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# Why do Employees Speak-up? Examining the Roles of LMX, Perceived Risk and Perceived Leader Power in Predicting Voice Behavior


## Abstract

**Purpose**: This study aims to better understand why employees voice. Drawing on Social Information Processing theory and insights derived from the literature on power, we suggest that LMX fosters voice by reducing the perceived risk of voicing. We further contend that high perceived leader power will strengthen this mediated relationship.

**Design/methodology/approach**: We relied on a sample of 265 employee-supervisor dyads collected from Chinese organizations to test the study hypotheses.

**Findings**: Results indicated that perceived risk of voicing significantly mediated the positive LMX-voice behavior relationship. In addition, perceived leader power strengthened the effect of LMX on voice behavior via perceived risk of voicing. The relationship of LMX to perceived risk of voicing was more negative, and the indirect effect of LMX on voice behavior was more positive when employees perceived that leader power was high.

**Practical implications**: Organizations seeking to promote voice behaviors should support leaders to develop high-quality relationships with employees. Organizations should also ensure that leaders are sufficiently empowered to fulfill their roles, and ensure that employees are aware of their leaders' influence.

**Originality/value**: Findings suggest that, in the context of high-quality leader-member relationships, employees' perceptions of their leaders' power may help to overcome barriers associated with speaking-up. Thus, this study helps explain the conditions that encourage employees to voice.



**Keywords**: LMX, voice, perceived risk of voicing, perceived leader power.

# Why do Employees Speak-up? Examining the Roles of LMX, Perceived Risk and Perceived Leader Power in Predicting Voice Behavior

When employees speak up with constructive ideas to improve work procedures, they demonstrate behaviors that enhance both their individual performance and the long-term effectiveness of the organization. Until now, a great deal of research has been conducted to understand what leads employees to demonstrate (or not) such *voice* behaviors (Cai et al., 2019; Morrison, 2014). One of the key findings that has emerged from previous research is that leaders, through their behaviors or through their relationships with employees, play a critical role in fostering voice behaviors (Cai et al., 2019; Morrison, 2014). Of importance, leader-member exchange (LMX), which reflects the extent to which employees hold a high-quality, social exchange-based relationship with their leader, has been found to influence voice behaviors (e.g., Burris et al., 2008; see also Chamberlin et al., 2017).

LMX is generally thought to exert its effect on outcomes by following social exchange principles: for example, the more employees benefit from strong LMX, the more they reciprocate by showing positive attitudes and behaviors (e.g., organizational commitment and job performance) (Erdogan and Bauer, 2015). This social exchange logic has been firmly supported by meta-analytical findings (Martin et al., 2016; Rockstuhl et al., 2012). Yet, Burris and colleagues (2008) have shown that, even though LMX translates as increased organizational commitment, this commitment is not sufficient to encourage employees to speak-up. Contrary to social-exchange based outcomes such as commitment and performance, speaking up is fundamentally *risky*: when employees speak up, they may be perceived as troublemakers, lose the respect and support of others, receive a negative performance evaluation, be given tasks they're

unwilling to do, or even be dismissed (Detert and Trevino, 2010; Grant, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003).

In this paper, we emphasize the importance of understanding the risk associated with voice. Voice is risky and employees should be strongly motivated to assess the risks associated with voice behaviors before speaking up (Detert and Burris, 2007). Drawing from Social Information Processing theory (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978), we contend that employees process cues from their social environment in order to assess the risk associated with voice behaviors. LMX should represent, in this process, an important source of information. LMX gives employees an indication as to the kind of response they may expect from the leader if they voice (Erdogan and Bauer, 2015; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). The better the quality of the relationship employees have with the leader, the more they can expect support and encouragement from the leader, thus employees should perceive voice as being less risky and, ultimately, speak up more. On this basis, we hypothesize that LMX will increase voice because it reduces perceived risk of voicing.

We further contend that employees' perceptions of their leader's power, as another social cue, will strengthen the effect of LMX on perceived risk of voicing and, indirectly, on voice behaviors. The literature on power suggests that when employees perceive leaders as possessing high levels of power, they view them as being able to control valuable resources and to influence others (Galinsky et al., 2003; Lammers et al., 2009). Therefore, perceived leader power should provide social information that helps employees *contextualize* LMX and its effect (Cai et al., 2019). Employees who have a high-quality relationship with their leader and view them as being highly influential should expect to benefit from this influence when they voice. Thus, the relationship between LMX and voice, as mediated by perceived risk of voicing, should be stronger when perceived leader power is high.

This study contributes to a better understanding of why employees demonstrate voice behaviors. By emphasizing the risky nature of voice and adopting a social information processing framework, we move away from the social exchange logic generally used to explain the LMX-outcomes relationships. Social Information Processing theory postulates that individuals use social information to form their attitudes and behaviors (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Thus, we suggest that the decision to voice is, at least in part, determined by social cues around employees. Employees process information about the quality of their relationship with their leader (i.e., LMX) to evaluate the risks associated with speaking up, which, in turn, influences their willingness to engage in risky voice behaviors. Information pertaining to leader power shapes the voice decision-making process. This social information processing perspective enables us to articulate more clearly the psychological mechanism that underpins the LMX-voice relationship and the conditions under which LMX best exerts its effects on voice behaviors. Figure 1 summarizes our hypotheses.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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## Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

### *Social Information Processing between LMX, Perceived Risk and Employee Voice*

Social Information Processing theory states that "individuals, as adaptive organisms, adapt attitudes, behavior, and beliefs to their social context and to the reality of their own past and present behavior and situation" (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978, p. 226). Thus, the social environment contains important cues that individuals process to construct and interpret events, which in turn shape their attitudes and behaviors. Employees seek information in their social environment to

determine whether it is risky (or not) to speak up before engaging in risky voice behaviors (Detert and Burris, 2007; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). Given that voice behaviors are generally directed at the leader (Detert and Burris, 2007; King et al., 2019), employees should be highly motivated to seek social information relating to their leader and their anticipated response to voice. Employees should, in fact, scrutinize their leader's actions and decisions and demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with what they can expect from their leader (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). LMX represents, as we will argue next, a crucial source of information for employees.

LMX focuses on the dyadic relationships between leaders and employees. It assumes that leaders develop high-quality exchange relationships with some employees, which are viewed as being part of the in-group, and low-quality exchange relationships with other employees, which are viewed as part of the out-group (Erdogan and Bauer, 2015; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Employees who have a high-quality relationship with the leader enjoy more support, trust, respect and attention from the leader, or even enjoy more privileges. Communication and exchange of information between in-group employees and their leader is also more open and supportive, even friendly (Fairhurst, 1993; Kacmar et al., 2003). In contrast, employees who have a low-quality relationship with the leader are less likely to have access to information, support, and reward opportunities from their leader. Communication between leaders and low-LMX employees can even be confrontational and adversarial (Fairhurst, 1993; Kacmar et al., 2003).

Importantly, LMX is thought to develop in the first few months after entry and to remain fairly stable over time (Erdogan and Bauer, 2015). This suggests that employees who have a high-quality relationship with the leader can expect that the leader will consistently show favorable responses toward them, whereas employees who have a low-quality relationship with the leader can expect less favorable responses. It follows that the more employees perceive they

have a high-quality relationship with their leader, the more they can expect positive responses from their leader when they speak up. Employees can reasonably expect, for instance, that the leader will view their suggestions for improvement as being constructive. They can also expect the leader to show respect for their initiative and support for the suggestions they are making. Thus, LMX should reduce employees' perceptions that voice is risky and because *voice is perceived as less risky*, employees should demonstrate more voice behaviors. Extending previous work on perceived risk of voicing (Wei et al., 2015), we therefore hypothesize that LMX will result in increased voice behaviors through reducing risk of voicing.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived risk of voicing mediates a positive relationship between LMX and voice.

### *The Moderating Role of Perceived Leader Power*

Power refers to the asymmetric control over valuable resources in social relationships (Galinsky et al., 2003). Employees' perceptions of their leader's power reflects the extent to which the leader is viewed as being able to control the outcomes of others in the organization and influence their attitudes and behaviors (Brinol et al., 2017; Lammers et al., 2009). Employees should perceive their leader as having a high level of power when, for instance, he or she has a say in important decisions that affect the way tasks are accomplished by employees or when he or she is able get important stakeholders to change their decision about the resources allocated to projects.

We contend that, as a crucial social cue, perceived leader power provides employees with information that help them contextualize LMX and its effect on risk of voicing and, indirectly, on voice behaviors (Cai et al., 2019). When employees have a high-quality relationship with the leader and perceive the leader to have high levels of power, they should view him or her as

having sufficient influence in the organization to bring into the LMX relationship valuable resources. They should also expect to benefit from these resources (Giessner and Schubert, 2007; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). Indeed, a leader who is perceived as powerful should be seen as being able to leverage extant resources when needed (Lammers et al., 2009). Because resources are generally limited and because leaders generally differentiate between employees from the in-group and those from the out-group (Erdogan and Bauer, 2015; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995), employees with whom the leader has a high-quality relationship are more likely to receive additional resources than others. These employees can confidently expect their leader, not only to respond positively when they speak up, but also to be able to support their initiatives. Employees can expect, for instance, that the leader will help convince important stakeholders in the organization about the benefits of their ideas or help gather the resources needed to put their ideas into practice. Thus, having a high-quality relationship with the leader and perceiving that the leader has high power creates an ideal context to reduce the risks associated with speaking up. This reasoning is consistent with previous work suggesting that leaders who have good relationships with employees can better understand employees' suggestions and, if they have sufficient power, can also secure additional resources to support employees in implementing their suggestions (Venkataramani et al., 2016). In contrast, employees who do not have a high-quality relationship with the leader should not expect to benefit from the resources that a highly powerful leader may have access to. They may even be worried that the leader will use his or her influence in a way that will be detrimental for them. Thus, we hypothesize that perceived leader power will strengthen the negative effect of LMX on perceived risk of voicing and the positive effect of LMX on voice behaviors via perceived risk of voicing.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived leader power moderates the negative relationship between LMX and perceived risk of voicing, such that this relationship is stronger (i.e., more negative) when perceived leader power is high (versus low).

Hypothesis 3: Perceived leader power moderates the mediated relationship between LMX and voice behavior via perceived risk of voicing, such that the mediated relationship is stronger (i.e., more positive) when perceived leader power is high (versus low).

## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

Data for this study were collected in two waves from several organizations located in mainland China. With the help of the HR managers from these organizations, we invited 400 employees (randomly selected) and their supervisors to fill in questionnaires, which were returned in sealed envelopes. Employees completed two questionnaires at a 1-month interval while leaders completed one questionnaire. At Time 1, employees provided sociodemographic information as well as LMX and perceived leader power ratings. At Time 2, employees reported perceived risk of voicing while leaders provided sociodemographic information and ratings of employees' voice behaviors. Each leader rated only one employee.

A total of 360 employees responded to the Time 1 questionnaire, for a response rate of 90%. Matched data was obtained from 313 employees and their leaders at Time 2, for a response rate of 86.94%. After screening for missing data or repeated answers, we kept data from 265 employees and their leaders for this study (usable response rate = 84.66%). Of the employees, 50.6% were male and average age was 29.32 years (SD = 6.61). Most of them (77.30%) had a college degree or above. Their tenure with their leaders was, on average, 2.81 years (SD = 2.36).

Of the leaders, 64.50% were male and the average age was 35.20 years (SD = 7.49). Most of them (81.9%) had a college degree or above.

***Measures***

All scales were translated from English to Chinese using a standard translation-back translation procedure.

*Perceived leader power:* We used a 5-item scale developed by Giessner and Schubert (2007; see also Giessner and Schubert, 2019) to measure perceived leader power (α = .85) Responses were provided by employees on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree), Sample items are "I think my supervisor is dominant.", "I think my supervisor has a lot of control in the company" and "I think my supervisor holds a very high status within the company".

*Leader-member exchange*: The LMX-7 scale of Scandura and Graen (1984; see also Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995) was used to measure LMX (α = .89). As in other studies using this scale (e.g., Kong et al., 2017), we asked employees to rate their supervisor using a 5-point scale. Sample items are "Do you know where you stand with your leader… do you usually know how satisfied your leader is with what you do?" (1 = Rarely, 5 = Very often), "How well does your leader understand your job problems and needs?" (1 = Not a bit, 5 = A great deal) and "How would you characterize your working relationship with your leader?" (1 = Extremely ineffective, 5 = Extremely effective).

*Perceived risk of voicing*: To measure perceived risk of voicing, we adopted an 8-item scale developed by Wei et al. (2015) based on the work of Milliken et al. (2003) and Zhang et al. (2011; see also Zhang and Wei, 2017) (α = .95). Responses were provided by employees on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree). Items include "If I speak up my supervisor would think that I don't respect him/her", "If I speak up my supervisor would regard

me as a trouble-maker' and "If I speak up my supervisor will create troubles on my job in the future" [sic].

*Employee voice*: Supervisors rated employee voice using the 6-item scale developed by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) and used by others (e.g., Lapointe and Vandenberghe, 2018) ($\alpha = .91$). Responses were provided on a 5-point scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). Items include "This particular employee communicates his/her opinions about work issues to others in this group even if his/her opinion is different and others in the group disagree with him/her", "This particular employee develops and makes recommendations concerning issues that affect this work group" and "This particular employee speaks up in this group with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures".

*Control variables*: Given that socio-demographics may affect voice behaviors, we controlled for employees' gender, age, tenure with the leader and level of education as well as for leaders' gender, age and level of education.

**Data analysis**

Data was analyzed at the individual level because leaders only rated the voice behaviors of one of their employees.

***Confirmatory factor analysis***

We used Mplus 7.4 and the maximum likelihood method of estimation to conduct confirmatory factor analyses. The four-factor model, including LMX, perceived leader power, perceived risk of voicing and voice behavior, provided a reasonable fit to the data ($\chi^2(293) = 775.96$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.06). This model also proved superior to three 3-factor models in which we combined LMX and perceived leader power ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 387.28$, $p < .001$),LMX and perceived risk of voicing ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 750.52$, $p < .001$) and perceived risk of voicing and perceived leader power ($\Delta\chi^2(3) = 518.49$, $p < .001$), and

a 1-factor model that merged all study variables ($\Delta\chi^2$ (6) = 2026.05, $p < .001$). Thus, the four constructs appeared distinguishable.

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Insert Tables 1-2 and Figure 2 about here

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***Descriptive statistics***

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and Cronbach'α coefficients. Of interest, significant positive relationships are observed between LMX and voice behavior ($r = 0.39$, $p < .001$) and perceived leader power and perceived risk of voicing ($r = 0.21$, $p < .01$). Significant negative relationships are observed between LMX and perceived risk of voicing ($r = -0.37$, $p < .001$) and perceived risk of voicing and voice behavior ($r = -0.36$, $p < .001$).

***Hypothesis testing***

To test Hypothesis 1, we first regressed perceived risk of voicing and voice behavior on LMX respectively while controlling for demographic variables. The results revealed a significant and negative relationship between LMX and perceived risk of voicing ($B = -0.48$, *S.E.* = 0.08, $p < .001$, see Model 12 in Table 2) and a significant and positive relationship between LMX and voice behavior ($B = 0.38$, *S.E.* = 0.06, $p < .001$, see Model 22 in Table 2). Then, we regressed voice behavior on LMX and perceived risk of voicing together and found that LMX was still significantly and positively related to voice behavior ($B = 0.29$, *S.E.* = 0.06, $p < .001$, see Model 23 in Table 2) while perceived risk of voicing was significantly and negatively related to voice behavior ($B = -0.19$, *S.E.* = 0.04, $p < .001$, see Model 23 in Table 2). These results indicate that the relationship between LMX and voice is partially mediated by perceived risk of voicing. We also tested the indirect effect of perceived risk of voicing in Mplus with a bootstrap analysis

(Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The result showed that perceived risk of voicing significantly mediated the relationship between LMX and voice (indirect effect = 0.09, S.E. = 0.03, 99% CI = [0.04, 0.17]). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

To test Hypothesis 2, we regressed perceived risk of voicing on LMX, perceived leader power and the interaction between these two variables (Models 13 and 14 in Table 2). The predictors and the interaction term were mean-centered (Aiken and West, 1991). Results indicated that the interaction term significantly and negatively predicted perceived risk of voicing (*B* = -0.34, *S.E.* = 0.09, $p < .001$, see Model 14 in Table 2). To illustrate the nature of the interaction, we computed simple slopes at high (+ 1 SD above the mean) and low (- 1 SD below the mean) levels of the moderator (perceived leader power) (Preacher et al., 2006). Figure 2 shows that the negative relationship of LMX to perceived risk of voicing was stronger (i.e., more negative) when perceived leader power was high rather than low (High perceived power: *B* = -0.54, *S.E.* = 0.08, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [-0.71, -0.38]; Low perceived power: *B* = -0.25, *S.E.* = 0.10, $p = 0.011$, 95% CI = [-0.43, -0.06]). The difference between these two slopes was also significant (*B* = -0.30, *S.E.* = 0.08, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI = [-0.45, -0.14]). Thus, results support Hypothesis 2.

To test Hypothesis 3, we carried out a bootstrap analysis using Mplus. This enabled us to calculate the indirect effect of LMX on voice behavior at conditional values of perceived leader power (Preacher et al., 2007). When perceived leader power was high (+ 1 SD above the mean), the indirect effect from LMX to voice behavior via perceived risk of voicing was stronger (estimate = 0.12, *S.E.* = 0.04, 99% CI = [0.04, 0.24]) than when perceived leader power was low (– 1 SD below the mean) (estimate = 0.05, *S.E.* = 0.02, 99% CI = [0.00, 0.13]). The difference between these two conditional indirect effects was also significant (estimate = 0.06, *S.E.* = 0.02, 99%CI = [0.02, 0.13]). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

**Discussion**

The present study sought to better understand why employees speak up. We demonstrated that perceived risk of voicing mediated the positive LMX-voice behavior relationship. In addition, we demonstrated that the relationship of LMX to perceived risk of voicing and, indirectly, to voice behavior was stronger when perceived leader power was high. We now discuss the implications of our study as well as directions for future research.

### *Implications and Directions for Future Research*

Speaking up with ideas to improve work processes involves some risk (Detert and Trevino, 2010; Grant, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003). Acknowledging this important fact, we suggested that, before speaking up, employees process the social cues pertaining to their relationship with the leader to draw inferences about how risky voice is and use that information to determine if they should engage in voice. The better the quality of the relationship that the employees have with their leader, the less they should view voice as risky and, ultimately, the more they should speak up. Consistent with this idea, our findings indicated that perceived risk of voicing mediated a positive relationship between LMX and voice. The fact that employees perceive that they have a relationship with the leader that is caring, supportive, and respectful, therefore plays an important role in fostering voice behaviors. More importantly, findings shed new light on the mechanisms linking LMX to voice. Consistent with Social Information Processing theory (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978), which emphasizes employees' cognitive evaluation of social information as a determinant of behavior, our results suggest that employees seek and process information about their relationship with the leader to evaluate the possible risks associated with speaking up before engaging in voice behaviors. If, for example, employees find information suggesting that they are part of the in-group, i.e., that they get extra care and support from the leader, they should view voicing as less risky and expect their leader to show support for the ideas and suggestions that

they express. In contrast, if employees find information suggesting that they are part of the out-group, i.e., that they receive minimal support and consideration from the leader, they should view voicing as more risky because they have very limited reasons to expect their leader to support their initiative. It would be interesting to examine how LMX and perceived risk contribute to explain other behaviors that are considered risky such as behaviors related to creativity and innovation. These behaviors involve, among others, a risk to the employees' image and, more broadly, a risk of failure (Anderson et al., 2014; Cai et al., 2019). Thus, future research should explore how LMX may proactively help employees manage risk perceptions associated with creative and innovative behaviors.

This study also suggested that employees' perceptions of their leader's power represented an important contingency for the relationship between LMX and voice behavior as mediated by perceived risk of voicing. Findings supported this idea. The relationship between LMX and perceived risk of voicing was stronger when perceived leader power was high (versus low). The indirect relationship between LMX and voice behavior was also stronger when perceived leader power was high (versus low). Thus, this study contributes to our understanding of the contexts in which LMX exerts an optimal influence on voice behaviors (Cai et al., 2019). The results are also consistent with Social Information Processing theory (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). They show that employees combine multiple sources of information about their leader to assess the risks associated with speaking up. Perceptions of leader power help employees to contextualize their relationship with the leader and, more importantly, anticipate the likely outcomes associated with voice behaviors. When employees have a high-quality relationship with their leader and view their leader as highly powerful, it enables them to think, for instance, that the leader will be willing and able to influence others in the organization to support and put into practice the ideas

they voiced rather than ignore them (Giessner and Schubert, 2007; Lammers et al., 2009; Venkataramani et al., 2016). Thus, it gives employees legitimate reasons to believe that it is worth voicing their ideas.

It is interesting to contrast these findings with previous research, which suggested that that hierarchical differences and power differences make upward communication about ideas especially threatening for employees (Kumar and Mishra, 2017; Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Indeed, our study provides an alternative view by suggesting that, in the context of LMX, employees' perceptions that their leader is highly powerful helps to overcome barriers associated with speaking-up. In this context, perceived leader power makes employees more likely to risk speaking up, a risk that they may otherwise avoid. It shows employees that the leader can, for instance, defend them and their ideas in the face of adversity. Thus, perceived leader power can, at least to some extent, be empowering for employees. Future research should seek to explore the difference between legitimate leader power and perceived leader power and the effect each has on employee voice behavior as well as the conditions in which these variables may appear threatening or empowering for employees.

### *Practical Implications*

Organizations should encourage employees to speak up with ideas on how to improve work processes if they want to remain competitive and effective in the longer-term. The present study highlights how organizations can foster voice behavior among employees. Specifically, results suggest that the leader, particularly the high-quality relationship that he or she establishes with employees, plays an important role in encouraging employees to speak up. Organizations should therefore enable leaders to create such relationships with employees by, for example, providing opportunities for informal interactions among them. Informal interactions may help leaders and employees to get to know each other. They may also reduce any mistaken beliefs or fears

employees have towards their leader and their potential responses to voice behaviors. Moreover, leadership development programs could be implemented to help leaders improve the quality of their relationship with employees. Such training programs could provide leaders with the opportunity to develop relational skills and support to build successful relationships with employees. Interactive sessions could include, for example, discussions with other leaders on how to manage sensitive situations with employees, and role-plays to put into practice relational skills (Scandura and Graen, 1984).

Of importance, these efforts at building high-quality relationships between leaders and employees should result in a stronger effect on voice behaviors when the leader is perceived to be highly powerful. Hence, organizations should ensure that leaders have sufficient opportunity to influence others in the organization. Leaders should make good use of their influence to ensure that employees view them as powerful and see that they are willing to exert their influence on behalf of employees. For example, leaders can show employees how they can influence important stakeholders to move forward with initiatives that are beneficial for the workgroup and the organization. These strategies, combined with the ones promoting high-quality LMX should contribute to make voice less risky and increase the likelihood of voice among employees.

***Limitations and Further Research Directions***

First, common method bias may have influenced the results of the study. However, a two-wave design and the inclusion of leader reports of voice behavior have helped to minimize concerns associated with common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Relying on objective measures (e.g., observations of voice behaviors) would further minimize method-related concerns. Relying on panel data would also strengthen our contention regarding the causal ordering of variables (Maxwell and Cole, 2007). Second, we acknowledge that there may be multiple mechanisms through which LMX influences voice. Future research should examine

perceived risk of voicing in parallel to other mechanisms to distinguish how they respectively influence voice behaviors. Among other possibilities, future research should examine how perceived risk predicts voice behavior in parallel to social exchange-based mechanisms such as affective commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991; see also Burris et al., 2008).

## Conclusion

Speaking up entails risks for employees, yet it contributes to organizational performance. Thus, it is important to know how to help employees overcome the barriers associated with speaking up. Using a two-wave design and data collected from employees and their leaders, the present study demonstrated that voice behavior is predicted by LMX and that this positive effect operates through reduced perceived risk of voicing. Furthermore, this study showed that perceived leader power strengthened the relationship between LMX and perceived risk of voicing, and, through perceived risk of voicing, between LMX and voice behaviors. These relationships were stronger when perceived leader power was high (versus low). We hope that this study's findings will help researchers and practitioners better understand why employees speak up and help to generate further interest in voice behavior research.

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**Table 1. Means, SD, correlations among variables**

| | M | SD | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 E-gender | 1.49 | 0.50 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 E-age | 29.32 | 6.61 | 0.14$^{*}$ | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Working time with leader | 2.81 | 2.36 | 0.01 | 0.61$^{***}$ | | | | | | | | |
| 4 E-education | 3.23 | 0.86 | 0.11$^{+}$ | -0.04 | 0.02 | | | | | | | |
| 5 L-gender | 1.36 | 0.49 | 0.43$^{***}$ | 0.13$^{*}$ | 0.06 | 0.14$^{*}$ | | | | | | |
| 6 L-age | 35.20 | 7.49 | 0.09 | 0.37$^{***}$ | 0.33$^{***}$ | 0.21$^{***}$ | -0.03 | | | | | |
| 7 L-education | 3.37 | 0.87 | 0.06 | -0.06 | 0.05 | 0.45$^{***}$ | 0.03 | 0.11$^{+}$ | | | | |
| 8 LMX | 3.58 | 0.76 | 0.03 | 0.06 | 0.14$^{*}$ | -0.07 | -0.02 | -0.09 | -0.09 | | | |
| 9 Perceived leader power | 2.05 | 0.76 | -0.03 | -0.00 | -0.09 | -0.07 | 0.07 | -0.05 | -0.03 | -0.40$^{***}$ | | |
| 10 Perceived risk of voicing | 2.38 | 1.00 | -0.07 | -0.15$^{*}$ | -0.08 | -0.06 | -0.02 | -0.03 | 0.04 | -0.37$^{***}$ | 0.21$^{**}$ | |
| 11 Voice behavior | 3.74 | 0.75 | -0.05 | 0.10 | 0.12$^{+}$ | 0.02 | 0.00 | -0.02 | -0.05 | 0.39$^{***}$ | -0.17$^{**}$ | -0.36$^{***}$ |

***Note.*** N=265. E-=Employee, L-=Leader, Education: 1= junior school or below, 2=high school, 3=college, 4=Bachelor, 5=master and PhD. $^{***}p<0.001$, $^{**}p<0.01$, $^{*}p<0.05$, $^{+}p<0.10$.

**Table 2. Results of Regression Analysis**

| | Perceived risk of voicing | | | | Voice behavior | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Model 11 | Model 12 | Model 13 | Model 14 | Model 21 | Model 22 | Model 23 |
| Employee gender | -0.13(0.14) | -0.08(0.13) | -0.07(0.13) | -0.06(0.12) | -0.09(0.10) | -0.13(0.10) | -0.15(0.09) |
| Employee age | -0.03(0.01)$^{*}$ | -0.03(0.01)$^{*}$ | -0.03(0.01)$^{*}$ | -0.02(0.01)$^{*}$ | 0.01(0.01) | 0.01(0.01) | 0.00(0.01) |
| Working time with leader | 0.00(0.03) | 0.03(0.03) | 0.04(0.03) | 0.03(0.03) | 0.03(0.03) | 0.01(0.02) | 0.01(0.02) |
| Employee education | -0.13(0.08) | -0.13(0.8)$^{+}$ | -0.12(0.08) | -0.12(0.07)$^{+}$ | 0.06(0.06) | 0.06(0.06) | 0.04(0.06) |
| Leader gender | 0.09(0.14) | 0.05(0.13) | 0.03(0.13) | 0.03(0.13) | 0.01(0.11) | 0.04(0.10) | 0.05(0.09) |
| Leader age | 0.01(0.01) | -0.00(0.01) | 0.00(0.01) | -0.00(0.01) | -0.01(0.01) | -0.00(0.01) | -0.00(0.01) |
| Leader education | 0.09(0.08) | 0.05(0.07) | 0.05(0.07) | 0.09(0.07) | -0.06(0.06) | -0.03(0.06) | -0.02(0.05) |
| LMX | | -0.48(0.08)$^{***}$ | -0.45(0.08)$^{***}$ | -0.39(0.08)$^{***}$ | | 0.38(0.06)$^{***}$ | 0.29(0.06)$^{***}$ |
| Perceived leader power | | | 0.10(0.08) | 0.04(0.08) | | | |
| INT | | | | -0.34(0.09)$^{***}$ | | | |
| Perceived risk of voicing | | | | | | | -0.19(0.04)$^{***}$ |
| $R^2$ | 0.04 | 0.17$^{***}$ | 0.17$^{***}$ | 0.21$^{***}$ | 0.03 | 0.17$^{***}$ | 0.22$^{***}$ |
| $R^2$ change | | 0.13 | 0.13 | 0.04 | | 0.14 | 0.19 |

***Note.*** N=265. INT=LMX × perceived leader power. All data are unstandardized estimates. $^{***}p<0.001$, $^{**}p<0.01$, $^{*}p<0.05$, $^{+}p<0.10$.

**Figure 1. Research model**

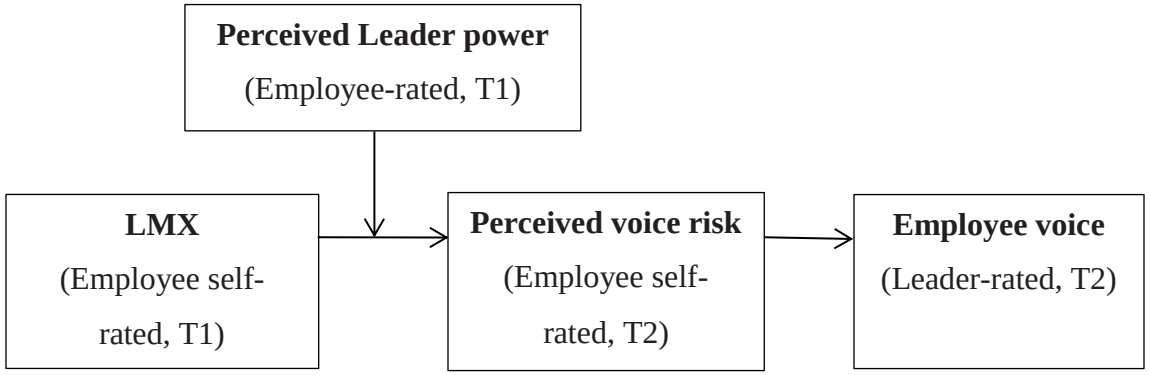

**Figure 2. Moderation effect of perceived leader power on the relationship between LMX and perceived risk of voicing**