

Psychological Safety And Worker Voice Through Trade Unions: The Role Of Trust In Voice Reception, Protection, And Response Mechanisms In Vietnam

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Abstract

Establishing participation rights and channels does not in itself ensure that workers will proactively provide information, raise concerns, or make recommendations on matters affecting their rights, interests, and working conditions. Research on worker voice suggests that the decision to speak up commonly rests on two simultaneous assessments: whether speaking up is safe and whether one's voice is likely to have an impact. This article employs a directed integrative review, combined with an analysis of Vietnam's current legal and policy framework, to develop a conceptual framework explaining worker voice through trade unions. The proposed framework distinguishes among three domains of trust: trust in the voice reception mechanism, trust in the voice protection mechanism, and trust in the voice processing and response mechanism. Trust in the protection mechanism reduces perceived risk and contributes to psychological safety, whereas trust in the reception and response mechanisms strengthens the perception that voice will be acknowledged and have an impact. Psychological safety and perceived voice impact, in turn, encourage workers to provide information, raise issues, and make recommendations through trade unions. The article argues that a trade union is not merely a channel for transmitting views but also an intermediary institution capable of reducing individual risk, transforming isolated expressions of voice into evidence-based representative voice, and building trust through its practices of reception, confidentiality, protection, processing, and response. On this basis, the article advances six research propositions and outlines implications for designing trustworthy voice mechanisms in public agencies, public service units, and enterprises in Vietnam.

Keywords: psychological safety; worker voice; trade unions; trust; protection mechanisms; response mechanisms.

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I. Introduction

Workers often possess information that managers, representative bodies, or policymakers cannot readily access in full, such as shortcomings in work organization, safety hazards, the application of wage and working-time rules, social insurance issues, or the unintended consequences of a regulation. Possessing information, however, does not mean that an individual will share it. Voice in organizations always entails uncertainty: those who speak up cannot be certain that their views will be acknowledged, that doing so will not damage relationships with managers and colleagues, or that it will not adversely affect their employment position and career opportunities. The gap between “having something to say” and “actually speaking up” is therefore a central concern in organizational behavior and industrial relations research (Morrison, 2011, 2014, 2023).

Empirical research shows that silence is not merely the absence of an opinion. Milliken et al. (2003) found that employees often withhold issues about which they are concerned because they fear being viewed negatively or damaging valued relationships. Detert and Edmondson (2011) further showed that “implicit voice theories”—taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship—may prevent individuals from offering even constructive suggestions. Fear of social and professional consequences can thus turn formal participation channels into structures that exist in form but fail to capture substantive information (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009).

In Vietnam, the 2019 Labor Code defines workplace dialogue as a process of sharing information, consulting, discussing, and exchanging views between employers and workers or workers' representative organizations. The 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy provides for multiple forms of participation, including direct comments, conferences, consultation forms, suggestion boxes, hotlines, electronic information systems, and participation through trade unions. The 2024 Trade Union Law establishes the trade union's functions of representing, caring for, and protecting workers; participating in the development of policies and laws; organizing dialogue; and recommending the resolution of reports, complaints, and other

matters of concern to workers. These provisions create an important legal foundation for worker voice and trade union representation (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019, 2022, 2024, 2025).

Nevertheless, the existence of rights and reception channels is insufficient to ensure substantive voice. Workers will proactively provide information only when they trust that the receiving body has the competence and willingness to act, that their identity and sensitive information will be protected to the extent necessary, and that speaking up will not expose them to unjustified adverse consequences. They must also believe that their voice can produce a meaningful outcome, even though this does not mean that every proposal must be accepted. This article therefore positions trust in reception, protection, and response mechanisms as the bridge between formal participation channels and workers' decisions to speak up.

The article addresses three questions. First, how does psychological safety affect workers' provision of information, expression of concerns, and submission of recommendations through trade unions? Second, how does trust in reception, protection, and response mechanisms contribute to psychological safety and perceived voice impact? Third, what conditions must trade unions establish to transform formal participation channels into safe, accountable, and trustworthy voice mechanisms? On this basis, the article proposes a dual-path conceptual framework comprising a safety pathway and an impact pathway.

II. Research Method

This article is designed as a conceptual study that combines a directed integrative review with an analysis of legal and policy documents. This approach is appropriate because the objective is not to estimate a causal relationship using empirical data, but to connect streams of research that have developed relatively independently and construct an explanatory model that can be tested in future research.

The literature was selected from four groups. The first comprises foundational studies and reviews of psychological safety, particularly Edmondson (1999), Edmondson and Lei (2014), and Frazier et al. (2017). The second covers worker voice and silence, including Morrison (2011, 2014, 2023), Milliken et al. (2003), Liang et al. (2012), and Sherf et al. (2021). The third comprises research on organizational trust, procedural justice, and the behavior of those receiving voice, such as Mayer et al. (1995), Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), Detert and Burris (2007), and Dirks and de Jong (2022). The fourth includes literature on representative voice, industrial relations, and Vietnam's legal context, including Dundon et al. (2004), Pauksztat and Wittek (2011), Cox and Le Queux (2023), International Labour Organization publications, and current legal documents.

The selected materials were analyzed using four guiding questions: (1) what makes workers perceive speaking up as risky; (2) which characteristics of the receiving actor and reception mechanism build or undermine trust; (3) what leads workers to believe that voice is or is not likely to have an impact; and (4) through which organizational practices can trade unions intervene in these conditions? The article does not claim to be a PRISMA-compliant systematic review. Its conclusions are therefore presented as a theoretical synthesis and a set of research propositions, rather than as quantitative findings representative of the entire body of available literature.

III. Theoretical Foundations

Worker Voice through Trade Unions

Worker voice has been approached in terms of different meanings and purposes. Dundon et al. (2004) identified four principal meanings of employee voice: the articulation of individual dissatisfaction; the expression of collective organization; contributions to management decision-making; and the demonstration of mutuality and cooperative workplace relations. Of these meanings, voice as an expression of collective organization is particularly relevant to the present study because individual worker concerns can be aggregated and transformed into representative trade union voice. Complementing this industrial relations perspective, Morrison (2011, 2014) emphasized voice as a proactive behavior through which workers communicate ideas, suggestions, concerns, or information intended to improve the current state of affairs. Bringing these perspectives together, the article treats voice both as workers' intentional communicative behavior and as input that a representative organization can aggregate and transform into evidence-based collective action.

In this article, worker voice through trade unions refers to workers' proactive provision of information, expression of concerns, proposal of solutions, or submission of recommendations on matters relating to rights, interests, and working conditions, so that a trade union can receive and aggregate this input, represent the workers concerned, and convert it into organized dialogue, collective bargaining, recommendations, or social criticism. This definition clearly distinguishes individual and organizational roles: trade union members and workers do not themselves conduct the trade union's social criticism; rather, they provide the information, cases, and views that serve as inputs for the union's representative functions.

Voice through trade unions may be individual, collective, or representative. Individual voice occurs when a worker directly raises a personal issue. Collective voice arises when multiple workers share the same concern. Representative voice occurs when one or more actors speak up about a workplace issue on behalf of

others (Paukstat & Wittek, 2011). Trade unions effect an important transformation from individual to representative voice by verifying information, determining whether an issue is widespread, comparing the matter against legal provisions, assembling evidence, and selecting an appropriate form of intervention.

This transformation not only increases the weight of an opinion but may also reduce individual risk. A personal report may reveal the worker's identity and place that individual in direct confrontation with another party. By contrast, a recommendation that has been aggregated, anonymized to the necessary extent, and presented in the name of a representative organization can disperse risk and bring the issue within an evidence-based dialogue process. These benefits arise, however, only when workers trust that the trade union genuinely possesses representative capacity and will not allow their information to be used in ways that disadvantage them.

Psychological Safety, Perceived Risk, and Silence

Edmondson (1999) introduced team psychological safety as a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. The concept was developed to explain why members do or do not ask questions, acknowledge mistakes, raise concerns, and share information. Edmondson and Lei's (2014) review shows that psychological safety has become an important construct in research on voice, learning, and teamwork. Frazier et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis, based on 136 independent samples comprising more than 22,000 individuals and nearly 5,000 groups, further confirms the construct's place within the nomological network of antecedents and behavioral outcomes at work.

Building on Edmondson's (1999) group-level concept of psychological safety, this article makes two adjustments concerning the level and context of analysis. First, rather than treating psychological safety as a shared belief among members of a work team, it focuses on each worker's individual perception. Second, the referent is not the full range of interactions within the team, but the specific situation in which a worker provides information, raises a concern, or makes a recommendation through a trade union. On this basis, the article uses the concept of "perceived psychological safety when voicing through a trade union," defined as the extent to which workers believe that they can provide information, raise concerns, or make recommendations through a trade union without experiencing unjustified adverse consequences for their relationships, employment position, income, career opportunities, or treatment at work. This is a context-specific adaptation of Edmondson's concept for trade-union-mediated voice, not an unmodified application of Edmondson's team psychological safety construct or scale. Nor is it equivalent to legal protection or objective employment security.

Psychological safety does not mean that every opinion is correct or must be accepted. A safe environment still requires those who speak up to be honest, evidence-based, respectful of others, and compliant with the law. The core meaning of psychological safety is that individuals are not unreasonably punished or demeaned merely for asking a question, identifying a problem, or proposing change. Psychological safety must therefore be considered alongside the responsibilities of those who speak up and the procedures used to verify information.

Evidence on silence indicates that individuals commonly assess the costs before speaking up. Milliken et al. (2003) identified fear of being labeled negatively and damaging relationships as common reasons for silence. Kish-Gephart et al. (2009) systematized the sources of fear in the workplace and showed that fear can impede the communication of important information. Liang et al. (2012) found psychological safety to be particularly important for prohibitive voice—that is, speaking up about practices, incidents, or processes that may cause harm. This form of voice closely resembles the reports that trade unions need to receive to protect workers' rights and interests.

Voice and silence, however, are not opposite ends of a single continuum. Sherf et al. (2021) showed that they are relatively independent constructs: an individual may speak up about one issue while remaining silent about another. Their study also found perceived impact to be more strongly associated with voice, whereas psychological safety was more strongly associated with silence. This finding suggests that trade unions seeking to foster substantive voice must address two questions simultaneously from the worker's perspective: "Is it safe for me to speak up?" and "Will speaking up make a difference?"

Trust in Voice Reception, Protection, and Response Mechanisms

According to Mayer et al. (1995), trust involves a willingness to accept vulnerability on the basis of positive expectations regarding the party to be trusted. In voicing, workers accept at least three forms of vulnerability: sensitive information may be disclosed; their views may be interpreted unfavorably; and speaking up may fail to produce an outcome while still imposing personal costs. In this sense, trust is the mechanism that enables individuals to accept risk when they cannot fully monitor or control the conduct of the receiving party.

Building on Mayer et al.'s (1995) vulnerability-based conception, this article proposes three context-specific domains of trust in trade union voice mechanisms: trust in the voice reception mechanism, trust in the

voice protection mechanism, and trust in the voice processing and response mechanism. This is a conceptual decomposition proposed by the article on the basis of three successive functions of a voice mechanism; it does not reproduce the three original components of Mayer et al.'s model. In that model, ability, benevolence, and integrity are attributes that shape the perceived trustworthiness of a trustee. By contrast, reception, protection, processing, and response are functional domains of the mechanism in which workers place their trust when deciding whether to voice through a trade union.

First, trust in the voice reception mechanism is the expectation that workers can access an appropriate channel; that information will be recorded fully and accurately; that the recipient has sufficient authority, competence, and responsibility; and that the views received will be verified, classified, aggregated, and directed to the appropriate actor responsible for taking action. A reception mechanism is therefore more than an address to which information is sent. It encompasses the rules, actors, channels, and procedures needed to ensure that worker voice is formally acknowledged.

Second, trust in the voice protection mechanism is the expectation that identities and sensitive information will be appropriately managed; access to data will be controlled; identities will be disclosed only when justified and in accordance with established procedures; and workers who speak up will receive advice, representation, and support from the trade union if they encounter adverse reactions. A protection mechanism is not limited to a general promise of confidentiality. It also encompasses rules, responsibilities, organizational measures, and response procedures for situations in which workers encounter obstruction or suffer adverse consequences because they have spoken up.

Third, trust in the voice processing and response mechanism is the expectation that workers' views will receive substantive consideration, be referred to the appropriate competent actor, be processed within a reasonable period, and generate feedback on both progress and outcomes. Decisions to accept or reject an opinion should be explained to the extent necessary, clarifying which matters have been resolved, which remain under consideration, and which fall outside the relevant body's authority. Accountable response does not mean that every proposal must be accepted; rather, it requires the processing of voice to be traceable, explainable, and verifiable.

Procedural justice and recipient behavior are two practical foundations of trust. Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) showed that workgroup procedural justice climate moderates the relationship between individual-level antecedents and silence; in stronger procedural justice climates, workgroup identification and professional commitment have more pronounced silence-reducing effects. Detert and Burris (2007) found managerial openness to be consistently associated with employee voice, implying that claims of being "always willing to listen" have value only when reflected in receptive, nondefensive behavior and consistent handling of input. For trade unions, these principles translate into requirements of accessibility, impartiality, confidentiality, clear explanation, and follow-through within the scope of their functions.

IV. Vietnam's Institutional Context And The Intermediary Role Of Trade Unions

Legal Opportunities for Worker Voice

Vietnam's current legal framework provides multiple points of access through which workers can express their views. The 2019 Labor Code defines workplace dialogue as a process of information sharing, consultation, discussion, and exchange of views concerning rights, interests, and matters of common concern, with the aim of strengthening understanding and cooperation and seeking mutually beneficial solutions. This provision extends voice beyond the expression of dissatisfaction and situates it within a mechanism for regular exchange among workers, representative organizations, and employers (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019).

The 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy provides for forms of participation in public agencies and public service units that include direct comments, conferences, consultation forms, suggestion boxes, hotlines, electronic information systems, and participation through trade unions. It also assigns responsibilities for receiving, aggregating, and responding to views; studying and incorporating them; providing explanations; and publicly disclosing the substance of explanations and incorporated comments. For state-owned enterprises, the Law provides for participation through workers' representative organizations, dialogue conferences, suggestion boxes, and information systems. Trade union executive committees coordinate and supervise the collection of views, the provision of explanations, and the implementation of matters on which comments have been received (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2022).

The 2024 Trade Union Law, which took effect on July 1, 2025, and was subsequently amended in part by Law No. 97/2025/QH15, establishes the trade union's functions of representing, caring for, and protecting workers' lawful and legitimate rights and interests; coordinating employee conferences; conducting workplace dialogue; providing legal support; recommending that competent authorities act when workers' rights and interests are infringed; participating in the development of policies and laws; and recommending the resolution of reports, complaints, denunciations, and other matters of concern to workers (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2024, 2025).

At the level of international policy, the Decent Work Country Programme for Viet Nam 2022–2026 emphasizes opportunities for work that provides fair income, safety, social protection, and personal development, while also encompassing freedom to express concerns, organize, and participate in decisions affecting one's life. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023) treats social dialogue as an integral component of sustainable labor-market governance and industrial relations in Vietnam.

From Formal Participation Channels to Substantive Voice

The foregoing provisions establish rights, actors, and forms of participation, but they do not automatically eliminate perceived risk. A participation channel may be technically accessible but lack confidentiality; it may receive information quickly but provide unclear feedback; or it may be organized periodically while participants remain concerned about the consequences of raising an issue. The legal effectiveness and psychological effectiveness of a channel therefore constitute two distinct layers. The first concerns whether the channel exists and has authority; the second concerns whether workers trust it enough to use it.

Research on industrial relations in Vietnam highlights the complexity of worker representation and voice, particularly at the workplace level. Cox and Le Queux (2023) examined changes in the framework for worker representation following the 2019 Labor Code and raised questions about the conditions required for independent and effective worker voice. In the legal context preceding the entry into force of the 2024 Trade Union Law and the 2025 amendments, Phan Thị Thanh Huyền (2024) identified several limitations in the law governing trade union social criticism, including fragmented provisions, an insufficiently clear scope for trade union initiative, underdeveloped protection and response mechanisms, and constraints on implementation resources.

The legal framework adopted after that study introduced important changes. In particular, Article 17 of the 2024 Trade Union Law directly provides for trade unions' right and responsibility to participate in consultation and social criticism, while also requiring the study, incorporation, and explanation of social criticism. The absence of direct recognition in the Trade Union Law has therefore been remedied to some extent. Nevertheless, the degree to which post-reform law and practice have resolved issues concerning reception procedures, information protection, the timeliness and quality of responses, implementation resources, and the mechanism's practical effectiveness remains to be assessed. Accordingly, this article uses Phan Thị Thanh Huyền (2024) as a diagnosis of the pre-reform framework and as a basis for identifying criteria that require continued examination under the current legal framework.

The article does not infer that workers in Vietnam generally lack psychological safety; such a conclusion would require representative data. Its claim is narrower: wherever workers perceive high personal risk and limited potential impact, formal rights and channels are unlikely to translate into substantive voice. Trust in how trade unions receive, protect, process, and respond to voice should therefore be incorporated as an explanatory variable in research on worker participation.

Trade Unions as Intermediary Institutions that Build Trust

The intermediary role of trade unions has three dimensions. First, trade unions can reduce individual risk by allowing workers to choose their level of identifiability, aggregating similar reports, and shifting an issue from an individual relationship to a representative relationship. This capacity is particularly important where workers depend on their employment, income, or evaluation by a direct supervisor.

Second, trade unions transform information into evidence-based voice. An initial report may be incomplete, emotionally expressed, or limited to a single case. Trade union officers must clarify the facts, compare them against relevant documents, distinguish a rights violation from a conflict of interests, determine the prevalence of the issue, assess which body has authority to address it, and select an appropriate form of dialogue, recommendation, or social criticism. This process protects both the person providing the information and the accuracy and credibility of representative action.

Third, trade unions build trust through a sequence of observable behaviors. Trust is created less by slogans encouraging workers to contribute comments than by whether trade union officers are accessible, whether their initial response is respectful, whether sensitive information is carefully managed, whether information providers receive updates, and whether the organization offers support when adverse consequences arise. Each episode of receiving and processing voice can either strengthen or weaken trust in subsequent opportunities to speak up.

Trade unions are not, however, the sole determinant of psychological safety. Employer attitudes, management culture, power relations, employment stability, and the degree of legal enforcement all affect perceived risk. The role of the trade union is to provide an intermediary layer capable of reducing risk, improving voice quality, and mobilizing protection mechanisms; it cannot wholly replace the responsibilities of employers and public authorities.

V. Conceptual Framework And Research Propositions

Drawing on the preceding arguments, the article proposes a model comprising five groups of constructs: the quality of trade union voice mechanisms; workers' trust in voice mechanisms; perceived psychological safety when voicing; perceived voice impact; and worker voice through trade unions. Trust in voice mechanisms is divided into three functional domains: trust in the voice reception mechanism, trust in the voice protection mechanism, and trust in the voice processing and response mechanism. Mechanism quality reflects observable and assessable features of rules, actors, channels, procedures, and operating practices, whereas trust in the mechanism reflects workers' subjective expectations that these rules and procedures will actually be implemented when they speak up. Psychological safety and perceived impact are proximal evaluations underlying behavioral decisions, while voice through trade unions is the behavioral outcome to be explained.

Table 1. Constructs in the Proposed Conceptual Framework

Construct	Definition in This Article	Core Indicators	Role in the Model
Quality of trade union voice mechanisms	The extent to which the rules, actors, channels, and procedures for receiving, protecting, processing, and responding to voice are designed and operated in a clear, accessible, confidential, fair, and accountable manner.	Publicly available rules and procedures; multiple reception channels; clearly assigned responsibility; differentiated data-access rights; processing time limits; case-tracking records; and implementation oversight.	Institutional antecedent of trust in voice mechanisms.
Trust in the voice reception mechanism	Workers' expectation that their views can be submitted through an appropriate channel, accurately recorded, verified, classified, aggregated, and directed to the actor responsible for addressing them.	Trust that reception channels are accessible; information will not be overlooked or distorted; recipients are competent and accountable; and issues will be verified, classified, and directed to the competent body.	Subjective bridge between mechanism quality and the perceived likelihood that voice will be acknowledged and considered.
Trust in the voice protection mechanism	Workers' expectation that their identity and sensitive information will be appropriately managed, disclosure will be controlled, and the trade union will advise, represent, and support them if they encounter adverse reactions after speaking up.	Trust that identities and sensitive data will remain confidential; access will be controlled; identity disclosure will be justified and follow established procedures; and the trade union will not abandon workers who encounter obstruction or adverse consequences.	Reduces perceived risk and contributes to psychological safety when voicing.
Trust in the voice processing and response mechanism	Workers' expectation that their views will receive substantive consideration, be processed within a reasonable period, and generate feedback on progress, outcomes, and the reasons for acceptance or non-acceptance.	Trust that issues will receive substantive consideration; a responsible focal point and time limits exist; status updates will be provided; outcomes or explanations will be given; and matters outside the relevant authority will be appropriately referred or accompanied by guidance.	Contributes to the perception that voice can produce an outcome, explanation, or meaningful change.
Perceived psychological safety when voicing through a trade union	An individual-level perception that workers can provide information, raise concerns, or make recommendations through a trade union without experiencing unjustified adverse consequences.	Freedom from fear of negative labeling, stigmatization, isolation, or obstruction; limited concern about adverse effects on employment, income, career opportunities, relationships, or treatment at work.	Mediator in the protection–psychological safety pathway; reduces inhibition and the motivation to remain silent.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Quality of reception–protection–response mechanisms → Trust in the mechanisms → (Psychological safety + Perceived impact) → Worker voice through trade unions → Information and evidence for trade union dialogue, recommendations, and social criticism

The Protection–Psychological Safety Pathway

Trust in the protection mechanism reduces perceived risk because workers expect sensitive information to be managed carefully, their identities to be disclosed only when necessary and with appropriate consent, and the trade union not to abandon them if adverse reactions arise. When these expectations are sufficiently strong, speaking up is less likely to be perceived as a solitary step. Conversely, an incident involving identity disclosure, arbitrary transfer of information, or failure to support a reporting worker can undermine the psychological safety not only of the individual concerned but also of those who observe the incident.

Proposition 1. Workers' trust in the trade union's protection mechanism is positively related to their perceived psychological safety when voicing through the trade union.

Psychological safety reduces the inhibition of behavior, particularly prohibitive voice concerning practices that may cause harm. Workers may still consider many other factors, but when they no longer need to devote most of their attention to self-protection, they are more likely to provide information and raise concerns. *Proposition 2. Perceived psychological safety is positively related to workers' willingness to provide information, raise concerns, and make recommendations through the trade union.*

The Reception–Response–Perceived Impact Pathway

Workers may feel relatively safe yet still remain silent if they believe their views will be ignored. The reception mechanism must therefore demonstrate that information is recorded, classified, and referred to the appropriate actor, while the response mechanism must show that processing has a starting point, a discernible status, and an outcome or explanation. These signals generate perceived impact—the assessment that the effort involved in speaking up can produce change, adjustment, an explanation, or at least formal acknowledgment of the issue.

Proposition 3. Trust in the trade union's reception and response mechanisms is positively related to workers' perception that their voice is likely to have an impact.

When perceived impact is high, the expected benefit of speaking up increases, giving individuals greater motivation to invest the time and effort required to articulate an issue. This is particularly important for behaviors that demand effort, such as preparing a recommendation, participating in dialogue, or supplying evidence. Perceived impact need not rest on the expectation that every proposal will be accepted; it can be sustained when the organization clearly explains the grounds for non-acceptance and identifies alternative courses of action.

Proposition 4. Perceived voice impact is positively related to workers' participation in commenting, making recommendations, and providing information through the trade union.

Mechanism Quality and the Feedback Loop of Trust Formation

Trust is formed through both design and experience. Accessibility reduces the cost of speaking up; confidentiality reduces risk; procedural justice reassures workers that their views will be considered according to consistent criteria; and transparent responses enable them to recognize the value of participation. These elements do not operate independently. An accessible channel that lacks confidentiality may increase risk, whereas a confidential mechanism that provides no response may create a sense of futility.

Proposition 5. Accessibility, confidentiality, procedural justice, and transparency of response are positive conditions for building workers' trust in trade union voice mechanisms.

The relationship between mechanisms and voice is dynamic. Positive experiences can strengthen trust and generate more voice, whereas negative experiences increase silence. Importantly, workers learn not only from their own experiences but also by observing how the organization handles their colleagues' views. A case that is handled merely as a formality, or an instance in which a worker who spoke up suffers adverse consequences, may therefore generate spillover effects far beyond the person directly involved.

Proposition 6. Failure to respond, merely formal responses, or the failure to address adverse consequences experienced by workers who speak up will undermine trust, increase silence, and reduce the quality of inputs available for trade union representation, dialogue, and social criticism.

VI. Implications For The Design Of Trade Union Voice Mechanisms

Provide Multiple Channels but Establish a Single Accountable Focal Point

A voice mechanism should combine direct and digital channels: meetings with trade union officers, conferences, dialogue, surveys, suggestion boxes, electronic forms, and channels for forwarding information from grassroots-level trade unions to higher levels. Increasing the number of channels is meaningless, however, if information becomes fragmented or no responsible person can be identified. Each channel should feed into a common process comprising acknowledgment of receipt, classification, verification, referral for action, updates, and case closure.

Introduce Graduated Confidentiality and Control Access Rights

Not every view needs to be completely anonymous. Workers should be able to choose among three levels: disclosure of identity with consent; disclosure of identity only to a designated trade union focal point; or anonymity in aggregated reports. Procedures should specify who may access the data, when renewed consent must be obtained before disclosure, how information is to be stored, and how long it may be retained. Promising a level of confidentiality that cannot be maintained in practice may damage trust more seriously than clearly explaining the limits of confidentiality at the outset.

Standardize Protection and Post-Voice Support

Protection mechanisms must extend beyond statements of principle. Trade unions should establish a focal point for receiving reports of obstruction or mistreatment following a worker's contribution; a risk-assessment procedure for sensitive cases; forms of legal advice, representation, or referral to a higher level; and a method for documenting developments after an opinion has been submitted. These measures do not imply that every risk can be eliminated, but they allow workers to see that the organization has a plan and accepts responsibility when risks arise.

Provide Accountable Responses with Clear Limits

At a minimum, a response should address four questions: whether the view has been received; the stage at which it is being processed; which aspects have been referred to the competent actor; and the outcome or reason why the issue cannot yet be resolved. For protracted matters, progress updates may be as important as the final response. Trade unions must also distinguish matters within their own authority from those that must be referred to another body, thereby avoiding expectations that exceed their capacity and subsequently undermine trust.

Strengthen the Capacity of Reception Officers

The quality of the initial interaction may determine whether a worker continues sharing information or withdraws. Reception officers require training in nonjudgmental listening, asking clarifying questions, handling emotions, protecting confidential information, identifying conflicts of interest, analyzing problems, and explaining procedures. Legal competence must be accompanied by communication skills; an answer that is legally correct but disrespectful may still undermine psychological safety.

Measure Trust, Safety, and Impact Rather than Merely Counting Recommendations

The effectiveness of a voice mechanism should not be assessed solely by the number of views received or documents submitted. Indicators should include the proportion of workers who know how to access the participation channels; levels of trust in confidentiality and protection; the time taken to acknowledge receipt; the proportion of submissions for which updates are provided; satisfaction with explanations; and perceived safety when speaking up. These indicators help distinguish among possible reasons for a low volume of voice: the absence of problems, lack of awareness of the channels, distrust in the mechanism, or fear of adverse consequences.

Link Voice Mechanisms to Trade Union Ideological Work

Trade union ideological work can support voice mechanisms, but it should not be understood simply as communication designed to encourage workers to "be bold in offering comments." Trade unions must first provide clear information about participation rights, reception channels, the scope and limits of confidentiality, the standards of an evidence-based contribution, and processing procedures. Explaining in advance which matters fall within the union's authority, which must be referred to another body, and the anticipated response time reduces ambiguity, limits unrealistic expectations, and strengthens perceptions of procedural justice.

At the same time, trust is strengthened only when organizational communication is consistent with workers' actual experiences. A message encouraging workers to speak up will be counterproductive if they observe views being ignored, identities being disclosed arbitrarily, or contributors receiving no support when they encounter difficulties. Trade union ideological work should therefore be integrated with a chain of practices for understanding workers' concerns and aspirations, providing information and guidance, receiving and verifying input, protecting those who speak up, and responding. Within this chain, explanation, persuasion, and encouragement must rest on verifiable processing outcomes. This approach both strengthens contributors' sense of responsibility and creates a favorable psychological and social environment in which evidence-based voice can emerge and support trade union dialogue, recommendations, and social criticism.

VII. Limitations And Directions For Future Research

The article has three limitations. First, as a conceptual study, it does not test the propositions using data from workers and trade union officers. Second, the model focuses on trust and psychological assessments, whereas voice behavior is also influenced by individual characteristics, type of employment, power position, organizational attachment, organizational culture, and the nature of the issue. Third, public agencies, public service units, state-owned enterprises, private enterprises, and foreign-invested enterprises have different power structures and representative mechanisms. The relationships proposed in the model should therefore not be assumed to have equal strength across all sectors.

Future research could test the model using multiwave surveys to reduce the risk of common method variance; combine data from workers with data from trade union officers and case-processing records; compare

different types of public agencies, public service units, and enterprises; and conduct case studies of incidents that build or breach trust. Psychological safety, perceived impact, and trust in reception, protection, processing, and response should be measured separately rather than combined into a single “general trust” scale. Researchers could also examine the moderating roles of employer openness, employment dependence, and prior experiences of adverse consequences after speaking up.

VIII. Conclusion

Participation rights and reception channels are necessary but insufficient conditions for substantive worker voice. The decision to speak up is shaped by simultaneous assessments of risk and impact: workers must feel relatively safe while also believing that their views are likely to be acknowledged and meaningfully processed. This article proposes trust in reception, protection, and response mechanisms as the bridge between formal institutions and these two assessments.

In the proposed model, trust in protection creates the safety pathway by reducing perceived risk, while trust in reception and response creates the impact pathway by strengthening expectations regarding the value of voice. Trade unions serve an intermediary role by reducing individual risk, transforming isolated information into evidence-based representative voice, and building trust through the extent to which they genuinely listen, maintain confidentiality, protect, process, and respond.

Trade union representative capacity should therefore be assessed not only by the number of recommendations submitted, but also by the extent to which workers believe that they can speak up safely, responsibly, and meaningfully through their representative organization. When reinforced by consistent practice, trust allows worker voice to become an important source of information and evidence for trade union dialogue, recommendations, and social criticism.

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