive information, and alleviates they express grievance and hurtful criticisms.

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