

# **Voice within the Union:**

## **Relationship of Leader, Status and Voice behavior**

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### **Abstract**

Member's participation is crucial for the survival of trade unions. However, little attention has been paid to voice within trade union, while plenty of voice literatures have been studied in organizational behavior. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to uncover the relationship with leaders, organizational support and member's voice behavior. Also, we will attempt to explore mediating roles of felt obligation for constructive change at the individual- level of voice mechanism under the union-context.

Major result of this study will be to find out positive relationship between Authentic leadership and member's voice behavior, as regarding to mobilization theory (H1). Also, we will exam potential

positive relationship between perceived insider status and member's voice behavior, by applying organizational support theory (H2). Moreover, in order to find out antecedent of union member's voice behavior, we will consider felt obligation for constructive change as playing mediating role of this mechanism. (i.e. felt obligation for constructive change as mediator of authentic leadership and voice behavior (H3), and as mediator of PIS and voice behavior (H4))

The implication of this study is to find out that union leadership and organization supports are antecedent of members' voice behavior via felt obligation for constructive change. Union should recognize importance of voice and try to make better climate to encourage member's voice, by using leader and organizational supports. Consequently, voice within the union should be encouraged, and so is voice research in union-context as well.

Keywords: Voice, Authentic leadership, Perceived insider status, Trade Union

## **Introduction**

Trade union is the most representative collective voice mechanism in the organization literature. For the purpose of developing bargaining power with employers, however, research about voice within unions has been undermined. Questions have consistently been raised on whether traditional forms of unions can represent their members. Hyman (1997) argued that unions disproportionately represent the interests of skilled and white male workers, while not representing the interests of low-waged female workers. It was also pointed out in Korea that traditional unions have been operated in a system where the interests of regular and male workers of large companies are mainly represented (Park & Kim, 2016). With the advent of globalization and neoliberalism, demand for a flexible labor market is increasing, thereby causing a sweeping change in the labor-management relationship around the world. Among the many changes widely observed across the globe, one of the most noteworthy phenomena

is the increase in diversity of labor forces, and the consequently different voice arising within union.

Union participation is crucial for the survival of trade unions. Participation is a necessary channel of communication if members are to express their concerns to the leadership (Barling et al., 1992). Furthermore, participation can also be seen as a measure of union strength and efficiency (Fosh, 1993). Given the decline in unionization over the last few decades in most developed countries, research in the area of union participation is critical. Several authors (Barling et al., 1992., Fosh, 1993; Hyman, 1984) have explored the notion that union renewal is possible through workplace activism. Fosh (1993) contended that 'local leaders, by their ability to lead in a way that encourages members to become involved . . . can build upon surges of participation and interest, thus increasing the strength of workplace unionism'. Frustration-aggression theory, such as exit-voice and loyalty, suggests that members will either participate (exhibit voice) or leave the union when they are dissatisfied with the services provided by that union. This approach have been tested using agents (i.e. union) as voice but have not been examined within unions as the organization in question. In this regard, this study concluded that academic research is needed on union member's voices that have been taking root as a new trends by expanding the scope of the employment relationship. In order to determine antecedents of member's voices, roles of leaders and organizations will be analyzed. There has been no in-depth research conducted on union member's voice at the individual level in Korea and abroad, so this research is expected to be used later in developing theoretical characteristics including the roles and functions of micro-voice mechanism in the trade unions.

Trade unions must listen to the voices of members more than organization (i.e. employer and company in general cases). In organizational behavior research, variety of voice literatures have been studied, whereas in industrial relations field, voice within union has not done much at the individual level. Therefore, this study will attempt to explore the antecedent of the voice of the individual in the trade union.

## **Theoretical Background and Hypothesis**

### ***Mobilization Theory: authentic leadership and voice behavior***

That Kelly's book "Rethinking Industrial Relations" has been well-read is without doubt. It has been cited over 1,400 times in scholarly writings since its publication. Kelly's mobilization theory identifies under which conditions 'individuals are transformed into collective actors willing and able to create and sustain collective organization and engage in collective action against their employer' (1998). The book then outlines a theory of how that collective organization and action takes place, and the opportunities and constraints presented by the wider context. Mobilization theory helps to explain how and why collective action is frequently brought about by a small number of activists 'who play a crucial role in promoting a sense of grievance, generating group cohesion and using and legitimizing collective activity against a relevant target' (Kelly, 1998). In particular, transformational leaders are able to activate social identities and get subordinates to behave in a manner consistent with that identity. Fantasia's (1988) study of wildcat disputes illustrates the importance of leaders in playing this role.

Mobilization theory (interactionist theory) suggests that active, involved and responsive union leaders are necessary to encourage collective action. A responsive leadership can act upon perceptions of injustice in the workplace and encourage greater levels of participation (Kelly, 1998). This study lends some support to this theory. Interestingly, high levels of authentic leadership combined with leader responsiveness lead to individuals participating in their union. Framed within a cost-benefit analysis, this may be seen to reduce the psychological cost of participation and increase its efficacy, particularly in the context of good leadership.

The authentic leadership concept is relatively new, but there have been several empirical studies linking authentic leadership with work attitudes and outcomes, but very few in health care. Positive relationships between authentic leadership and performance, organizational citizenship behavior

(Walumbwa et al. 2008), psychological empowerment, trust in management (Walumbwa et al. 2010), organizational commitment, and work engagement have been shown using samples from various fields. One implicit assumption of research exploring the authentic leadership theory is that, once developed, the quality of authentic leadership remains relatively stable. The ethical and performance challenges inherent to the current, turbulent work environment have called for a new approach to leadership. Accordingly, OB literatures have highlighted the importance of authentic leadership or the degree to which leaders remain “true to the self.” Authentic leadership in the workplace occurs when leaders enact their true selves and is manifest in behaviors such as being honest with oneself (e.g., admitting personal mistakes), being sincere with others (e.g., telling others the hard truth), and behaving in a way that reflects one’s personal values (Walumbwa et al, 2008). Avolio and Gardner (2005) posited that these authentic leader behaviors lead to follower performance outcomes that are sustainable in the current, unstable work environment.

Previous research has confirmed that authentic leadership is related to follower performance and organizational citizenship behaviors (Walumbwa et al., 2008) through the mechanisms of follower identification with the supervisor or organization and follower feelings of empowerment. Furthermore, prior research has shown that authentic leadership relates to group performance and group organizational citizenship behaviors through the mechanisms of group trust and group positive psychological capital. This mechanism are expected to be magnified on union-context as well. By applying integration of authentic leadership theory and Mobilization theory, we can expect that the relationship with union officials (and executives) will have influence on member's behavior. Result of authentic leadership research in the OB field will potentially describes how Authentic leadership will have positive impact on members' voice. Therefore, we predict:

*H1: Authentic leadership is positively related to member’s voice behavior*

### ***Social exchange theory and Perceived insider status***

Researchers have long discussed the relationship that develops between an individual employee and his or her work organization. One way to conceptualize this relationship is through the exchanges that occur between organizations and employees. Blau's (1964) social exchange theory is based on the presumption that employment relationships can go beyond a simple economic exchange agreement. Social exchange relationships are based on the promise of reciprocation (Blau, 1964), and the details of the exchange are sometimes unspecified. Under social exchange, employees may rely on relational trust, whereby they will contribute effort beyond that required by the job with the expectation that they will be rewarded sometime in the future.

The definition of perceived insider status was the extent to which employees perceive themselves to be organization insiders (versus outsiders) (Stamper & Masterson, 2002). It represents a sense that employees have earned a "personal space" and acceptance inside their work organization. The perception of belonging to an organization is based on the presence of boundaries that differentiate ingroup individuals from out-group employees. Masterson and Stamper (2003) indicated that these boundaries help employees who are insiders to create a personal space within the organization, resulting in a belief that they are free to share relevant needs and feelings with other insiders, creating feelings of intimacy. Furthermore, this intimacy translates into a sense of perceived acceptance by other insiders. Thus, perceived insider status is an indicator of a sense of belonging to the community of the work organization, which is one aspect of the relationship that exists between the organization and the employee (Masterson & Stamper, 2003).

The way to create a distinction between insider and outsider employees using social exchange is for the organization to offer different rewards or inducements to the two groups. Based on inducements and contributions theory (March & Simon, 1958), these workers should then feel obligated to contribute more work and effort to the organization than would workers not receiving such

opportunities, such as part-time employees. As this inducement–contribution cycle continues, it creates a differential in the treatment of workers, resulting in the perception that some employees are more valuable to the organization and others are more expendable, i.e., that some are organizational insiders, and others are outsiders. To summarize, organizations that promote the distinction between insider and outsider employees may use inducements such as benefits, training, and promotions to send signals to certain employees that they have achieved insider status (and subsequently send signals to employees who do not receive these inducements that they are outsiders). By applying organizational support perspective on trade union, we can also expect that perceived insider status will have influence on member's behavior as well. Result of OB literature will potentially describe how PIS will have positive impact on members' voice.

Therefore, we predict:

*H2: Perceived insider status is positively related to member's voice behavior*

### ***Felt obligation for constructive change as mediating roles***

Based on the mobilization literature (interactionist theory) (Kelly, 1998), which argues that leaders are necessary to trigger perceived injustices at the workplace, we can expect that leader responsiveness will influence on union participation. This can then be extended to argue that relationship with leader will increase participation (i.e. voice in this study), by increasing employees felt obligation for constructive change. Felt obligation for constructive change are expected to be high in this context as mobilization theory predicts that mobilization will occur where the union is perceived to be a good agent for change. This is more likely where there is high authentic leadership.

In keeping with the argument that employees need sufficient confidence to overcome their fear of engaging in voice, personal skill has been described as a key source of felt obligation for constructive

change (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Therefore, this study hypothesizes that the relationship between authentic leadership and employees' voice behavior is mediated by felt obligation for constructive change. Initially, authentic leadership is positively related to felt obligation for constructive change. Felt obligation for constructive change influences the extent to which employees are committed to developing new procedures and correcting problems in their organization (Fuller et al., 2006; Morrison & Phelps, 1999). In particular, employees experiencing higher levels of felt obligation for constructive change are more likely to perceive speaking up as a positive means of caring for their organization and thus are more likely to engage in voice as "responsible citizens" of the organization.

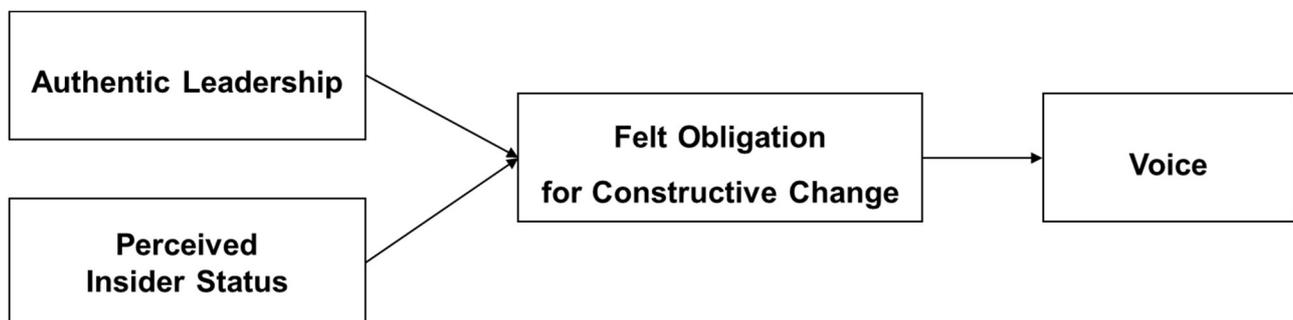
Doing so constitutes one way for these employees to reciprocate the organization's supportiveness and maintain a high-quality exchange relationship with it. In contrast, those experiencing low levels of felt obligation for constructive change are less likely to feel obliged to perform voice behavior because they are less committed to helping the organization in this way. In keeping with this reasoning, past empirical work has demonstrated support for the importance of felt obligation for constructive change as a psychological state leading to the performance of voice and other discretionary, change-oriented behaviors (Fuller et al., 2006; Morrison & Phelps, 1999) Based on these previous studies, we can expect that felt obligation for constructive change is an important antecedent of voice behavior, and this will be applying to union context as well. Therefore, we predict:

*H3: Felt obligation for constructive change will mediate the relationship between Authentic leadership and member's voice behavior*

*H4: Felt obligation for constructive change will mediate the relationship between Perceived insider status and member's voice behavior*

Based on the theoretical arguments presented above, this study built a conceptual model to understand the inner mechanism in terms of how dyadic factor of authentic leadership and organizational factor of perceived insider status influence union members' voice behavior via felt obligation for constructive change.

Figure 1. Theoretical model



## Methods

### *Sample*

As this research idea was inspired by recent news regarding the voice behavior of trade union, this study will be carried out in that realm. Data will be collected via a self-administered questionnaire. A sample of approximately 200 union-members, preferably those who work in the same company in South Korea, will be asked to complete the questionnaire. In an attempt to reflect the characteristics of the trade-union in general, the participants will range in age from 25 to 60, and the ratio of male and female participants will be similar.

## ***Measurements***

This study will adapt existing measurements to ensure validity, while some questionnaire items will be modified to match the study context. In order to properly measure the variables mentioned in the previous hypothesis framework, 34 questionnaire items will be used.

The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) (Avolio et al. 2007) was used to measure union member' perception of manager authentic leadership. The ALQ is divided into four subscales, based on the four authentic components: relational transparency, balanced processing, self-awareness, and internalized moral perspective. Confirmatory factor analysis has supported the four dimensions of the ALQ (Walumbwa et al. 2008). Each subscale was averaged to produce a total scale score between 0–4 with higher scores representative of higher levels of authenticity. Acceptable internal consistency has been consistently reported, as evident by Cronbach's alphas ranging from 0.70–0.90 (Walumbwa et al. 2008). On the survey, union-member will be asked to rate their perceptions of their union officials or executives, who was defined as the leader of unit where they worked the majority of their time.

Perceived organizational support will be assessed by union members. Stamper and Masterson's (2002) short version with four items will be used to measure perceived insider status. Sample items were "I feel very much a part of my work organization" and "My work organization makes me believe that I am included in it." Responses were obtained on a scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree).

Felt obligation for constructive change will be measured using the 7-item scale developed by Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, and Rhoades (2001). Felt obligation scale will be used to reflect an employee's desire to repay his or her organization by acting for organizational improvement and change. Eisenberger and colleagues' (2001) scale captured employees' general felt obligation to repay their organization, whereas our adaptation captured the extent to which employees felt obligated to repay their organization through generating constructive change. Sample items include "I owe it to

the organization to do whatever I can to come up with ideas/solutions to achieve its goal." and "I would feel an obligation to take time from my personal schedule to generate ideas/solutions for the organization if it is needed." Responses will be obtained on a scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree) by union members.

Voice behavior will be evaluated using the 10-item scale developed by Liang et al. (2012). Sample items include "He/she proactively develops and makes suggestions for issues that may influence the unit" and "He/she advises other colleagues against undesirable behaviors that would hamper our union performance." Responses will be obtained on a scale ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 5 (= strongly agree).

As control variables, gender was assessed as a basic demographic control variable that could potentially affect voice (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998), so this study will control employees' gender. Drawing on the work of Morrison et al. (2011), employees with longer dyadic tenure may feel more comfortable speaking up than newcomers. Therefore, we also chose dyadic tenure as a control variable.

## **Expected Outcomes**

Four hypotheses proposed in this study are expected to be adopted. Based on mobilization theory, this study expects significant result for hypothesis 1, which indicates that Authentic leadership will be positively related to member's voice behavior. It has already been proved in the previous organizational behavior literature. This study expects that the relationship between Authentic leadership and member's voice behavior will be positive in union-context as well. For hypothesis 2, related to organizational support theory, this study expect significant result of that perceived insider status will be positively related to member's voice behavior. Lastly, we can expect that felt obligation for constructive change is an important antecedent of voice behavior, and this will be applying to union context as well. Therefore, this study also expects significant outcomes of hypothesis 3 that felt

obligation for constructive change will mediate the relationship between Authentic leadership and member's voice behavior, and hypothesis 4 that felt obligation for constructive change will mediate the relationship between Perceived insider status and member's voice behavior.

## **Conclusion**

This research provides many implications and contributions as follows. First, one of the major theoretical contributions is to Kelly's mobilization theory, which promotes member's participation of members by improving opportunities of their voices. Encouragement of union participation is essential for the revitalization of trade unions. This study also contributes to the authentic leadership and organizational support literature. It is meaningful that expanding existing business organization-centered authentic leadership and PIS research to union-context. For instance, the relationship quality of supervisor-subordinates will be extended to union official-members. Finally, this paper contributes to the voice literature. From the point of OB perspective, it is significant to attempt generalization by extending to union-context. From the IR perspective, this study describes how leader and organizational support encourage individual level of voice in trade union. In addition, it is also important to find out mediating role of felt obligation for constructive change.

Practically, from the working-level aspect, this research indicates that traditional labor unions should pay more attention to member's voices. In recent years, the unionization rate has continued to decline and employee's interest representation gap has increased. Whether trade unions represent workers' interests have been questioned. At this time, this study gives signal to focus more attention on the voice of their union members. Second, voice can be seen as a new indicator of union performance. In the past, union organization rate and collective bargaining rate were considered as group level, and union satisfaction and participation level were regarded as individual level performance index. However, this has limitations in interpreting the results of various perspectives of

union performance. From this study, it is possible to measure how union are democratic and how union members are represented by union members' voice behaviors.

The implication of this study is to find out that union leadership and organization supports are antecedent of members' voice behavior via felt obligation for constructive change. Union should recognize importance of voice and try to make better climate to encourage member's voice, by using leader and organizational supports. Consequently, voice within the union should be encouraged, and so is voice research in union-context as well.

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