Innovation strategy, voice practices, employee voice participation, and organizational innovation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of voice practices—formal practices designed to provide employees with opportunities to have a voice—in enhancing organizational innovation. We distinguish between promotive and prohibitive voice practices and extend the distinction to the systemic process level of analysis. Leveraging the contingency and behavioral perspectives, we propose that voice practices (both promotive and prohibitive) mediate the relationship between innovation strategy and organizational innovation, a link mediated by employee voice participation, indicating a two-step mediation process. Our investigation of this two-step mediation model using a national sample of Canadian employers supports our research model. This study shows that managerial actions to enhance employee voice can add value by supporting organizational innovation.

1. Introduction

Employee voice—a set of individual discretionary behaviors to articulate their ideas, opinions, and suggestions in the workplace—can stimulate organizational innovation by challenging the status quo and improving organizational processes (Budd, Gollan, & Wilkinson, 2010; Milliken, Schipani, Bishara, & Prado, 2015; Morrison, 2011; Satterstrom, Kerrissey, & DiBenigno, 2021). Significant progress has been made at the individual and group levels of analysis, where employee voice is usually treated as a set of individual discretionary behaviors (Kaufman, 2015; Wilkinson & Barry, 2016). Researchers have recognized different forms of individual employee voice over a range of dimensions, including the motives for voice behavior (Klaas, Olson-Buchanan, & Ward, 2012) and the content of voice behavior (Burris, Rockmann, & Kimmons, 2017; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Researchers also reported that individual employee voice positively affects employees' innovative behaviors in the workplace (for a review, see Morrison (2011)).

However, several researchers have criticized this approach for treating the voice concept as an individual choice at the individual level without linking it to organizational level strategies, policies, and practices (Kaufman, 2015; Wilkinson & Barry, 2016). Thus, researchers call for an integrative approach that considers the process by which organizational voice *practices* can harness ideas, opinions, and suggestions voiced by employees (de Azevedo, Schlosser, & McPhee, 2020; Kaufman, 2015; Kwon & Farndale, 2020; Lind & Kulik, 2009), although little research has been conducted from this perspective.

The current study investigates whether and how voice practices designed to harness employees' ideas, opinions, and suggestions can bring organizational innovation as intended (Colovic & Williams, 2020; Kaya, Abubakar, Behravesh, Yildiz, & Mert, 2020). Voice practices may be key predictors of organizational innovation because they are fundamentally designed to give organizational members opportunities to challenge the status quo, initiate organizational change, and facilitate knowledge-sharing (Chen & Huang, 2009; Guzman & Espejo, 2019; Kianto, Sáenz, & Aramburu, 2017). However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has examined whether voice practices contribute to organizational innovation across firms nor identified the processes and conditions through which voice practices best support firm innovation. Our study addresses these recognized gaps and contributes to calls to build an integrated understanding of employee voice management (Felin, Foss, & Ployhart, 2015; Kwon & Farndale, 2020; Ployhart & Hale,

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2014; Seeck & Diehl, 2017).

In developing research hypotheses, we follow prior studies that suggest understanding management practices as organizational communication channels through which employers can send consistent, strong messages from management to employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). First, in alignment with the behavioral perspective (e.g., ability–motivation–opportunity model), we propose that employee voice participation is a key linkage between organizational voice practices and organizational outcomes (de Azevedo et al., 2020). Second, despite decades of studies on "strategic" human resource management (HRM), empirical support for the interaction between business strategy and management practices has been mixed (Jackson, Schuler, & Jiang, 2014). We revisit the contingency perspective on the role business strategy plays in the link between management practices and organizational innovation by conceptualizing voice practices as a sub-system influenced by the broader organizational decision to pursue an innovation-focused business strategy (hereafter, innovation strategy). This conceptualization underlies our suggested two-step mediation process linking innovation strategy to organizational innovation via the development of voice practices and, subsequently, higher levels of employee voice participation. We test our hypotheses using longitudinal survey data from Canada, an individualistic and egalitarian society where individuals tend to speak up more freely (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Kwon & Farndale, 2020). Overall, our study provides an empirical response to several calls, including the need to re-examine the relationship between business strategy and management practices (Jackson et al., 2014). Our study also addresses the need for a greater understanding of how voice practices function to produce organizational-level outcomes like organizational innovation (Jiang, Takeuchi, & Lepak, 2013).

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Individual employee voice

Morrison (2011) comprehensive definition of employee voice states that voice consists of the "discretionary communications of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning" (p. 375). Voice researchers have made many attempts to categorize different forms of voice over a range of dimensions (Klaas et al., 2012; Van Dyne et al., 2003), including the motives for voice behavior (Morrison, 2011) and the content of voice behavior (Burris et al., 2017). Most relevant to our discussion is the distinction made by Liang, Farh, and Farh (2012) between promotive voice and prohibitive voice. They defined promotive voice as "employees' expression of new ideas or suggestions for improving the overall functioning of their work unit or organization" (p. 74). Meanwhile, they defined prohibitive voice as "employees' expressions of concern about work practices, incidents, or employee behavior that are harmful to their organization" (p. 75). Promotive voice expresses ideas or suggestions intended to stimulate positive change by challenging the status quo (e.g., suggestions for improvement in a work unit), whereas prohibitive voice expresses concern about workplace events or features that may be harmful. Moreover, promotive voice is motivated by the desire to improve the organization, whereas prohibitive voice (e.g., the use of a grievance procedure) is motivated by the desire to draw attention to harmful factors in the organization and prevent their consequences (MacMillan, Hurst, Kelley, Howell, & Jung, 2020). Studies in this stream have shown, for example, that promotive voice, expressing ideas and suggestions intended to stimulate positive changes, may enhance employee task performance (e.g., Ng & Feldman, 2012), workgroup learning (Edmondson, 2003), and performance (e.g., MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Meanwhile, prohibitive voice, expressing concerns about organizational problems and issues (e.g., complaints and grievances), can undermine interpersonal

relationships and negatively influence performance evaluations (Klaas & DeNisi, 1989; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Research at the interpersonal level shows that prohibitive voice can be threatening to the receiver and thus is less effective than promotive voice for initiating organizational change (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Socio-emotional barriers impede the reception of prohibitive voice; hence, its content often does not reach key decision-makers (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014), except concerning topics related to loss prevention, such as safety (Li, Liao, Tangirala, & Firth, 2017). In teams, a positive mood may also enhance innovative capability (Mitchell, Boyle, & Nicholas, 2021).

2.2. Organizational voice practices

Despite the progress on understanding individual employee voice, relatively little is known about how to harness ideas, opinions, and suggestions voiced by individual employees (Kaufman, 2015; Wilkinson & Barry, 2016). This study focuses on organizational voice practices that we define as formal processes or procedures intended to provide employees with opportunities to engage in voice behaviors, thereby encouraging them to speak up. Formal voice-related practices are not new to the literature. For example, providing opportunities for employees to be involved in decision-making has been recognized as a key dimension of high-involvement work systems. However, unlike other sub-dimensions of high-involvement work systems (e.g., compensation, training, and staffing), the mechanisms explaining how voice practices result in organizational outcomes, like organizational innovation, have not been the subject of detailed investigation. Initial evidence suggests that employee voice mediates the relationship between such work systems and organizational innovation (Rasheed, Shahzad, Conroy, Nadeem, & Siddique, 2017). However, the difference in practices between firms where employees do or do not speak up has yet to be explained.

This study contributes to current knowledge by demonstrating that voice practices operate as communication or signaling mechanisms that "nudge" or encourage employees to participate in voice behavior and express the ideas and suggestions that ultimately lead to organizational innovation. This view is consistent with that of Bowen and Ostroff (2004), who proposed that management practices "can be viewed as communications from the employer to employee" (p. 207). They suggested that employers communicate their intentions regarding the employment relationship by implementing management practices. Employees engage in shared sense-making through social information processing to interpret the meaning of management practices, resulting in the development of shared attitudes and behaviors in response to management practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). Although most management practices deliver messages from the employer to employees, voice practices are also intended to send messages from employees to the employer by providing them with input channels for voice (Rees, Alfes, & Gatenby, 2013). Therefore, voice practices can be viewed as a means of unearthing key employee insights and concerns to improve the quality of organizational decision-making. Meanwhile, employees' unsolicited voice behaviors constitute a "push" strategy of agentic communication on behalf of employees (Satterstrom et al., 2021; Volery & Tarabashkina, 2021). Voice practices are a systemic or "pull" strategy designed to prompt constructive communication with employees (de Azevedo et al., 2020). They function as communication channels of varying degrees of formality (Della Torre, Gritti, & Salimi, 2021) that reduce the effort in speaking up and strengthen employee perceptions that the firm desires their input for problem-solving and decision-making.

Moreover, corresponding to the two recognized types of voice behaviors (i.e., promotive and prohibitive), voice related practices can be either promotive or prohibitive. Promotive voice practices are designed to elicit voice related to positive organizational changes (e.g., employee suggestion programs, problem-solving teams, and communities of practice). Meanwhile, prohibitive voice practices are designed to hear

workplace concerns, problems, and complaints (e.g., employee grievance procedures and appeal programs).

Promotive voice practices intended to receive ideas and suggestions for improvement are likely to foster organizational innovation (Liang et al., 2012). However, even prohibitive voice practices may be positively rather than negatively associated with organizational innovation at the organizational practice level. Unlike the dyadic interactions in expressing voice at the individual and interpersonal levels, organizational-level practices separate the content of prohibitive voice from the individuals who might feel threatened by it (Klaas & DeNisi, 1989; MacMillan et al., 2020). Therefore, formalizing the prohibitive voice process minimizes negative and defensive responses to news about problems (Burris, 2012; Morrison, 2014). In addition, providing formal channels for expressing a prohibitive voice is likely to enhance psychological safety for employees with concerns about organizational dysfunctions, thereby pulling information from individuals who might otherwise remain silent (Morrison, 2014). Moreover, in a formal prohibitive voice process, individuals outside the relevant event influence the decision about responding to the information, thereby limiting the potentially negative effects of defensiveness (Liang et al., 2012). In summary, we expect that both promotive and prohibitive voice practices will contribute positively to organizational innovation at the organizational system level. Furthermore, de Azevedo et al. (2020) case study with interview data demonstrated the role of a temporary HR event— a Think-A-Thon—in fostering employees' engagement in voluntary verbal inputs and innovative activities to develop the company. Our study extends their qualitative findings by applying quantitative investigations based on a large sample of organizations. In addition, this study explores voice practices that are broadly used as formal HR practices in organizations. Moreover, we focus on an organizational antecedent (business strategy) and an outcome (organizational innovation) of voice practices in addition to how employees react to voice practices.

2.3. Voice practices, employee voice participation, and organizational innovation

Organizational innovation is critical for business competitiveness and growth (Kaya et al., 2020). Thus, HRM researchers have commonly considered organizational innovation a key outcome of HRM practices (Chen & Huang, 2009; Seeck & Diehl, 2017). The underlying logic is that the innovative capacity of organizations lies in the employees' capabilities for innovation (AlNuaimi, Singh, & Harney, 2021), and HRM is related to the innovation process where employees generate and implement innovations (Seeck & Diehl, 2017; Singh, Gupta, Busso, & Kamboj, 2021).

Researchers have proposed and found that management practices providing voice channels (e.g., information sharing, participative work design, and problem-solving teams) can positively contribute to organizational innovation (e.g., Wood & Wall, 2007). Innovation relies on novel ideas that come from inside or outside the organization and result in implementing new or improved products, services, or processes. As structured mechanisms eliciting employee ideas, voice practices may play a key role in enabling organizational innovation (Chen & Huang, 2009; Kianto et al., 2017; McCabe & Lewin, 1992). Organizational innovation is also a proximal outcome of voice practices relative to firms' financial performance because they have more direct control over creating innovations than the business environment, economy, and senior management's decisions affecting firm financial outcomes (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Hence, we expect that the influence of employee voice on organizational innovation will be more direct than its influence on firm financial performance.

Furthermore, the behavioral perspective on strategic HRM suggests that employee attitudes and behaviors are key mediating variables explaining the link between management practices and organizational outcomes (Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009). According to the

behavioral perspective, the key mechanism linking HRM practices to organizational innovation is collective employee behavior that brings changes to the organization (Jeong & Shin, 2019).

As such, employees' participation in voice practices likely plays a crucial role in linking voice practices and organizational innovation (de Azevedo et al., 2020). For example, by encouraging employee participation, an organization can foster employee interactions, information sharing, and idea generation (Kesting et al., 2016). Consequently, the organization can achieve creative and innovative problem-solving through enhanced employee voice participation, mediating between voice practices and organizational innovation.

The success of communication systems relies on the enactment of organizational members (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992). Moreover, voice practices are *opportunities* for employees to facilitate firm innovation; thus, voice practices need to be enacted by employees. Voice practices provide channels for voice, and employees may feel an obligation for constructive change to help organizational functioning (Carnevale et al., 2020). Therefore, we predict that the effect of voice practices on firm organizational innovation is mediated by firm-level employee voice participation:

H1: Voice practices (both promotive and prohibitive) are positively associated with organizational innovation (H1A), a link that is mediated by employee voice participation (H1B).

2.4. Relationship between innovation strategy and voice practices

Strategic HRM theorizing has commonly argued that HRM practices must be aligned with a firm's overall business strategy to support organizational innovation (Jackson et al., 2014; Seeck & Diehl, 2017). This view is referred to as the contingency perspective and argues that management practices consistent with a firm's business strategy produce better outcomes than management practices that are not (Datta et al., 2005; De Winne & Sels, 2010; Han, Kang, Oh, Kehoe, & Lepak, 2019; Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989; Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009). Thus, an organization's practices and business strategy facilitate alignment between the external and internal business environments. In this regard, the underlying assumption is that decisions on management practices can be independent of strategic decisions; however, when aligned, they may create synergistic interactions (Jackson et al., 2014; Kilroy, Bosak, Flood, & Peccei, 2020). Under the contingency perspective, business strategy is typically regarded as a moderator of the relationship between management practices and organizational outcomes (Jackson et al., 2014). Thus, according to the contingency perspective, an innovation strategy will likely moderate the relationship between voice practices and organizational innovation.

However, a recent review that identified 14 studies testing this moderator effect showed inconsistent findings, thus providing "too little evidence and too few replications … to draw conclusions about how HRM systems and business strategies function together" (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 25). Those results suggest value in reconsidering the relationship between business strategy and management practices. Researchers often argue that the role of business strategy should be understood as a determinant of management practices instead of a constraint upon the linkage between management practices and outcomes. According to this perspective, organizations adopt specific types of management practices to implement their intended strategy effectively (e.g., Bae & Lawler, 2000; Camps & Luna-Arocas, 2009; Schuler & Jackson, 1987; Wright & McMahan, 1992). From this viewpoint, management practices function as a sub-system mediating the link between business strategy and firm performance. In a nested, interrelated set of systems and sub-systems, decisions about management practices are driven partly by choice of business strategy. Moreover, practices that do not support the strategy are likely to be modified over time as managers receive performance feedback.

This study examines the relationship between innovation strategy, voice practices, and organizational innovation. Different HRM practices

are configured to fit business strategies, and different business strategies stimulate different employee behaviors (Edgar, 2020; Jackson et al., 2014). Following Porter (1980) strategy typology, we expect that organizations with an innovation strategy that focuses on R&D, quality improvement, innovation, and technological leadership will implement more voice practices than organizations without a strong focus on innovation. Expending resources on voice practices (both promotive and prohibitive) supports firms' innovation strategy by generating ideas and suggestions from employees through those practices. Moreover, allowing employees to speak through voice practices can work as "a long-term mutual gain strategy" by building employee trust and commitment toward implementing innovation strategy (Hu & Jiang, 2018; Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2021).

Thus, we posit that an organization's voice practices—both promotive and prohibitive—are influenced by the degree to which firms pursue an innovation strategy. HRM researchers have proposed that HRM practices are a key mechanism for eliciting desired employee behaviors, which, in turn, contribute to the successful execution of business strategies (Edgar, 2020; Jackson et al., 2014). As argued above, firms pursuing an innovation strategy are more likely to benefit from investing in both voice practices and the resulting flow of employee ideas for change. Although both an innovation strategy and voice practices might affect organizational innovation directly, we expect that voice practices will mediate the influence of an innovation strategy on organizational innovation, and subsequently, by the enhanced employee voice participation resulting from those practices. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Voice practices (both promotive and prohibitive) mediate the relationship between innovation strategy and organizational innovation (H2A), a link that is mediated by employee voice participation (H2B), indicating a two-step mediation process.

Our research model considers the relationship between an innovation strategy, voice practices (promotive and prohibitive), employee voice participation, and organizational innovation (see Fig. 1).

3. Method

3.1. Sample

The hypotheses were examined using data from Statistics Canada's Workplace and Employee Survey (WES). The WES dataset (1999–2006) is a longitudinal, stratified sample of more than 6,000 Canadian businesses across various industries and locations. Measures from three consecutive years—T1 (2003), T2 (2004), and T3 (2005)—were used to allow for a lag effect between voice practices and organizational innovation.

These waves were selected considering the availability of the variables in the most recent data and one or two-year time lags between the implementation of management practices and organizational outcomes (Huselid & Becker, 1996). The WES dataset is a linked set of workplace (i.e., employer) and employee surveys. The workplace surveys were completed by a senior manager at each organization, whereas individual employees completed the employee surveys. The response rates for the workplace survey were 83.1% (T1), 81.7% (T2), and 77.7% (T3). Meanwhile, the response rates for the employee survey were 85.7% (T2). For inclusion in the final sample, organizations must have responded to the survey in all three years and not have missing data. These criteria resulted in a final sample of 4,230.[1] Per Statistics Canada requirements, a proportional weighting was used to reflect population

estimates.

Canada is an individualistic, democratic, and Western country with a strong tradition emphasizing individuals' freedom. Like the US, Canada has a well-established market system with protestant work ethics that emphasize work as an integral part of one's life. According to Haynes, Boxall, and Freeman (2018), employee voice in Canada is no different from other Anglo-American countries. However, a notable difference regarding employee voice is that Canadian employees tend to have more opportunities to exercise collective voice through unions (Pohler & Luchak, 2014). For example, while the unionization rate in the US has declined over the last 30 years, Canada still has a relatively high unionization rate (Warner, 2013).

3.2. Measures

The year, source, and item details for each measure are presented in Appendix A.

3.2.1. Voice practices

The WES dataset includes a range of management practices that can be studied as an organizational-level system. This study examined voice practices within organizations that provided promotive or prohibitive employee voice opportunities. The study's promotive voice practice measures include four practices intended to produce positive change within firms: employee suggestion programs, information-sharing by management with employees, employee problem-solving teams, and joint labor-management committees. These items were measured on yes/no scale (*yes* = 1, *no* = 0) regarding whether the organization had implemented each practice. Responses to these four items from the T1 (2003) employer survey were averaged to measure organizational promotive voice-related management practices. In this regard, the reliability of the promotive voice practices measure was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.79$). Unlike the four separate items on promotive voice practices, WES provides a single item on prohibitive voice practices. Prohibitive voice practice was measured using a single item asking about three management practices: "Does this workplace have a dispute, complaint, or grievance system for employees?" Responses indicating that the workplace had a formal dispute, complaint, or grievance system were coded as "1" and "0" otherwise.

3.2.2. Organizational innovation

The WES workplace employer survey provided the measure of organizational innovation. Following prior studies (Yang & Konrad, 2011), organizational innovation was operationalized as new or improved products, services, or processes. Each year, WES organizations responded to four items questioning the introduction of such innovations: new products or services, improved products or services, new processes, or improved processes (yes = 1, no = 0). The mean of these four items was used from each T2 (2004) and T3 (2005) survey to calculate the study's organizational innovation measure. The mean of these two years is used for two reasons. First, a lag from T1 (2003) was included when voice practices were measured to allow sufficient time for employee suggestions to affect organizational innovations. Second, because of the ambiguity surrounding the time lag required for employee voice to translate into organizational innovation, the mean of T2 and T3 items was calculated. The reliability was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.84$).

3.2.3. Innovation strategy

We followed the operationalization and coding of previous authors who used the measure in the WES dataset (Thornhill & White, 2007). Employers were asked to rate the importance of various factors to the organization's overall business strategy (0 = not applicable or not important, 1 = slightly important, 2 = important, 3 = very important, and 4 = crucial). Innovation strategy was measured using the following three items: undertaking R&D, developing new products/services, and

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[1] Following Statistics Canada requirements, we rounded the sample size up to the nearest 10 to ensure confidentiality. The difference is less than 0.1% of the total sample.
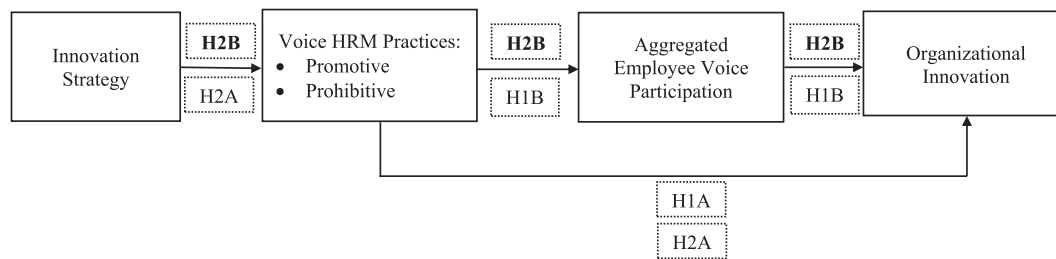
Fig. 1. Conceptual Model for Voice HRM Practices and Organizational Innovation, Notes. H1A: the effects of voice HRM practices on organizational innovation, H1B: the mediation effect of employee voice participation on the relationship between voice HRM practices and organizational innovation, H2A: the mediation effect of voice HRM practices on the relationship between innovation strategy and organizational innovation, H2B: the double mediation effect of voice HRM practices and employee voice participation on the relationship between innovation strategy and organizational innovation.

developing new production/operating techniques ($\alpha = 0.79$). These items were taken from the employer survey at T1 (2003).

3.2.4. Employee voice participation

Employee voice participation was measured using the employee data from T2 (2004). Five items were aggregated, referring to the frequency with which employees participated in opportunities presented by the organization's management practices (0 = never, 1 = occasionally, and 2 = frequently or always). Employees were asked to report their participation in the following voice opportunities: employee surveys; employee suggestion programs or meetings; task team or labor-management committees; quality or workflow teams/circles; and self-directed, semi-autonomous, or mini-enterprise workgroups. The measure showed an acceptable level of within-firm agreement among individual employees (e.g., ICC(1) = 0.32, ICC(2) = 0.62, and $r_{wg(j)} = 0.95$) (Bliese, 2000).

3.2.5. Control variables

The organizational control variables were taken from the employer survey at T1. Industry dummy (service = 0, manufacturing = 1), firm size (by the number of employees), and union density (collective bargaining employees divided by the total number of employees) were included to control for any effect of firm-level characteristics on organizational innovation. In addition, research has found differences in voice behaviors between unionized and non-unionized firms (Dundon et al., 2015); therefore, union density was considered. Both firm size and union density were log-transformed for the analysis.

4. Results

Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations for key variables. Hierarchical linear regression was used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses. Possible multicollinearity among variables was investigated. As a rule-of-thumb threshold, variance inflation factors (VIFs) should be lower than ten (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The VIFs of variables in the analyses were lower than 2.0; therefore, multicollinearity was not a concern in this study.

H1A predicted a positive relationship between the organization's

voice practices and organizational innovation. The regression results in Table 2, Model 3, show that the effects of both promotive and prohibitive voice practices on organizational innovation were positive and significant ($b = 0.16$, $p < .05$ for promotive voice practices, and $b = 0.04$, $p < .05$ for prohibitive voice practices). Thus, H1A was supported.

H1B predicted that employee voice participation would mediate the relationship between voice practices and organizational innovation. The regression results in Table 2 show that the effect of firm-level voice participation on organizational innovation was positive and significant (Model 4: $b = 0.06$, $p < .01$).

Sobel tests indicated that voice participation mediated the relationship between promotive voice practices and organizational innovation ($z = 3.84$, $p < .00$) and that between prohibitive voice practices and organizational innovation ($z = 2.59$, $p < .05$). Together, these findings indicate support for H1B.

H2A predicted that voice practices mediate the relationship between

Table 2
Innovation Strategy, Voice Practices, Voice Participation, and Organizational innovation.

	DV = Organizational innovation			
	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4
Manufacturing	−0.03**	−0.04**	−0.04**	−0.04**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Firm size	0.05**	0.04**	0.02**	0.01(0.01)
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	
Union density	−0.07**	−0.07**	−0.12**	−0.12**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Innovation Strategy		0.08**	0.08**	0.08**
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Promotive voice (1)			0.16**	0.13**
			(0.02)	(0.03)
Prohibitive voice (2)			0.04**	0.04**
			(0.02)	(0.02)
Participation				0.06**
				(0.02)
R2	0.03	0.10	0.11	0.11
Δ R2		0.062**	0.013**	0.003**

N = 4230, unstandardized coefficients and standard errors, ** p < .01, * p < .05.

Table 1
Means, standard deviations and correlations.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Organizational innovation	0.25	0.30							
2. Promotive Voice Practices	0.08	0.22	0.19**						
3. Prohibitive Voice Practices	0.13	0.34	0.10**	0.33**					
4. Innovation Strategy	0.86	0.95	0.28**	0.18**	0.13**				
5. Firm Size[1]	1.95	1.19	0.17**	0.53**	0.32**	0.21**			
6. Union Density[1]	0.06	0.22	0.00	0.27**	0.48**	0.07**	0.31**		
7. Manufacturing	0.31	0.46	−0.02	0.07**	0.02	0.11**	0.14**	0.06**	
8. Voice Participation	0.24	0.40	0.19**	0.54**	0.29**	0.19**	0.67**	0.24**	0.11**

N = 4230 (rounded). [1] log transformed. ** p < .01, * p < .05.

innovation strategy and organizational innovation. The regression results in Table 3 show that an innovation strategy positively predicts both promotive voice practices ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.00$, $p < .01$) and prohibitive voice practices ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p < .00$). In addition, the regression results (Model 3 in Table 2) show that both promotive and prohibitive voice practices positively predict organizational innovation. Sobel tests indicated that promotive voice practices mediated the relationship between innovation strategy and organizational innovation ($z = 4.17$, $p < .01$). Prohibitive voice practices also mediated the relationship between innovation strategy and organizational innovation ($z = 3.68$, $p < .01$). Hence, our results support both parts of H2A.

H2B predicted a two-step mediation process whereby the positive association between innovation strategy and organizational innovation is mediated first, through voice practices and then through employee voice participation. Sobel tests supported the mediating effect of voice participation to explain the link between innovation strategy and organizational innovation ($z = 2.80$, $p < .01$). There was also support for the mediating effect of voice practices in the link between innovation strategy and voice participation ($z = 5.13$, $p < .01$ for promotive voice practices and $z = 2.71$, $p < .01$ for prohibitive voice practices). In addition, the direct paths from both promotive and prohibitive voice practices to voice participation remained significant ($p < .01$), even after all mediators were included in the model (Model 4 in Table 2). Together with the findings supporting H1A and H2A, these findings verify our proposed two-step mediation process (Fig. 1).

4.1. Robustness check

We hypothesized that voice practices mediate the relationship between innovation strategy and organizational innovation, departing from the tradition under the contingency perspective in HRM, which suggests considering business strategy as a moderator on the relationship between HRM practices and organizational outcomes. The possible moderation effect of innovation strategy on the relationship between the two types of voice practices and organizational innovation was tested, but these interactions were not statistically significant ($p > .05$) (S1 in Appendix B). These findings align with prior studies that reported little empirical evidence of the moderating role of business strategy in the studies on management practices (Jackson et al., 2014).

Hirschman (1970) suggested that regardless of whether employees focus on problems (prohibitive voice) or solutions (promotive voice), they may use voice to bring positive changes to their organization. According to his logic, when voice practices of one type are already present, those of the other type provide less additional value. Although not hypothesized, further tests were conducted, revealing that the interaction between the two types of voice practices was negative on organizational innovation ($p < .01$) (S2 in Appendix B). This negative interaction indicates that a range of employee ideas or issues can be expressed through either kind of voice practice, such that adding the

Table 3
Innovation Strategy and Voice Practices.

	DV = Promotive voice practices		DV = Prohibitive voice practices	
	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4
Manufacturing	−0.00	−0.01	−0.02*	−0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Firm size	0.09**	0.09**	0.05**	0.05**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Union density	0.11**	0.11**	0.66**	0.66**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.02)
Innovation		0.07**		0.02**
Strategy		(0.00)		(0.01)
R2	0.29	0.30	0.27	0.27
Δ R2		0.01**		0.004**

N = 4230, unstandardized coefficients and standard errors, ** p < .01, * p < .05.

other kind has a decreasing rate of return.

The hypotheses were used with a binary industrial dummy (service: 0, manufacturing: 1) as a control variable. Furthermore, there was support for the hypotheses with 13 industrial dummies (S3 in Appendix A).

5. Discussion

The voice concept has been primarily investigated as an individual behavior, and this study documents the value of examining voice practices as formal mechanisms for increasing communication and information flow from employees to the employer. The study's findings contribute to the HRM-innovation literature by showing that voice practices are positive predictors of organizational innovation. Prior studies reported that HRM practices facilitate knowledge exchange and innovative work behaviors, further leading to organizational innovation (Chen & Huang, 2009; El-Kassar, Dagher, Lythreatis, & Azakir, 2022; Haar, O'Kane, & Cunningham, 2022; Oubrich, Hakmaoui, Benhayoun, Söilen, & Abdulkader, 2021). This study contributes to the growing body of the HRM-innovation literature by suggesting voice practices as HRM practices specifically designed to invoke employee voice participation to achieve organizational innovation.

This study is correlational, and thus, reverse causality cannot be dismissed. However, an average one-and-a-half-year time lapse between the measure of voice practices at T1 and the measures of organizational innovation at T2 and T3 was included to address this concern. Moreover, the reverse causality argument that innovative organizations provide voice practices is consistent with the feedback component of the communication systems theory perspective and, therefore, generates an intriguing topic for future research (Shin & Konrad, 2017; Vargo et al., 2017).

Interestingly, the focal relationship holds regardless of whether the voice practices facilitated promotive or prohibitive employee voice. This result suggests that although the two types of voice may result from different employee motives for participation, establishing either type of voice practice may have similar effects at the organizational level. Overall, our study suggests that innovation-seeking organizations should provide employees with opportunities to articulate their voice and that employees should be rewarded rather than punished for their voice behaviors. Lately, increased attention has been paid to employees' initiatives and interpersonal relationships to illicit organizational innovation (Alnuaimi et al., 2021; Chebbi, Yahiaoui, Sellami, Papasolomou, & Melanthiou, 2020). However, our data did not allow for a separation of voice participation intended to maintain or challenge the status quo, which would be an interesting direction for future study.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Following Bowen and Ostroff (2004; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016), management practices are considered a source of communication from the employer to the employee. Design features that foster employee voice enhance information flow to decision-makers by encouraging employees to participate and removing barriers. This logic suggests that employees can effectively judge whether ideas or suggestions are appropriate for their particular organization and that their actual voice behaviors are chosen to contribute to the organization.

Our findings also support our reconceptualization of the vertical linkage between business strategy and management practices. Traditionally, strategic theorizing of management practices has posited that appropriate vertical alignment enhances firm performance whereby strategy moderates the performance effect of management practices. However, empirical studies have shown little evidence of this moderating effect (Jackson et al., 2014). We retain the notion that strategy vertically links management practices to the business environment and that management practices must be properly aligned to add value to the firm. Our reconceptualization frames management practices as a sub-

system nested within the firm's overall strategic approach. When HRM practices are well integrated with business strategies, we speculate that HRM practices are not separable from business strategies but function as components of a larger organizational system (Chadwick & Dabu, 2009). Thus, the interactive process between business strategies and HRM practices might be weak, whereas the integrative system can be strong. Thus, well-aligned management practices function as a mediating mechanism through which strategy drives firm performance. Our findings support this reconceptualization, but future research is needed to replicate this finding and demonstrate its generalizability.

This study advances the literature on voice by differentiating types of voice practices from types of individual voice *behaviors*. Recent studies have stressed that not all individual voice behaviors will have the same effect (e.g., Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Considering voice as a systemic feature rather than an interpersonal interaction extends theorizing on promotive compared to prohibitive voice. Systems-level prohibitive voice processes can garner valuable input for organizational decision-making that may be less available at the interpersonal level due to the socio-emotional barriers associated with prohibitive voice. Organizations establish prohibitive voice practices to provide a communication channel for employees to express their dissatisfaction, thereby encouraging them to stay at the organizations instead of leaving (Freeman, 1980). The results of this study support that establishing a channel to listen to employee concerns can benefit rather than harm an organization, bolstering calls for organizations to be more attentive to their employees (Singh & Vanka, 2019). Employees expect that their voice will be heard by their employers when their organizations have prohibitive voice practices. According to expectancy theory (Lawler, 1986), employees are more likely to choose to behave proactively (e.g., suggesting improvement, initiating action at work, and engaging new ideas) when they perceive their employers value them and their contribution.

5.2. Practical implications

The study's results revealed that voice practices are positive predictors of organizational innovation. Practitioners who consider introducing voice practices to achieve organizational innovation may need to establish organizational norms encouraging employees to utilize them because voice participation mediates the relationship between voice practices and innovation. Organizations should consider ways to make employees feel valued and safe through voice participation, failing which employees will withhold their suggestions and concerns on organizational issues, especially for change and development (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). For example, a culture tolerant of dissent can encourage employees to propose challenging ideas due to underlying trust in management (Colovic & Williams, 2020; Selvaraj & Joseph, 2020), high psychological safety (Xu, Qin, Dust, & DiRenzo, 2019), and belief in leaders' integrity (Peng & Wei, 2020) or leadership style (Rasheed, Shahzad, & Nadeem, 2021), thereby enabling the organization to benefit from employee voice. Thus, we encourage organizations to adopt open-door voice policies to promote organizational innovation and not underestimate the value of the information generated through prohibitive voice opportunities, like formal grievance processes.

The study revealed that prohibitive voice practices positively predict organizational innovation. Although employees will likely voice negative experiences through a formal grievance program, expressing such concerns can positively contribute to organizational outcomes. Moreover, although prohibitive voice can be threatening at the individual level, prohibitive voice practices distance decision-making from the involved individuals to facilitate using threatening but valuable information. Employees may be fearful of expressing negative opinions, but establishing prohibitive voice practices can help address such concerns. Offering a voice channel to express negative opinions and concerns can help an organization become more pluralistic in valuing employee opinions and perspectives, thereby bringing positive change and development to the organization (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Thus,

organizations may provide training for managers to understand the value of the information generated from constructive dispute resolution processes.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

In this study, we proposed and tested the voice practice concept in Canada, which is an individualistic and egalitarian society (Hofstede et al., 2010). Considering that individual behaviors can be influenced by national culture, the findings of this study need to be generalized to other cultural settings. For example, researchers have found national differences in perceptions of voice opportunities (Edwards & Edwards, 2015). Moreover, studies have shown that country differences in work centrality (Volery & Tarabashkina, 2021) and cultural tightness (Kwon & Farndale, 2020) can moderate the relationship between employee characteristics and voice- or innovation-related work behaviors. Kwon, Farndale, and Park (2016) speculated that individuals in low-power distance cultures are more likely to value participation opportunities from voice practices than those in high-power distance cultures. Moreover, establishing voice practices might be invaluable in tight cultures where individuals are expected to develop conformity under stronger social norms and sanctions (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006; Shin, Hasse, & Schotter, 2017). In summary, although cultural differences can influence the strength of associations, we expect that our findings can be generalized in a broad context.

Although we take an additive index of voice practices, benefits from different types of voice practices may partially, but not perfectly, substitute for each other (Delery, 1998; Jiang et al., 2012). In a typical promotive voice practice, employees can propose a positive solution to a working condition issue, such as a problem-solving team or a joint labor-management committee. However, the same issue could also be framed as unfair treatment requiring resolution through a formal grievance program. More thorough empirical studies are necessary to understand the dynamic process of using different types of voice practices. Furthermore, we leveraged the strengths of the existing WES dataset, including the large sample size, high response rate, ability to weight the analyses to generate representative findings, and its comprehensive measurement of firm strategy, performance, and management practices. Due to the availability, we relied on a single item to measure the prohibitive voice practice—having a dispute, complaint, or grievance system. We believe that senior managers' responses are less prone to subjective biases because they reported the existence of certain practices. However, multiple items on prohibitive voice practices must be developed to capture several types of prohibitive voice practices. In addition, although researchers have still used the dataset, assuming the consistency of HRM practices over time, more than a decade has passed since the collection of the WES data. Considering the potential disruption of HRM practices after the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020), a recent dataset must be collected and used for analysis. Besides, a characteristic of this dataset is its inclusion of large numbers of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 100 employees (Chadwick, Way, Kerr, & Thacker, 2013). Our findings showing negative synergies from added HRM practices may be influenced by the inclusion of many SMEs in the sample. Larger firms may be more likely to benefit from the development of a broader set of management practices due to the availability of greater organizational slack and potential economies of scale. Future research can add value by examining organizational size as a contingency affecting the value of adding complementary practices to the sub-system.

Voice practices were measured based on whether an organization reported having a certain formal practice. Finer-grained measurement, indicating the availability of each practice to different groups of employees, may improve the validity of our measures. Improved measurement might have strengthened our ability to detect the theoretically posited associations. Furthermore, although industrial relations researchers may be interested in collective employee voice provided in

unionized settings (Kaufman, 2015), collective voice could not be separated from individual voice in this study. Moreover, the process surrounding how employee voice was treated within the organization, how well the voice practices were implemented, and how well each organization ensured confidentiality could not be measured. Future research may develop better voice practice measures and investigate qualitative aspects of voice practices.

Although voice participation is considered a key mechanism linking voice practices to organizational innovation, this study did not consider voice mechanisms in detail. It could not specify when and how employees participated in the voice practices. For example, employees' decision whether, when, and how to participate in the voice practices can be affected by their positive social relationships with leaders and co-workers via feeling an obligation for constructive change and positive work energy (Carnevale, Huang, & Harms, 2018; Carnevale, Huang, Uhl-Bien, & Harris, 2020). The organizational, interpersonal, or individual conditions that increase and decrease voice participation in voice practices are an interesting area for future research and theory.

Lastly, future research is needed to examine the relationship between voice practices and high-involvement work systems. Specifically, future research can investigate voice practices from the widely accepted ability–motivation–opportunity framework in strategic HRM. Although our approach to voice practices was limited to the opportunity dimension (whether formal practices are designed to provide employees with voice opportunities), future research can include voice-ability and voice-motivation-related practices and the opportunity dimension. Given emerging evidence on the role of inter-organizational communication and collaboration in organizational innovation (Kaya et al., 2020), researchers should examine how voice practices and employee participation can operate between firms. Recent research has argued that teams can cultivate an upward voice over time to prevent premature rejection of emerging ideas (Satterstrom et al., 2021). Hence, we suggest that researchers examine how firm voice practices can be designed to enable rather than dampen the voice cultivation process. Voice practices that encourage, for instance, team member allyship, persistence, and co-crafting, could hasten innovative ideas to implementation and positive results.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the association between innovation strategy, voice practices, employee voice participation, and firm-level innovation. Few studies have supported the moderating effect of strategy on the performance outcomes of management practices. Its findings show that voice practices mediate the link between a firm's innovation strategy and its organizational innovation via the mechanism of employee voice participation. This two-step mediating effect supports our systems theory reconceptualization of HRM as a sub-system requiring alignment with the higher-level strategic system. Overall, this pattern of results supports the value of establishing voice practices to enhance organizational innovation.

7. Author Notes

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Duckjung Shin: Writing – original draft, Investigation, Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Project administration, Writing – review & editing. **Meredith J. Woodwark:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Validation. **Alison M. Konrad:** Conceptualization, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing, Resources, Supervision. **Yong-suhk Jung:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Writing – review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A

Variables	Year	Measurement [WES data items]
Promotive voice practices	2003	Mean of 4 items (1 = yes, 0 = no): - Employee suggestion programs - Information sharing with employees - Problem-solving teams - Joint labor-management committee
Prohibitive voice practices	2003	"Does this workplace have a dispute, complaint or grievance system for employees?" Yes, formal (1); No or informal only (0)
Organizational innovation	2004 & 2005	Mean of 4 items (1 = yes, 0 = no): - Introduction of new products or services - Introduction of new processes - Introduction of improved products or services - Introduction of improved processes
Innovation strategy	2003	Mean of 3 items (0, 1, 2, 3, 4): Importance of each to workplace general strategy: - Undertaking research and development - Developing new products / services - Developing new production / operating techniques
Voice participation	2004	Aggregation of 5 items (1 = yes, 0 = no): Frequency of participation in voice opportunities: - Employee surveys - Employee suggestion program or meetings

(*continued*)

Variables	Year	Measurement [WES data items]
Control variables	2003	- Task team or labor-management committee - Quality or work flow team/circle - Self-directed, semi-autonomous, or mini-enterprise work group Industry dummies, firm size, union density

Appendix B

S1: Moderation Effect of Innovation Strategy and Voice HRM on Organizational Innovation

	Model1	Moderation Effect			
		Promotive voice HRM		Prohibitive voice HRM	
		Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5
Manufacturing	−.03**	−.04***	−.04***	−.06***	−.06***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)		
Size	.05***	.03***	.03***	.15***	.15***
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)		
Union density	.06***	.04**	.04**	.02	.02
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)		
Strategy (1)		.06***	.07***	.19***	.21***
		(.00)	(.01)		
voice HRM (2)		.11***	.12***	.07***	.07***
		(.02)	(.02)		
(1) X (2)			.04*		.01
			(.02)		
R2	.05	.09	.09	.09	.09
R2 changes		.05***	.00	.04***	.00

unstandardized coefficients, *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.

S2: Interaction Effect of Promotive Voice HRM and Prohibitive Voice HRM on Organizational Innovation

	Model1	Model2	Model3
Manufacturing	−.03**	−.03**	−.03**
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Size	.05***	.04***	.04***
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Union density	.06***	.03	.03
	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)
Promotive voice HRM (1)		.11***	.08***
		(.02)	(.02)
Prohibitive voice HRM (2)		.07***	.05***
		(.01)	(.01)
(1) X (2)			−.27***
			(.04)
R2	.05	.06	.07
R2 changes		.01***	.01***

unstandardized coefficients, *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05.

S3: Innovation Strategy and Voice Practices with 13 Industry Dummies

	DV = Organizational innovation	
	Model1	Model2
Industry1	−.20** (.04)	−.20** (.04)
Industry2	−.06 (.03)	−.04 (.03)
Industry3	−.08 (.04)	−.08 (.04)
Industry4	−.06 (.04)	−.05 (.04)
Industry5	−.03 (.03)	−.02 (.03)
Industry6	−.09** (.03)	−.08** (.03)
Industry7	−.13** (.03)	−.12** (.03)
Industry8	−.19** (.04)	−.20** (.04)
Industry9	−.08** (.03)	−.06* (.03)
Industry10	.08** (.03)	.08** (.03)

(*continued on next page*)

(continued)

	DV = Organizational innovation	
	Model1	Model2
Industry11	−.15** (.03)	−.14** (.03)
Industry12	−.10** (.03)	−.09** (.03)
Industry13	−.12** (.03)	−.12** (.03)
Firm size	.05** (.00)	.03** (.03)
Union density	.06** (.01)	.03* (.00)
Promotive voice		.11** (.02)
Prohibitive voice		.07** (.01)
R2	.27	.29
Δ R2		.01**

unstandardized coefficients, *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.

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