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Voice Climate Perceptions: A Multidimensional Model as a Determinant of Affective Commitment, Work Engagement, Neglect and Exit

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This study explored the multidimensionality of voice climate, extending the theoretical model to incorporate three components: encouragement, safety, and efficacy. The utility of this multidimensional conceptualisation as a determinant of affective organisational commitment, work engagement, neglect, and exit was then examined. Online questionnaires were completed by 119 employees from several organisations (M_{age} = 36, SD = 14). Factor analysis confirmed the multidimensional nature of voice climate and path analysis suggested that organisations may benefit by focusing on each of the voice climate dimensions. Voice encouragement was positively associated with work engagement and affective organisational commitment, while voice climate efficacy was positively related to work engagement. Future research should consider the specific antecedents of each component of voice climate as well as their differential impact on important organisational outcomes, while factoring in appropriate time lag effects.

■ **Keywords:** affective organisational commitment, efficacy, empowerment, encouragement, exit, neglect, safety, turnover, voice climate, work engagement

Organisational voice has the ability to influence important work-related factors, including employees' affective organisational commitment, work engagement, neglect, and exit (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Allen & Tuselmann, 2009; Bryson, Charlwood, & Forth, 2006; Farndale, Van Ruiten, Kelliher, & Hope-Hailey, 2011; Miles, Borman, Spector, & Fox, 2002; Park & Rainey, 2007; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005; Withey & Cooper, 1989). The term 'voice' has, however, been used interchangeably to refer to both voice behaviour, which concerns the act of communicating, and voice climate, which refers to the perception and beliefs about attitudes, and practices related to voice behaviour in the workplace. Research suggests that voice climate perceptions are best represented by three components: encouragement, safety, and efficacy (Allen & Tuselmann, 2009; Farndale et al., 2011; Frazier, 2009; Landau, 2009; Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011), which are conceptually distinct from related constructs such as psychological safety, general group efficacy, and involvement climate (Frazier, 2009; Morrison et al., 2011). Only one previous study has included encouragement as a component of voice climate (Frazier, 2009) and none have incorporated all three facets. Furthermore, research has yet to explore the extent to which the three components can be differentiated from one another. This study therefore sought to contribute to the voice climate literature by exploring the extent to which voice climate is multidimensional, comprising of the three components: encouragement, safety, and efficacy, and whether the three-component model is useful in determining work-related outcomes.

Voice Climate: A Multi-Dimensional Construct

The encouragement component of voice climate relates to employees' perception about the extent to which voice behaviour is supported by their superiors at work (Frazier,

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2009). For example, in a positive voice climate, the perception that voice behaviour is encouraged may develop if employees are consistently asked their opinions and are given opportunities to provide input in relation to work related issues.

The safety component of voice climate relates to employees' beliefs about the likelihood that voice behaviour will result in negative consequences such as reprimand (Morrison et al., 2011). Employees often perceive voice behaviour to be risky, as challenging or confronting superiors can be emotionally difficult and speaking out may incur retaliation (Withey & Cooper, 1989). As a consequence, employees may weigh up the possible costs and potential benefits of voice behaviour before voicing. The only study other than this one to have included safety expectations and efficacy as components of employees' voice climate perceptions found that voice climate explained a significant amount of variance in voice behaviour (32%) beyond that explained by other variables such as satisfaction and workgroup identification (Morrison et al., 2011).

The efficacy component of voice climate relates to how effective employees believe their voice behaviour is likely to be. Employees who consistently have their contributions listened to and acted upon can be said to be working within an efficacy-positive voice climate (Morrison et al., 2011). Furthermore, employees who were satisfied with the impact of their past voice behaviour had higher levels of affective commitment, viewed their supervisors more favourably, and had lower levels of exit, than employees with negative experiences of the effectiveness of their voice behaviour (Landau, 2009).

Employees' perception about their organisation's voice climate can be complex, as employers often present mixed messages about their position on voice behaviour (Landau, 2009); for example, by encouraging voice through employee surveys but then showing a lack of voice efficacy by failing to act on the survey results. In order to develop accurate hypotheses about the links between voice climate and work-related outcomes, it is important that measures reflect all aspects of voice climate.

Voice Climate and Affective Organisational Commitment

Affectively committed employees feel involved and emotionally attached to their organisation, identify with its goals and values, and therefore remain with the organisation because they want to (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Previous research indicates that when employees feel they are permitted to provide input, that their voice behaviour is likely to be well received, or they are empowered, they are likely to have higher levels of affective commitment (Farndale et al., 2011; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). These findings align closely with ownership theory, as proposed by O'Driscoll, Pierce, and Coghlan (2006), which argues that involvement and efficacy engender a sense of belonging. Work environments that empower employees and provide them with knowledge of their jobs and organisations, in turn enables employees a greater investment into their work. It is therefore hypothesised that all three subcomponents of voice climate will be positively related to affective organisational commitment.

Voice Climate and Work Engagement

In the current study, work engagement is defined 'as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). There is a lack of research regarding voice climate as a predictor of work engagement; however, voice efficacy has been linked to job involvement (Brown & Leigh, 1996), which is conceptually similar (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006). Research has also linked participation in organisational decision-making to work engagement through perceptions of organisational climates as open, trusting and supportive (Wuesterwald, 2012). This aligns with models of social exchange in that individuals are empowered via encouragement, safety and efficacy, which is reciprocated via a greater sense of attachment and commitment (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000). It is therefore hypothesised that all three components of voice climate will be positively related to work engagement.

Voice Climate and Neglect

Much of the research involving neglect has limited the construct to fairly passive behaviours such as chronic lateness, non-medical absenteeism, the personal use of company resources, shirking, and disengagement from work tasks (Allen & Tuselmann, 2009; Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van De Vliert, & Buunk, 1999; van Iterson, Naus, & Roe, 2007). Neglect can, however, be differentiated from the withdrawal of goodwill. Employees expressing goodwill toward their organisation may be performing their duties beyond expectations, while withdrawal of this goodwill may result in adequate performance that is not neglectful (Allen & Tuselmann, 2009). The current study therefore defines neglect as the intentional failure by employees to perform to the best of their ability at work (Allen & Tuselmann, 2009; Travis, Gomez, & Mor Barak, 2011).

Employees often feel dissatisfied when working in negative voice climates (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005), and neglect has been shown to be a likely response to dissatisfying workplace situations (Farrel, 1983). To reduce employee dissatisfaction, employee voice behaviour may depend on the receptiveness and response within the organisation (Bryson et al., 2006). This was evidenced in a longitudinal study by Travis et al. (2011), which found that voice behaviour was negatively related to neglect measured 6 months later. Travis and colleagues suggested that employees may reduce neglectful behaviours as organisations process and respond to the messages that are

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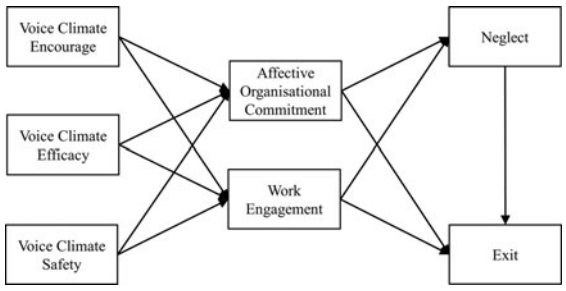


FIGURE 1

Hypothesised path model of the relationships between voice climate, engagement, commitment, neglect and exit.

voiced. It is therefore hypothesised that voice climate, and in particular voice efficacy, will be negatively related to neglect.

Voice Climate and Exit

Researchers are fairly consistent in their definition of employee exit as including: resigning, seeking alternative employment, or simply considering leaving the organisation (Allen & Tuselmann, 2009; Hagedoorn et al., 1999; Withey & Cooper, 1989). This is distinct from turnover that encompasses both voluntary and involuntary departure. This conceptualisation of exit allows researchers to gain some insight into how employees are feeling about remaining with the organisation, even when they perceive that quitting is not an option.

No research to date has examined the links between voice climate and exit. However, employees often feel dissatisfied when working in negative voice climates (Vakola & Bouradas, 2005) and a number of studies have found significant positive relationships between employee dissatisfaction and exit (Anshoo, 2011; Hagedoorn et al., 1999; Withey & Cooper, 1989). In addition, Allen and Tuselmann (2009) suggest that employees are even more likely to respond to dissatisfaction with exit in situations where they perceive that voice behaviour is either too costly, or unlikely to improve their situation. It is therefore hypothesised that voice climate, and in particular efficacy and safety, will be negatively related to exit.

Work engagement, characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption; and affective commitment, characterised by feeling involved and emotionally attached to the organisation, are conceptually distinct but interrelated constructs. Employees may feel engaged because of their attachment to the company or committed because of their engagement. Both work engagement and employee commitment have, however, long being established as antecedents of employee neglect (Deniz, Noyan, & Ertosun, 2013) and exit (Ram & Prabhakar, 2011); and neglect, a determinant of employees' decision to exit organisations (Si & Li, 2012). The path model outlined in Figure 1 proposes that positive voice climate perceptions increase employees' engagement and commitment, which in turn reduces employee neglect and exit intentions.

Method

Participants

The sample ($N = 119$) included 94 females and 24 males (with one participant not reporting their gender), and ranged in age from 18 to 64 years ($M_{age} = 36$, $SD = 14$). Participants included full-time (51%), part-time (16%), casual (26%), and contracted (3%) employees, with 3% unspecified. Approximately 23% of the participants were employed in a manager or supervisor position. Participants were employed in a number of organisations, based primarily in Western Australia. The majority of participants worked in either government departments (62%) or retail (25%) for an average of 5 years ($SD = 6.19$).

Procedure

Participants were invited to complete an anonymous online questionnaire using the following strategies: an advertisement in an Australian university alumni newsletter, a direct email request to the researchers' personal contacts, or an online 'Subject Pool', through which university students were credited 30 minutes of research participation towards their course requirements. All participants were in employment. Ethics approval was granted by the university's Human Ethics Committee and participant consent provided.

Measures

Voice climate. The study combined two previous voice climate measures, bringing together the three components of voice climate: encouragement, safety, and efficacy (Frazier, 2009; Morrison et al., 2011) and used a response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

The encouragement component was measured with Frazier's (2009) six-item voice climate measure and items included: 'Employees here are encouraged to speak up with new ideas or changes in procedures' and 'Employees here are encouraged to keep well informed about issues where our opinions might be useful to the group'. The six-item safety and six-item efficacy components of voice climate were measured with an adapted version of Morrison et al.'s (2011) voice climate measure. Examples of safety items included: 'Employees can get involved in issues that affect the quality of their work-life, without fear of reprimand or reprisal' and 'Employees can safely speak up and get others involved in issues that affect the group, without fear of reprimand or reprisal'. Efficacy items included: 'It is worthwhile for employees to develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect the group' and 'It is worthwhile for employees to communicate their opinions about work issues, even if those opinions are different and others disagree'.

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Affective organisational commitment. Allen and Meyer's (1990) affective organisational commitment scale was modified to reduce the overall questionnaire length by selecting the five items with the strongest factor loadings, as reported by Allen and Meyer (1990). Items included 'I feel like "part of the family" at my organisation' and 'This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me', rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Work engagement. The nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Seppala et al., 2008) with a response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) was used. Items included 'At my work, I feel that I am bursting with energy' and 'I am immersed in my work'.

Neglect. The study used the five neglect items from Hagedoorn et al.'s (1999) 'five categories of responses to problematic events'. Items included 'Now and then, do not put enough effort into your work' and 'Come in late because you do not feel like working'. The response scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Neglect was the only scale with a reliability coefficient below the generally acceptable level of .70 (Bernardi, 1994). Removal of the item 'Miss out on meetings because you do not feel like attending them', which had a total item correlation below .3, resulted in an increase in Cronbach's alpha to .67.

Exit. The six exit items from Hagedoorn et al.'s (1999) 'five categories of responses to problematic events' were used. Items included 'Actively look for a job elsewhere within your field' and 'Intend to change employers', using a response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Results

Data Analysis

Common method. Self-report items using similar response formats have the potential to inflate the interrelationships between measures. If a substantial amount of common method variance is present, either (a) a single factor will emerge from the factor analysis, or (b) one general factor will account for the majority of the covariance among the variables (e.g., Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Aulakh & Gencturk, 2000; Krishnan, Martin, & Noorderhaven, 2006; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Principal components factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation with SPSS v21.0 identified seven factors with Eigen values greater than 1.19, which accounted for 72% percent of the total variance. The first factor did not account for the majority of the variance (36%) and Harman's single factor test, which forces all items to load onto one factor (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), did not account for the majority of variance (36%), thus no general factor arising from common method is apparent.

Principal Component Analysis of Voice Climate. To investigate the underlying structure of the 18-item measure of voice climate, data were subjected to principal component analysis with direct oblimin rotation to allow for the factors to be intercorrelated, which would be expected given that all three factors are hypothesised to be lower order facets of voice climate. Three components with Eigen values exceeding 1 explained 82% of the variance. All items loaded on their expected components and none of the items had cross-loadings above .30.

Each factor is represented by six items, which is above the recommended minimum of four to five items per factor for small samples (Marsh & Hau, 1999; Marsh, Hau, Balla, & Grayson, 1998). The sample size allows for a ratio of 6.6 responses per item, which is in the lower bound range of 5 or 10 recommended in the literature (Mueller, 1996; Nunnally, 1978), and communality is also high, with only one item dropping below .8 (Costello & Osborne, 2005).

Normality. Analyses of skewness and kurtosis via AMOS 21.0 indicated that all variables were sufficiently normally distributed, with the exception of Voice Climate Self-Efficacy (Kurtosis = 4.075, critical ratio = 9.07). To address this, bootstrap analyses (250) were run and the Bollen-Stine *p*-value is reported alongside the results of the path analyses. No strong evidence was found, and given the relatively high tolerances of path analysis it would have been unlikely to interfere with the interpretation of results (Osborne & Waters, 2002). The ratio of 17 cases per predictor is slightly greater than the 15 recommended by Stevens (2009) and substantively larger than the minimum of 5 suggested by Bentler and Chou (1987).

Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha and Pearson's correlation coefficients for all the scales and subscales are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Intercorrelations supported the hypotheses that all three components of voice climate would be positively associated with organisational commitment, work engagement and neglect. Efficacy was not, however, more strongly associated with neglect than encouragement. Encouragement and safety were also negatively associated with exit, but efficacy did not have a statistically significant association.

Path analysis using AMOS 21.0 was used to test the model proposed in Figure 1. Non-significant pathways were excluded and the final model with standardised parameter estimates is presented in Figure 2. Indices of fit suggest a good approximation to the data ($\chi^2 = 9.359$, $p = .228$; CFI = .992; IFI = 1.001; NFI = .969, RMSEA = .053). Bootstrap analyses using 250 samples identified a mean chi-squared of 10. 489, SE = .330; Bollen-Stine $p = .606$. Unstandardised regression weights, standard errors and critical ratios for the regression weights are presented in Table 4; estimates

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TABLE 1
Direct Oblimin Rotated Pattern Matrix of the 18-Item Voice Climate Measure

	Safety	Efficacy	Encourage
Employees can communicate opinions about work issues with others without fear of reprimand or reprisal.	0.97		
Employees can safely speak up and get others involved in issues that affect the group.	0.97		
Employees can develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect the group.	0.94		
Employees can safely speak up with new ideas or changes in procedures.	0.95		
Employees can get involved in issues that affect the quality of their work-life.	0.90		
Employees can keep well informed about issues where their opinions might be useful to the group.	0.85		
It is worthwhile for employees to keep well informed about issues where their opinions might be useful.		0.92	
It is worthwhile employees speaking up with new ideas or changes in procedures.		0.91	
It is worthwhile for employees to develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect the group.		0.91	
It is worth employees getting involved in issues that affect the quality of life here at work.		0.91	
It is worthwhile for employees to communicate their opinions about work issues.		0.91	
It is worthwhile employees speaking up and getting others involved in issues that affect the group.		0.91	
Employees here are encouraged to speak up and get others involved in issues that affect the group.			0.91
Employees here are encouraged to communicate opinions about work issues with others.			0.88
The employees in my work section are encouraged to get involved in issues that affect the quality.			0.84
The employees in my work section are encouraged to speak up with new ideas or changes in procedures.			0.84
Employees here are encouraged to develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect the group.			0.84
The employees in my work section are encouraged to keep well informed about issues where our opinions might be. Useful.			0.70
Percentage of variance	49.67%	22.33%	9.60%

Note: Factor loadings less than .30 were removed.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for All Scales

	Mean	*SD*	Variance	SEM	Cronbach's alpha
1. VC-Encouragement	4.55	1.38	1.90	0.28	.92
2. VC-Safety	4.86	1.54	2.38	0.17	.97
3. VC-Efficacy	5.76	1.10	1.21	0.20	.96
4. Affective Commitment	4.30	1.48	2.18	0.32	.90
5. Work Engagement	4.59	1.12	1.25	0.35	.88
6. Neglect	2.42	1.09	1.49	0.57	.67
7. Exit	3.44	1.64	2.70	0.33	.89

Note: VC = Voice Climate.

of bias from the bootstrap analysis ranged from .007 to −.01.

The path analysis indicated that the relationships between voice climate encouragement and efficacy, and voice climate encouragement and neglect were fully mediated by work engagement. Furthermore, affective organisation commitment, while being strongly correlated with neglect and exit, did not predict additional variance above and beyond work engagement. The path analysis also suggests that work engagement fully mediates the relationship between voice climate encouragement and exit, and partially mediates the relationship between voice climate efficacy and exit, while voice climate safety is directly associated with exit.

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TABLE 3

Intercorrelations Between Voice Climate and Organisational Outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. VC-Encouragement	–	.64**	.29**	.70**	.63**	−.29**	−.40**
2. VC-Safety		–	.29**	.54**	.47**	−.22*	−.40**
3. VC-Efficacy			–	.24**	.39**	−.19*	−.11
4. Affective Commitment				–	.74**	−.21*	−.44**
5. Work Engagement					–	−.37**	−.59**
6. Neglect						–	.51**
7. Exit							–

Note: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$.

TABLE 4

Unstandardised Regressions, Standard Errors and Critical Ratio for the Variables in the Final Model

	Estimate	SE	CR
VC-Encouragement to Work Engagement	.46	.06	7.97
VC-Efficacy to Work Engagement	.21	.06	3.39
VC-Encouragement to Affective Commitment	.75	.07	10.67
Work Engagement to Neglect	−.41	.09	−4.32
Work Engagement to Exit	−.68	.11	−6.26
Neglect to Exit	.46	.10	4.64

Note: VC = Voice Climate.

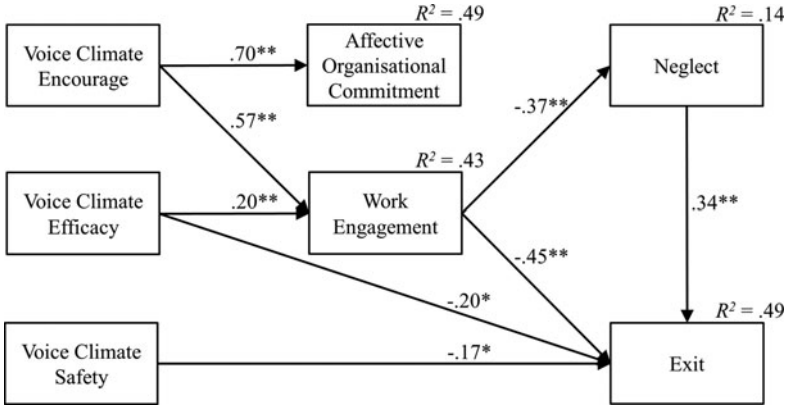


FIGURE 2

Path model of the relationships between voice climate, engagement, commitment, neglect and exit.

The strongest correlation was 0.74 and the strongest standardised regression coefficient was 0.70, with all paths in the hypothesised direction indicating that multicollinearity was not an issue (Garson, 2012).

Discussion

The results of this study supported the conceptualisation of voice climate as multidimensional and the hypothesis that positive voice climate perceptions promote improvements in work-related outcomes. This study adds support to the notion that perceptions of voice climate are complex, and involves an awareness of the extent to which voice behaviour is supported by the organisation, and the respective costs and benefits of voice behaviour (Farndale et al., 2011; Frazier, 2009; Morrison et al., 2011).

Voice Climate and the Work-Related Outcomes

The current study provides support for the hypotheses that employees working in organisations with positive voice climates are likely to have higher levels of affective commitment and work engagement, and are less likely to neglect their work duties or leave their job. These findings add weight to the idea that organisations can significantly benefit by ensuring that work climates are facilitative of employee voice behaviour (Allen & Tuselmann,

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2009; Anshoo, 2011; Farndale et al., 2011; Wuesterwald, 2012).

The finding that affective organisational commitment was most strongly associated with voice climate supports previous research (Farndale et al., 2011; Vakola & Bouradas, 2005). Specifically, this study found that encouragement of voice behaviour was most strongly associated with affective commitment. In other words, voice climates perceived as being supportive of employees speaking out facilitate employees' emotional attachment to the organisation. The path analyses suggested that this relationship may hold regardless of whether voice is effective in facilitating change; however, the cross-sectional nature of the current study precludes this interpretation.

The strong link between voice climate and affective organisational commitment is noteworthy for employers, as high levels of affective commitment have been associated with increases in job satisfaction, retention, motivation, performance, and quality of work (Park & Rainey, 2007). This study also found that voice climate encouragement and efficacy are predictive of work engagement. In other words, employees' engagement to their jobs is associated by the extent to which employees feel supported to contribute and whether their contributions will be effective. To a large extent, these findings parallel the work on employee empowerment (Gelfand, Fulmer, & Severance, 2011; Stajkovic, Lee, & Nyberg, 2009) and aligns with ownership theory (O'Driscoll et al., 2006).

It is also noteworthy in this study that employees who are engaged with their jobs' roles, tasks, and working environments are less likely to withdraw and consider leaving the organisation. In other words, voice climate arguably has an indirect relationship with important behavioural outcomes operating via work engagement to reduce neglect and exit.

In order to affect organisational outcomes, interventions focusing on improving employees' voice climate perceptions need to address and manage each of the components. For example, employees may appreciate not being reprimanded for speaking up, but may still feel discouraged from doing so, or perceive that doing so tends not to be effective. These findings suggest that organisational mechanisms such as grievance systems, meetings, and open door policies may be limited in their ability to improve voice climate perceptions alone. Employees are likely to be aware of the extent to which some channels may be unsafe or ineffective and may be particularly influenced by the extent to which they feel encouraged to utilise different mechanisms (Allen & Tuselmann, 2009; Farndale et al., 2011; Landau, 2009; Morrison et al., 2011; Withey & Cooper, 1989).

While the analyses did not find any strong evidence for common method and multicollinearity, the small sample size necessitates that the results of this study be interpreted with caution. More research is needed before the result can be generalised more broadly, although there is strong theoretical support for the multidimensional conceptualisation of voice climate. Longitudinal analysis has already identified the possibility of lag effects of voice climate on behaviour (Travis et al., 2011) and future research is needed to examine the longitudinal and causal pathways using a multidimensional conceptualisation of voice climate (Flanders, Lin, Pirkie, & Caudill, 1992) while considering alternate methods of measurement and the efficacy of interventions. For example, these results suggest that it is more important for employers to encourage voice behaviour and ensure it is actioned, than to focus solely on ensuring employees feel voice behaviour is safe in targeting high levels of employee neglect. Utilisation of this multidimensional conceptualisation of voice climate by researchers may ensure measures are broad enough to provide accurate insights into all aspects of voice climate and thereby increase the accuracy of hypotheses regarding the antecedents and consequences of voice climate perceptions.

Conclusion

This study provides support for a multidimensional conceptualisation of voice climate perceptions and the idea that, individually and as a whole, these components are strongly related to the work-related outcomes, affective organisational commitment, work engagement, neglect, and exit. These findings add weight to the idea that organisations can benefit by ensuring that work climates are facilitative of employee voice behaviour and particularly by encouraging and acting on employees contributions. This research may assist employers in understanding how their organisation's voice climate is linked to work-related outcomes that could have implications for the costs associated with lower productivity experienced via neglect and disengagement, as well as replacement costs associated with rehiring and training (O'Connell & Kung, 2007).

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