

Speaking up and stepping back: Examining the link between employee voice and job neglect

Dnika J. Travis^{a,*}, Rebecca J. Gomez^a, Michàlle E. Mor Barak^b

^a The University of Texas at Austin, School of Social Work, 1 University Station D3500, Austin, TX 78712, United States

^b University of Southern California, Montgomery Ross Fisher Building, Los Angeles, CA 90089–0411, United States

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ABSTRACT

How does an employee attempt (or lack thereof) to improve or change work related circumstances influence one's ability to do one's job? This longitudinal study sought to examine this question by testing the relationship between employee voice and two distinct forms of job neglect (active and passive neglect) among child welfare workers at baseline (time 1: $n = 359$) and six month follow-up (time 2: $n = 187$). Path analysis results revealed significant yet unexpected relationships between employee voice and the forms of job neglect. At time one, results showed that as employees voiced, they engaged in active neglect; yet this relationship shifted over time. In that, employees who exercised voice at time 1 were less likely to engage in active job neglect at time 2. With respect to passive neglect and voice, employees who indirectly limited their work effort at baseline were more likely to speak up at time 2. This study examines this unique finding and the role that both employee voice and job neglect play as workers attempt to manage dissatisfying work conditions or promote positive organizational change.

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1. Introduction

A new employee takes a risk to speak up to a supervisor about a work-related problem fearful of the risk to their job status. Another employee is considering taking initiative to implement an innovative method of working with clients, but decides it may not be worth the risk. How does an employee attempt (or lack thereof) to improve or change work related circumstances impact one's ability to do one's job? Perhaps, in some cases, an employee may disengage after deciding to not speak up. On the other hand, an employee who speaks up may be less likely to disengage and also decide to productively contribute to the effectiveness of their work organization.

These situations speak to the crux of the study – the relationship between employee voice and job neglect as distinct types of productive and counterproductive work behaviors. Derived from Hirschman's (1970) decisive work, employee voice has been traditionally conceptualized as one's efforts to improve dissatisfying work conditions. Organizational scholars have also characterized employee voice as a type of productive effort to promote organizational change (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). Job neglect, on the other hand, is considered a counterproductive work behavior that involves one's disengagement from work-related tasks and organizational

activities (Berntson, Naswall, & Sverke, 2010). Accordingly, the purpose of this study is two-fold:

- (1) To test the relationship between employee voice and two distinct forms of neglect over two time points and
- (2) To draw practice and research implications for administration and leadership in child welfare.

As well-documented in the child welfare literature, chronic issues in recruiting and retaining skilled and engaged staff continue to plague US based child welfare organizations. Estimated national annual turnover rates are 30 to 40%, with an average tenure of 2 years or less (United States General Accounting Office [GAO], 2003). Hence, organizations' ability to have a pulse on productive and counterproductive work behaviors can be essential to retaining and engaging a thriving child welfare workforce.

2. Background

2.1. Voice and neglect as productive and counterproductive work behaviors

2.1.1. Definitions

In many circumstances, employee voice is considered one of several productive work behaviors (Berntson et al., 2010). In Hirschman's (1970) classic work, voice is defined as “any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs” (p.30). Most recently, the employee voice construct has been extended to reflect

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dtravis@mail.utexas.edu (D.J. Travis).

employee behaviors that are geared toward promoting positive change in organizations (Anderson, 2005; Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Dowding, John, Mergoupis, & Vugt, 2000; Zhou & George, 2001). Hence, employee voice is generally conceptualized as a voluntary (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003) response involving employee efforts to improve dissatisfying work conditions or promote organizational change (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Kowtha, Landau, & Beng, 2001; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988; Saunders, Sheppard, Knight, & Roth, 1992; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Van Dyne, Cummings, & Parks, 1995). Employee voice can involve discussing problems with a supervisor, providing solution focused suggestions to human resources departments, verbalizing ideas for changing a workplace policy, or consulting with a union or organizational expert (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Detert & Treviño, 2010; Rusbult et al., 1988).

Counterproductive work behaviors, in general, are employee behaviors that have the potential to harm the welfare of the organization, its members, or its services and clients (Spector & Fox, 2005). Neglect, as conceptualized and measured in this study, is one form of counterproductive work behavior that involves efforts by employees to limit involvement in work-related tasks and organizational activities (e.g., showing up late for work or meetings and not putting much effort into work) (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). To fully understand neglect and its antecedents, this study leans on related constructs related to counterproductive work behaviors in organizational psychology, sociology, and management literature. This broad interdisciplinary approach reflects the absence of related research in human and social services.

Similar in scope and definition to neglect is the concept of employee deviance (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), of which production deviance (Peterson, 2002) closely reflects one's limited involvement in work activities and job tasks. Production deviance infringes on the work organization's standards, norms, and practices in such a manner that affects service quality and delivery. Examples of production deviance closely mirror and include misuse of time (working on personal matters while on the clock, taking a longer break than acceptable, or working slower than usual) (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Other forms of production deviance that fall under the umbrella of withholding effort (employee's lack of effort related to the execution of their job) may also occur (Kidwell & Robie, 2003). According to Kidwell and Robie (2003) and Kidwell and Bennett (1993) these include:

- Free riding is a lack of participation in team-based activities while harvesting benefits without much effort.
- Social loafing is a reduced effort when working in groups or teams.
- Shirking is an employees' propensity to give less than full effort by engaging in leisure activities while at work often without consequences.
- Job neglect (specifically studied here) involves an employees' lack of participation or full effort in work task or organizational related activities.

Despite the differences in magnitude between neglect and obviously harmful counterproductive behaviors such as theft, these can be positively related (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). Based on this notion, Marcus and Schuler (2004) held a generalist perspective in their research on counterproductive and deviant work behaviors to gain insight into its antecedents. This study also adopts a generalist perspective focusing on production deviance and withholding effort to understand the antecedents to differing forms of active and passive neglect. As such, passive forms of neglect can be characterized as disengagement in which an employee may be floating along and not fully participatory in work tasks; whereas active neglect can include an employee's direct attempt to deny their potential to achieve work outcomes as a way of showing one's disengagement (Krueger & Killham, 2006).

2.1.2. Benefits and outcomes

An employee's decision to speak up for positive change (voice) or disengage from work related activities (job neglect) may heed its

own benefits and consequences. With respect to voice, researchers have found that organizations in which employee voice is encouraged are more likely to achieve organizational objectives (Daley & Vasu, 2005). Further employee voice has been tied to increases in productivity (Bryson, Charlwood, & Forth, 2006). It has also been found that encouraging employee voice aids retention of the work force and results in a work-force with a higher skill level (Bryson et al., 2006). Additionally, research has found that employee voice is related to increased job satisfaction (Settles, Cortina, Stewart, & Malley, 2007). It is also possible that voice may be connected to other factors that have been associated with organizational behavior including the finding by (Boyas & Wind, 2010) that communication, supervisory support, influence, and trust are associated with job stress.

Employee voice also has a profound impact on employee well-being, engagement, and retention. Research on procedural fairness and inclusion has shown that when employees are involved in decisions, they become satisfied, committed, and passionately involved in their organization (Greenberg, 1996) and have less intention to quit (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002). Employees whose input is not acknowledged often can become psychologically detached and look for employment elsewhere (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, n.d.).

While it may be evident that employee voice is considered a productive work behavior, some cautionary notes are warranted. First, although research shows that employee voice can aid in productivity, it also shows that this may be dependent on management's response and receptiveness to voice (Bryson et al., 2006). When employees utilize voice they risk potential negative consequences such as job loss, retaliation from peers or superiors, and tension within the workplace. Second, although employee voice is generally discussed in the literature as having a positive intention (i.e. bringing new ideas or solutions to the agency), it can also be motivated by less altruistic motivations such as disengagement and self-protection (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Thus, employee voice can be used constructively, yet, it can also be expressed based on resignation, agreement due to low self-efficacy, to shift attention from the actor due to fear, and in proposing ideas that shift the focus to others in order to protect the individual (Van Dyne et al., 2003). It is important to acknowledge that in addition to the pro-social utilization of voice and the potential benefits of employee voice that other aspects of voice exist. For these reasons, the way that human services workers deal with challenges at work has implications for organizational, employee, and service related outcomes.

The consequences of job neglect to an organization as well as to employee engagement warrant continued investigation within child welfare organizations. In other settings, engaging in counterproductive behaviors (such as job neglect) may be experienced as a violation of expectations, values, and practices that can ultimately disturb service quality (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Examples of job neglect that can negatively impact an organization include tardiness, missed days of work, increased job error and the misuse of company time (Naus, Iterson, & Roe, 2007). Finally, employee behaviors that reflect employee disengagement such as not putting forth a concerted effort in their work can result in lowered levels of innovation and creativity – that is, a reduced ability to adapt to or initiate change (Krueger & Killham, 2006). Based on this research, within child welfare organizations the consequences of job neglect can be devastating. Although job neglect, does not directly have an impact on clients, this and other forms of employee disengagement have the potential to jeopardize the well-being and safety of children and families, through reduced employee work efforts.

2.2. The relationship between voice and neglect

Fig. 1 depicts a simplified illustration of the relationship between employee voice and neglect. Based on a comprehensive review of the

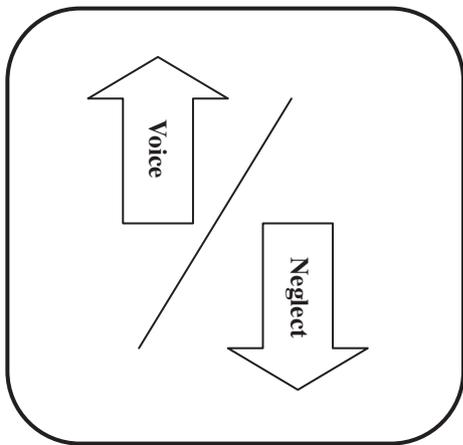


Fig. 1. Simplified voice-neglect model.

literature, we found no empirical studies specifically examining the relationship between voice and neglect. We, therefore, draw on those studies examining the relationship between organizational citizenship behaviors and counter-productive work behaviors (which respectively comprise some aspect of voice and neglect) and empowerment theories (Dalal, 2005; Hopkins, 2002; Lee & Koh, 2001), as well as our prior research (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010) to help provide support for our conceptual model.

Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) is a broad construct reflective of employees' extra-role behaviors (efforts that extend beyond one's job), that is not contractually obligated and is not formally compensated by the organization (Organ, 1997). Examples of OCB include assisting others in the agency with their job duties, working extra hours, and suggesting program improvements (Hopkins, 2002). Voice is considered one form of OCB (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Employees often use voice to positively impact the organization offering information and opinions to improve the organization (Van Dyne et al., 2003).

In one meta-analysis, Dalal (2005) showed that OCB and counterproductive workplace behaviors were moderately, and yet negatively related. In a separate study of Nigerian employees, Ladebo (2005) found that as employees failed to engage in organizational activities, they also exhibited a greater tendency toward work withdrawal behaviors such as being late or absent (neglect). These neglectful behaviors can negatively impact the organization as found in Podsakoff et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis linking OCB to positive and negative individual and organizational outcomes. In this Podsakoff's meta-analysis OCB was negatively related to absenteeism among other forms of disengagement such as intention to leave.

2.3. The consideration of diversity factors

Research studies that gage the relationship between job neglect and individual's diversity characteristics are limited. Rather, researchers have focused on a range of related counterproductive workplace behaviors as outcome variables. Those studies that are available have found that employees who are young, new to their jobs, work part-time, and are in low paying positions are more likely to engage in production deviance (Hollinger & Clark, 1983). Lau, Au, and Ho (2003) found that employees who are young and women were more likely to be absent from their job in a meta-analysis of 40 published studies. A separate research study of 3800 employed and self-employed individuals in the British workforce revealed that men had higher reported lateness than women and those with limited educational qualifications had lower counts of lateness (Clark, Peters,

& Tomlinson, 2005). In contrast, Koslowsky, Sagie, Krausz, and Singer (1997) found demographic characteristics were not significantly associated with lateness in a meta-analysis of empirical articles that examined lateness as an outcome variable.

An examination of the available literature on the connection between job neglect and diversity characteristics is not only limited but conflicting. Researchers have been hesitant to draw a connection between these diversity characteristics and neglect because the connection may be due to other factors such as the work environment itself or other micro level factors (see Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998).

The connection between employee diversity characteristics and employee voice is more vastly discussed in the organizational literature. Researchers have shown that certain employee diversity characteristics serve as antecedents of employee efforts to improve dissatisfying work conditions or promote organizational change (voice) (Tushman & Romanelli, 2008). Specifically, the literature suggests that employees who are different from the 'mainstream' may be less inclined to talk about aspects of their identity (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). A 'spiral of silence' may ensue where employee voice is suppressed based one's fear of potential negative consequences (e.g., being ostracized or harming an interpersonal relationship) that may accompany expressing dissatisfying or dissenting perspective or ideas (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). Five studies illustrate this relationship.

In an exploratory study, Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin (2003) discussed job position as a factor contributing to employee lack of voice. The authors stated that compared to older, more experienced, and higher ranking colleagues, workers who are of a younger age, inexperienced, or have a low ranking position are more aware of the potential unfavorable consequences to speaking up. These workers may then attribute their relative silence to their low power and lack of credibility within the work organization. Similarly, in a study of personal and situational factors that contribute to employee voice responses, LePine and Van Dyne (1998) found that women, non-Whites, and those without a college education have a lower propensity to engage in voice than men, and their White, and college educated counterparts. In a related study, Bowen and Blackmon (2003) also argued that differences based on diversity characteristics may impact employees' voice. Based on the framework of invisible/visible difference, these authors proposed that as non-dominant group members are uncomfortable in revealing their sexual identity, they may be less willing to speak out or voice concerns in other areas. Although, sexual identity is not examined in this study, this finding provides perspective on the challenges of non-dominant groups in exercising voice.

In contrast to the previously discussed studies, Bell, Edmondson, Meyerson, Nkomo, and Scully (2003) examined ethnic differences between Black and White women's tempered radicalism. They qualitatively captured the life histories and workplace changes of 120 women. They found that Black women were more likely to express themselves through voice as a verbal action, while White women were more focused on trying to understand the problematic situation rather than acting. A few researchers have specifically looked at the role of power derived from hierarchical position in relationship to voice. For example, Islam and Zyphur (2005) conducted an experiential study exploring the relationship between power (operationalized by a simulation of a CEO versus line worker position), social dominance (belief in hierarchy in which a person places one social group as dominant or subordinate), and voice. Although the researchers did not find that power had a direct relationship with voice, they did find that a social dominance orientation moderated the relationship between hierarchical position and voice. Anderson and Berdahl (2002) found that high power individuals (those with more perceived influence) have a greater tendency to express their attitudes and opinions than people with low power.

Based on the evidence reviewed, on one hand, no relationship between diversity characteristics and neglect is proposed. On the other hand, those in non-dominant position (e.g., ethnic minorities, women, newer employees) may be less likely to engage in voice.

2.4. Theoretical underpinnings

The development and application of empowerment theory has blossomed since the 1980s within academic disciplines such as management (Lee & Koh, 2001), organizational psychology (Spreitzer, 1996, 1997), nursing and health promotion (Laschinger, Sabiston, & Kutzscher, 1997), community psychology (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004), and social work (Carr, 2003; Pearlmutter & Bartle, 2000). At the same time, work organizations have integrated empowerment-focused practices into popular management or leadership technologies such as participative design (Cabana, 1995), organizational learning (Ellinger, Watkins, & Bostrom, 1999), self-managing work groups (Robbins & Fredendall, 1995), and organizational development (Latting & Blanchard, 1997). With the explosion of empowerment-related theory, research, and practice-level interventions, definitions of empowerment vary considerably according to the discipline. This study uses an organizational-level understanding of empowering management practices that aim to increase employees' felt sense of engagement in their jobs.

Organizationally-based empowerment is at its best when the leadership is shared and its members are afforded opportunities to develop skills and influence organizational processes (Zimmerman, 1990). Also, empowerment at the organizational-level has broadly been considered synonymous with employee involvement (Wilkinson, 1998). These approaches reflect a more structurally based form of empowerment where the entrustment of decision-making authority is strategically allocated while, at the same time, employee autonomy is fostered (Dewettick, Singh, & Buyens, 2003).

In their conceptualization of empowerment, Spreitzer and Doneson (2005) focused on processes and outcomes for the employee:

Empowerment enables employees to participate in decision making, helping them to break out of stagnant mindsets to take a risk and try something new. Empowering practices allow employees to decide on their own how they will recover from a service problem and surprise-and-delight customers by exceeding their expectations rather than waiting for approval from a supervisor. And perhaps most importantly, empowerment is viewed as critical in the process of organizational change. Rather than forcing or pushing people to change, empowerment provides a way of attracting them to want to change because they have ownership in the change process. (p.2).

Therefore, an empowerment perspective is used to support the relationship among employee voice and neglect responses over time. Empowerment is believed to foster a positive connection between employees and the work organization (Kuokkanen et al., 2007) based on employees' felt sense of self-efficacy, control, and job autonomy (Honold, 1997). Researchers have linked one's sense of control to emotions; whereas, employees who felt they had control were more likely to experience positive emotions and engage in OCB (Donald, Walter, Paul, & Suzy, 2002). In addition, researchers have established a connection between emotion and both OCB and counterproductive work behaviors with positive emotions creating OCB and negative emotions creating counterproductive work behaviors (Donald et al., 2002). Thus, employee voice may be connected to employees feeling a sense of control over their work environment and may impact one's ability to feel engaged in the workplace. Based on this perspective, as employees are proactive in affecting workplace change through voice they may be less inclined to engage in neglect.

2.5. Hypotheses

Informed by the empirical and theoretical literature, the following hypotheses reflect the relationship among voice and two forms of neglect over time. Demographic variables are accounted for in the model based on the role that one's non-dominant and dominant group status can have on employee work behaviors (as discussed above.) Thus,

Hypothesis A. As compared to dominant group members, non-dominant group members do not differ in their active or passive neglect responses and engage less in voice responses.

Hypothesis B. As employees engage in voice at baseline, they will be more likely to also engage in voice at the six month follow-up. This same pattern exists with both forms of neglect (active and passive) over time.

Hypothesis C.

- C.1 The more employees engage in voice at baseline, the less they will engage in active or passive forms of neglect at baseline and at the six-month follow-up.
- C.2 The more employees engage in neglect (active or passive) at baseline, the less they will engage in voice responses at the six-month follow-up.

3. Methods

This research was conducted as a part of a large-scale, longitudinal study conducted under the auspices of a university-based training center for employees working with children and families services. It builds on previous research on employee voice and job neglect (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010) and previous studies on retention in child welfare organizations (Gomez, Travis, Ayers-Lopez, & Schwab, 2010; Mor Barak, Levin, Nissly, & Lane, 2006; Nissly, Mor Barak, & Levin, 2004).

3.1. Study design and sample

This study employed a longitudinal panel design. The data were collected from a large child welfare agency in the western region of the United States. Baseline data were collected as well as again at a six month follow-up. Non-probability purposive sampling was used to recruit participants from among child welfare workers who attended training sessions offered at a university-based training center.

All participants came from the same child welfare agency. Comparable to organizations of similar size, the organization had over 3000 employees in direct children's services functions. The organization employs over 5000 individuals and maintains approximately 12,000 children in custody.

Three hundred and sixty-four child welfare worker participants were provided general information about the study by researchers at the beginning of the agency training. In the afternoon those who chose to participate were provided with a consent form and detailed explanation of the study. Those agreeing to participate completed the baseline survey. They were provided with lunch while completing the survey. Three individuals agreed to participate but did not complete the baseline questionnaire. Two questionnaires were excluded because the participants did not turn in their signed informed consent forms. The elimination of these five questionnaires resulted in three hundred and fifty-nine ($n = 359$) participants at baseline.

Six-month follow-up data were collected. All six-month follow-up questionnaires were distributed by mail. In all, 341 of the initial 364 participants were mailed six-month follow-up surveys. Twenty-three surveys were not mailed because:

- a) 21 Employees completed the baseline survey but did not provide follow-up contact information and

- b) Two participants did not complete the informed consent; thus, their baseline surveys were not included in the study.

Of those six-month follow-up surveys mailed, six were returned from the post office. In these instances, attempts were made to contact participants via telephone or email to obtain the correct address. However, the participants were not able to be located using this mechanism.

Six individuals quit the organization during the study time period. Among those who quit, three individuals also returned the follow-up survey based on their last date of employment and these surveys were included in the analyses. Furthermore, second attempt contacts included a mailing of 65 repeat questionnaires with a reminder letters to applicable employees at the one-month mark as recommended by Rubin and Babbie (2001). An additional 79 completed questionnaires were received after the first initial follow-up contact (regardless of method) was made with the participant.

Thus, based on the initial mailing as well as first and second follow-up contacts, 187 six-month follow-up surveys were received resulting in a 55.8% response rate of 341 mailed surveys and 52.1% of the 359 eligible study participants. Both these response rates slightly exceed Rubin and Babbie's (2001) suggestion that response rates greater than 50.0% are adequate for analysis and reporting.

3.2. Measures

Demographic variables included: ethnicity, gender, age, educational level, job position, and job tenure. Individuals' self-reported generalized tendencies to engage in voice or neglect (active and passive) were captured using Rusbult et al. (1998) voice (5-items) and job neglect (6-items) scales. Rusbult et al. (1988) tested the psychometric properties of the voice, and neglect scales in different variations across three studies. In all variations, the reliability coefficients for neglect (0.69 to 0.82) were acceptable, but varied for voice (0.45 to 0.77). Rusbult et al. (1988) attributed the lower than desired reliability estimates for voice to the heterogeneity of the construct or the differing forms of voice responses. The researchers were not surprised by the low reliability estimates, but rather suggested that specific voice responses do not necessarily occur in conjunction with other voice efforts. For example, an individual may talk to a supervisor about a problem but may not engage in any other change-oriented behavior. The same reasoning can be applied to neglect; an employee may regularly miss meetings, yet still put forth extra-effort in their work-related tasks. Rusbult et al. (1988) stated that these lower than desirable reliability coefficients do not trump the usefulness of such measures because the goal is to identify similarities within a specific construct that differ from another. Despite, these varied results, Rusbult's measures have been adapted in other settings and shown fairly high internal consistency (see for example, Hagedoorn, Van Yperen, Van de Vliert, & Buunk, 1999; Turnley & Feldman, 1999).

Employee voice captures the extent to which employees speak up and make efforts to improve dissatisfying work conditions or promote organizational change. Considering the complexity of the construct (Rusbult, 1998; Withey & Cooper, 1989), exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the 5-item measure and findings demonstrated that the scale reflects one dimension of employee voice at baseline and time 2. The alpha coefficients for the voice scale (baseline = 0.703; six-month follow-up = 0.68) was lower but also acceptable, considering the intricacy of the construct (Withey & Cooper, 1989). Sample voice items include "When I think of an idea that will benefit my organization I make a determined effort to implement it" and "I sometimes discuss problems at work with my employer." Employee voice was captured on a 5 point scale with higher scores indicating greater voice efforts.

For the current study, neglect was captured as a single 6-item-scale, however the scale was adapted to capture the dynamics of the responses. First, one item, "I care very little what happens to this organization as long as I get a paycheck," was removed due to two reasons. The item differed conceptually from the other five reflecting aspects of loyalty as a workplace attitude rather than a behavior. Also, after reliability analysis was conducted, results revealed the item's low contribution to the Cronbach's alpha.

Next, exploratory factor analysis (principal component extraction with varimax rotation) was conducted on baseline data to statistically support the discrimination among the differing types of neglect. Results indicated the emergence of two factors explaining 65.62% of the total variance based on the criterion of Eigenvalues greater than 1 and an evaluation of the scree plot. All items loaded strongly on their respective factor (ranging from 0.70 to 0.82). This two factor solution was consistent with the literature which shows differing types of neglect and other forms of counterproductive work behaviors (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Spector & Fox, 2005) as well as Krueger and Killham (2006) conceptualization of disengagement and active disengagement. Thus, two subscales of employee neglect were developed and tested separately to highlight the distinct forms of active and passive neglect. First, active neglect involves individual deliberate actions to avoid work including calling in sick, arriving late, or putting forth less effort in one's work. A sample item from the resultant 3-item active neglect scale included: "Now and again I arrive at work later just because I really am not in the mood for work that day." Next, the 2-item passive neglect scale comprised passive acts that limit one's capacity to engage fully in work-related tasks and activities, including working slowly or avoiding a supervisor. These include, "Sometimes when I don't feel like working I will work slowly or make errors" and "I try to keep out of sight of my supervisor so I can talk to co-workers, take breaks, or do other personal business." Using a five-point scale, higher scores are reflective of a greater tendency to disengage from work-related tasks and organizational activities in both forms of neglect. The Cronbach's alpha for the active neglect subscales were acceptable 0.678 for baseline and time 2 survey responses. Reliability scores for passive neglect were lower than desired (baseline: 0.548; time 2: 0.509); yet, this was acceptable considering the complexity of the response (Rusbult et al., 1988).

3.3. Study sample

Demographic variables included: ethnicity, gender, age, educational level, job position, and job tenure. As Table 1 shows, the majority of the sample were women. Approximately 60% were under 40 years of age, with an average age between 37 (time 1) to 38 (time 2) years old. Ethnically, the sample population was rather diverse as depicted in Table 1.

With regard to the study sample's professional demographic characteristics most have a graduate degree, with 66% at baseline and 77% at time 2. Among those with a graduate degree, over 50% had social work degrees at both time points. The overwhelming majority of the participants were direct service workers, comprising over 79% of the study sample at both time points. The remaining workers were either in supervisory or managerial positions. Participants' length of tenure in their work organization (at the time of baseline data collection) ranged from less than 1 month to 37 years with 30% employed for less than 1 year; 27% between 1 and 5 years; 19% between 5 and 10 years; and the remaining were employed over 10 years. Similar trends in length of tenure were found at six-month follow-up (see Table 2).

Data were analyzed to determine the extent to which the study respondents and the non-respondents differed from baseline to the second wave of the study, which was 6 months after the initial data collection (time 2). Results revealed no statistically significant differences between six-month follow-up respondents and non-

Table 1
Personal demographics characteristics.

| | Baseline (time 1) N = 359 | | 6-Month follow-up (time 2) N = 187 | |
|------------------|------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| | Frequency (n) | Valid (%) | Frequency (n) | Valid (%) |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | |
| Women | 300 | 83.6 | 155 | 82.9 |
| Men | 59 | 16.4 | 32 | 17.1 |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | |
| | Mean = 36.8; sd = 11.5 | | Mean = 38.5; sd = 12.1 | |
| <30 | 117 | 32.6 | 48 | 25.7 |
| 30–39 | 106 | 29.5 | 61 | 32.6 |
| 40–49 | 56 | 15.6 | 31 | 16.6 |
| 50–59 | 44 | 12.3 | 25 | 13.4 |
| 60+ | 36 | 10.0 | 22 | 11.8 |
| <i>Ethnicity</i> | | | | |
| Caucasian | 111 | 31.1 | 71 | 38.5 |
| Latino | 107 | 30.0 | 47 | 25.1 |
| African American | 77 | 21.6 | 36 | 19.8 |
| Asian | 44 | 12.3 | 25 | 13.4 |
| Other | 18 | 5.0 | 6 | 3.2 |

respondents, on the following variables: gender, ethnicity, job position, job tenure, and age. The only significant difference between six-month follow-up respondents and non-respondents was based on level of education ($\chi^2 = 25.85$; $p \leq 0.000$): Graduate-degreed workers were 65.7% of baseline respondents, while 77.5% of six-month follow-up respondents. No statistically significant differences existed on the study scale variables including employee voice and job neglect.

3.4. Data analysis

Two models depicting the relationships among voice to active neglect (Model I) and voice to passive neglect (Model II) were tested using path analysis with the maximum likelihood estimation method in Amos version 17.0 (Arbuckle, 2005). To achieve optimal model parsimony, each model was tested in two stages using a stepwise approach (based on the method employed by and Mor Barak et al. (2006) and Travis and Mor Barak (2010)). Stage one accounted for the relationship between all diversity characteristic and study constructs. Thus, all hypothesized paths were included in both models. Non-significant paths ($p \geq 0.05$) from the demographic variables to the major study constructs were removed in stage two and the refined model was retested for model fit.

Table 2
Professional demographic characteristics.

| | Baseline (time 1) N = 359 | | 6-Month follow-up (time 2) N = 187 | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| | Frequency (n) | Valid (%) | Frequency (n) | Valid (%) |
| <i>Highest degree obtained</i> | | | | |
| BA | 96 | 26.9 | 34 | 18.2 |
| BSW | 26 | 7.3 | 8 | 4.3 |
| MA/MS/MFT | 73 | 20.4 | 38 | 20.3 |
| MSW | 155 | 43.4 | 104 | 55.6 |
| PHD or other | 7 | 1.9 | 3 | 1.6 |
| <i>Job position</i> | | | | |
| Direct service worker | 282 | 81.7 | 146 | 79.3 |
| Supervisor or manager | 63 | 18.3 | 38 | 20.7 |
| <i>Job tenure</i> | | | | |
| | Mean = 6.9; median = 3.7; sd = 6.7 | | Mean = 7.0; median = 5.0; sd = 6.6 | |
| Less than 3 months | 50 | 14.0 | – | – |
| 3 months to 1 year | 57 | 16.0 | 46 | 25.3 |
| 1+ to 5 years | 96 | 27.0 | 47 | 24.7 |
| 5+ to 10 years | 67 | 18.8 | 42 | 22.6 |
| 10+ to 15 years | 46 | 12.9 | 25 | 13.4 |
| 15+ years | 40 | 11.2 | 26 | 14.0 |

Several goodness-of-fit indices were used to determine the consistency of the conceptual model's fit with the data as recommended by Byrne (2001). Indicators of acceptable model fit include the following: a non-statistically significant chi-square (χ^2); NFI and CFI values greater than 0.90 (values range between 0 and 1) with values close to 0.95 indicating superior fit; a root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) value of less than 0.10 (with <0.05 demonstrating a good fit, 0.07 representing reasonable errors of approximation in the population, and 0.08–0.10 indicating mediocre fit, and values greater than >0.10 equivalent of a poor fit). Hoelter's critical N (CN) was used to assess the adequacy of sample size: values greater than 200 indicated that the model adequately represents the same data.

3.5. Strengths and limitations

This study's focus on the relationship between employee voice and job neglect contributes to the research base on organizational dynamics within child welfare organizations. Accordingly, the study's conceptual model is framed by social work, organizational psychology, and management theories to reflect a comprehensive multidisciplinary perspective. Further, building on our prior research (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010), this study is novel among existing research in the child welfare literature and in its focus on the longitudinal relationship between voice and two differing forms of neglect (active and passive).

Despite these strengths, the study's limitations are important and worthy of consideration in the interpretation of the findings. To start, self-reported measures of employee voice and neglect were used; thus, we tested for whether common method variance posed as validity threat by using Harman's one-factor test. Harman's one-factor test checks for whether one underlying or general factor accounts for the majority of the covariance in the data (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). To this end, all 10 items that comprised voice, active neglect, and passive scales were entered into an unrotated principal components factor analysis. Analysis yielded 10 factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0. The first factor explained 25.6% of the variance and no single factor accounted for a majority of the covariance. Consequently, common method variance was not an apparent concern.

Second, a limitation of the study relates to external validity due to the use of non-probability purposive sampling. The study sample was over-represented or under-represented in certain categories as compared to the study population from which the data were drawn. The sample was significantly younger, had significantly more women and fewer African Americans and more Asian/Pacific Islanders than the study population. The sample was also more educated, included a higher proportion of line workers, and had significantly shorter agency tenure than the population.

Finally, the voice and neglect measures had less than desirable reliability statistics, which reflects the limitation with respect to fully capturing the complexity of the constructs. Researchers have noted these issues and argued that less than robust reliability statistics do not supersede the utility of the measures (Rusbult et al., 1988). However, further research is encouraged to continue refining and reconceptualizing voice and neglect, especially in the context of child welfare and human service settings.

4. Results

4.1. Assessment of model fit

Two models examining the relationship between voice and active neglect (model I) and voice and passive neglect (model II) were tested to gain insight into how differing work behaviors influence one another over time. Each model was tested in two stages to reveal the most refined, parsimonious model accounting for the effects of gender, ethnicity, and job tenure.

Table 3
Step 2, model I and II path analysis results.

| | Outcome variable | Independent variable | <i>b</i> | SE <i>b</i> | β |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|
| Model I: voice-active neglect | Voice (t1) | Ethnicity (Latino) | −0.339 | 0.154 | −0.141* |
| | Voice (t2) | Agency tenure | 0.075 | 0.010 | 0.477*** |
| | Voice (t2) | Gender | 0.285 | 0.142 | 0.109* |
| | Active neglect (t1) | Voice (t1) | 0.182 | 0.081 | 0.164* |
| | Voice (t2) | Voice (t1) | 0.643 | 0.052 | 0.686*** |
| | Voice (t2) | Active neglect (t1) | 0.013 | 0.046 | 0.015 |
| | Active neglect (t2) | Active neglect (t1) | 0.522 | 0.06 | 0.539*** |
| | Active neglect (t2) | Voice (t1) | −0.216 | 0.09 | −0.201* |
| | Active neglect (t2) | Voice (t2) | 0.262 | 0.096 | 0.229** |
| | Model II: voice-passive neglect | Voice (t1) | Ethnicity (Latino) | −0.340 | 0.154 |
| Voice (t2) | | Agency tenure | 0.075 | 0.010 | 0.477*** |
| Voice (t2) | | Gender | 0.279 | 0.140 | 0.107* |
| Passive neglect (t1) | | Voice (t1) | 0.066 | 0.069 | 0.070 |
| Voice (t2) | | Voice (t1) | 0.635 | 0.050 | 0.679*** |
| Voice (t2) | | Passive neglect (t1) | 0.139 | 0.053** | 0.140** |
| Passive neglect (t2) | | Passive neglect (t1) | 0.502 | 0.064 | 0.511*** |
| Passive neglect (t2) | | Voice (t1) | −0.035 | 0.080 | −0.038 |
| Passive neglect (t2) | | Voice (t2) | 0.054 | 0.087 | 0.055 |

Model I :

$\chi^2 = 20.12$; $df = 21$; $p = 0.51$; $NFI = 0.961$; $CFI = 1.00$; $RMSEA = 0.000$; $CN = 301$.

R^2 : voice = 0.255; active neglect_(t1) = 0.027; voice_(t2) = 0.469; active neglect_(t2) = 0.316.

Model II:

$\chi^2 = 22.37$; $df = 21$; $p = 0.378$; $NFI = 0.956$; $CFI = 0.997$; $RMSEA = 0.019$; $CN = 271$.

R^2 : voice_(t1) = 0.255; passive neglect_(t1) = 0.005; voice_(t2) = 0.488; passive neglect_(t2) = 0.270.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Results from stage 1 of the analyses revealed that both model fit the data well (see Table 2): Model I: voice-active neglect ($\chi^2 = 10.55$; $df = 12$; $p = 0.57$; $NFI = 0.98$; $CFI = 1.0$; $RMSEA = 0.00$; $CN = 356$) and Model II: voice-passive neglect ($\chi^2 = 11.18$; $df = 12$; $p = 0.51$; $NFI = 0.98$; $CFI = 1.0$; $RMSEA = 0.000$; $CN = 348$). In stage two, the statistical significance of all hypothesized paths from the diversity factors to voice and neglect constructs were examined for the extent to which they added misfit to the model. Then, the non-significant paths were removed, creating a refined, more parsimonious models (Model I: voice-active neglect: $\chi^2 = 20.12$; $df = 21$; $p = 0.51$; $NFI = 0.96$; $CFI = 1.0$; $RMSEA = 0.000$; $CN = 301$; Model II: voice-passive neglect: $\chi^2 = 22.37$; $df = 21$; $p = 0.38$; $NFI = 0.96$; $CFI = 0.99$; $RMSEA = 0.02$; $CN = 271$). At time 2, the refined model accounted for 46.9% of the variability in employee voice and 31.6% in active neglect in model I. In Model II, 48.8% of the variability in employee voice and 27.0% in active neglect was accounted for in the final stage of analyses.

4.2. Assessment of study hypotheses

Table 3 presents the unstandardized estimates (and its standard error), standardized estimates, and probability levels for each of the study model that examine the relationships among voice and two distinct types of job neglect (active and passive).

Hypothesis A accounts for the influences of one's non-dominant group on voice responses. Specifically, we hypothesized that as compared to dominant group members, non-dominant group members would engage less in voice responses. This was partially supported in both models in which Latinos were less likely to engage in voice at baseline (model I: $b = -0.463$; $p = 0.026$; model II: $b = -0.339$; $p = 0.027$). Next, those with longer agency tenure (model I: $b = 0.075$; $p < 0.001$; model II: $b = 0.071$; $p < 0.007$) are more likely to engage in voice over time. Finally, women (contrary to our hypothesis based on their non-dominant group status) were more likely to engage in voice over time (model I: $b = 0.314$; $p = 0.025$; model II: $b = 0.285$; $p < 0.045$).

Hypothesis B was fully supported. Thus, as an employee engages in a specific type of work behavior (whether voice, active or passive neglect), they are more inclined to engage in that same behavior over time.) These statistically significant pathways are depicted in Table 3.

The third set of hypothesis specifically examines the relationship between employee voice and job neglect. Hypothesis C.1 stated that the more employees engage in voice at baseline, the less they will engage in neglect at the six month interval. This hypothesis was only partially supported. Also, there were dissimilar results in model I and model II. To this end, model I (voice-active neglect) revealed statistically significant positive paths from voice to active neglect within the same time point:

- Time 1: voice_(T1)-active neglect_(T1) ($b = 0.182$; $p = 0.024$) and
- Time 2: voice_(T2)-active neglect_(T2) ($b = 0.261$; $p = 0.006$).

This finding was divergent from our hypothesis. As such, this finding indicates that those who exercised voice have a greater propensity (rather than lower propensity) to also engage in active neglect at the same point in time. Conversely, the more employees' engaged in voice at time 1, the less they engaged in active neglect at time 2 (six-month follow-up). Thus, the voice_(T1) to active neglect_(T2) was in the predicted direction ($\beta = -0.215$; $p = 0.017$) over time. Model II (voice to passive neglect) finding did not support hypothesis C.1. There were no statistically significant pathways between voice and passive neglect at baseline or over time.

Next, it was hypothesized that the more employees engaged in neglect (active or passive) at baseline, the less they will engage in voice responses at time 2 (Hypothesis C.2). This hypothesis was not supported by model I or II findings. As such, model I yielded no statistically significant pathways from active neglect_(t1) to voice_(t2).

However, model II findings revealed a statistically significant positive pathway from passive neglect_(T1) at baseline to voice_(T2) 6 months later ($b = 0.152$; $p = 0.003$). This finding was contrary to our hypothesis reflecting that those who may passively retreat at one point in time may be more inclined to speak up later in their jobs.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest a dynamic relationship between employee voice and job neglect. Most interestingly, employee voice behaviors link to the two distinct forms of job neglect in differing and unexpected ways. Below we detail these findings first

by providing a discussion of the diversity characteristics; then, the relationships between voice and neglect (active and passive) are considered.

5.1. The role of diversity characteristics

Employee diversity characteristics were accounted for in the model as they relate to employee voice based on the reviewed literature. As context, scholars have asserted that those in non-dominant groups may be less likely to speak up (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003 also argued that differences based on diversity characteristics may impact employees' voice); thus, this relationship was accounted for in the models tested. On the contrary, researchers have had conflicting information about the relationships between one's diversity characteristics and their propensity to engage in job neglect; thus these relationships were not included in the model.

Specifically as predicted, findings demonstrated that some of the non-dominant group engaged in less voice than their dominant group counterparts; these included Latinos and shorter-tenured employees. In this vein, scholars have purported that those in hierarchical positions of power are more apt to have access to resources and information, leeway to make critical decisions, and interpersonal linkages that create opportunities for the encouragement and acceptance of specific voice responses (Islam & Zyphur, 2005; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Interestingly, however, individuals in other non-dominant groups – African Americans and direct service workers – did not significantly differ from the dominant group counterparts in the refined model when these relationships were taken into account with the other study variables.

5.2. Voice and active neglect

Next, the relationship between employee voice and active neglect was examined in model I. In this, we found a significant and positive relationship between the two study constructs at the same point in time. This unexpected finding presents quite the conundrum – an employee may exercise voice to promote change or improve workplace conditions and simultaneously disengage in work-related tasks and organizational activities at the same time point. This may be, partly, due to the complexity of one's reaction to problematic and dissatisfying events at work highlighted in the literature. At any given point in time, an individual may seek solace in a variety of mechanisms, including both voice and neglect, to deal with workplace challenges. Dalal's (2005) hedonism assumption offers perspective on this relationship. Dalal asserts that people can act in a variety of ways to realize greater satisfaction in any area of one's life. This can be extended to organizational environments where an individual may speak up to create a more satisfactory work environment and step back or remove one self from unpleasant conditions, thus temporarily increasing satisfaction.

Despite the nature of the cross-sectional relationship between voice and neglect, a shift occurs over time. More specifically (as hypothesized), employee voice at baseline was inversely related to neglect at the six-month follow-up. In large hierarchical organizational structures such as child welfare organizations, it is not unlikely that it may take time for employee voice responses to be heard and possibility heeded. Although the data do not demonstrate that voice efforts at baseline predict actual changes in active neglect responses at the six-month follow-up, this finding suggests that being able to voice may be sufficient to discourage unfavorable work responses over time. Perhaps, when employees are included in key decision-making processes (Mor Barak, 2010) and experience the empowerment of expressing voice (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010) they are more likely to remain employed and productive within the organization. Further, at one point in time it may be that employees express their voice due to mounting frustration that may in itself impact job neglect. As the

organization processes the message voiced and begins to respond the relationship between voice and neglect reverses.

5.3. Voice-passive neglect

The significant and positive pathway between passive neglect and voice was not as hypothesized. In this, finding showed that as employees engaged in passive neglect at baseline; they had a greater propensity to exercise voice at time 2. Hence, this suggests that as an employee initially steps back by passively limiting their work effort (e.g., working slower than usual), they may be more likely to speak up over time. Although the significant path from passive neglect (baseline) to voice (time 2) was not in the hypothesized direction, this relationship can be considered aligned with original conceptualizations of voice and neglect as a response to dissatisfying conditions (Rusbult, 1998). In this, an individual may indirectly limit their work efforts; then as dissatisfaction mounts, he or she may be more inclined to try to figure out ways to improve their circumstances in the long run. Although this differs from the stated hypothesis, perhaps this finding is somewhat encouraging when specifically looking at the unique circumstances of working in child welfare organizations. In this, researchers have found that child welfare workers have elevated levels of job dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover (although not directly a measure of job neglect). Conceivably, a dissatisfied employee initially may act on their feelings by passively stepping back (or engaging in passive neglect); and then be more inclined to seek ways to improve their work conditions or promote positive change by speaking up (i.e., exercise voice) in the long run. This is consistent with Van Dyne et al. (2003) that an individual voice efforts may be expressed due to feelings of resignation.

6. Implications and conclusions

To ensure the safety and well-being of children, child welfare organizations are dependent on a skilled, engaged, and fully participatory workforce to provide needed services. Aligned with current employee retention research (Mor Barak et al., 2006; Travis & Mor Barak, 2010), the results of this study speak to the potential of assessing and unpacking employees' on-the-job work behaviors to enhance the effectiveness of child welfare organizations.

6.1. Implications for further research

Developing and using assessment tools that capture the complexity of employee voice and job neglect warrants further investigation. As measured in this study, voice is described as speaking up to overcome dissatisfactory work conditions or promote organizational change (e.g., speaking up about a sensitive issue with a supervisor or putting forth champion for the general betterment of the organization and not necessarily because of a dissatisfaction) (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Kowtha et al., 2001; Rusbult et al., 1988). Consequently, further investigation on the multidimensionality of employee voice is encouraged. Some researchers have taken this charge and specifically identified change-related voice behaviors (Avery, 2003; Avery & Quiñones, 2004; Kowtha et al., 2001). However, further development of employee voice research within the context of child welfare organizations is needed to take into account the demands of working in complex and dynamic work environments.

Likewise, understanding the intricacies of job neglect in child welfare settings is paramount. Job neglect can have different implications when the behaviors are considered internal and external to the organization. Internally, both active and passive neglect can be counterproductive to the effectiveness of organizational processes. With respect to neglect behaviors that occur internal to an organization, employee may miss meetings or withdrawal effort in day-to-day work tasks. Externally, job neglect behaviors can involve a

failure to address client needs, which perhaps is more egregious and detrimental to achieving positive outcomes for the children, families, and communities that child welfare organizations serve (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010).

We also encourage the development of further research to help understand the two rather unique and unexpected findings. To recap,

- (1) Speaking up (e.g., voice) and engaging in active neglect were positively related at the same point in time. Yet, the direction of relationship shifted direction over time, which indicates that voice may help reduce the potential of engaging in neglect in the long run.
- (2) Engaging in passive neglect at baseline leads to a greater propensity to speak up later.

The field would benefit from future research that seeks to replicate and expand these findings to determine if it is consistent within other child welfare workforce populations. Additionally, researchers need to examine reasons this finding may have occurred. What is distinctive about the relationship between employee voice and job neglect within child welfare settings? What other organizational contextual considerations emerge to help better understand these unexpected findings? What we know about employee voice has come primarily from research in the business or service (e.g., retail, sales) industries. Perhaps this study's framework and unique findings can help guide future examinations of how to build an engaged child welfare workforce based on our emphasis on employee productive and counterproductive behaviors.

6.2. Implications for practice in child welfare and human service settings

In terms of practice implications, we specifically focus on employee voice because the unique findings show that one's ability to speak up can limit one's propensity to engage in active, direct forms of neglect over time. Moreover, speaking up can be considered a long-term outlet for those who passively do not put full effort in their work. Previous research supports the concept that even among employees who are highly dissatisfied with their job, creativity can be enhanced when the organization support the use of employee voice (Zhou & George, 2001). Further, recent research has found a connection between self-efficacy (which is conceptually related to employee voice) and employees' intentions to remain employed in child welfare organizations (Ellett, 2009).

It is possible that there is a "learning curve" in finding your voice. Supervisors and administrators may need to recognize the importance of the role of some passive neglect as a step in employees learning to use their voice and fully engage in the organization. Further, it may be possible for supervisor, colleagues, and administrators engage employees in a manner that accelerates the transition from passive neglect to employee voice, virtually training employees to use their voice. Certainly this finding merits further exploration in research and practice settings.

As part of encouraging employees to speak up, supervisors and administrators in child welfare organizations may give added attention to creating opportunities for facilitating productive voice. Empowerment theories offer perspective on why organizations need to consider a multitude of ways to hear and validate employee concerns, feedback, and innovations. In this, organizations might consider supporting involving employees in decision-making to bolster a felt sense of empowerment (Bednar, 2003), which in turn has been linked to increased voice behaviors (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010). Accordingly, opportunities to have one's ideas heard may help empower an employee to remedy dissatisfying conditions as well as limit their active and passive forms of neglect from work-related tasks and organizational activities.

Provide opportunities for skill development in employee voice is also a key consideration for child welfare organizational leaders. In the

absence of productive dialog, child welfare organizations may find it difficult to change effectively, serve children and families, blend competencies to generate new programs, and introduce improvements to existing work processes. In fact, "efforts to transform the child welfare workplace will require giving more of a voice to workers and middle managers, experimenting with ways to redesign the work itself, and promoting continuous learning and improvement" (Cohen & Austin, 1994, p. 3). Members within learning organizations contribute by engaging in problem solving and constructively communicating with each other (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998). Thus, the question of how to harness an individual's willingness and ability to speak up and engage in constructive dialog — even in the face of difficult situations — is vital.

7. Conclusion

This study offers insights into the complexities of employee voice and job neglect in child welfare organization. To this end, by speaking up (rather than stepping back), employees may take on leadership roles in their organizations — regardless of their formal position of power — and do so despite forces supporting the status quo. As such, the skills needed for employee voice and leadership effectiveness are inextricably linked. Thus, under the guidance and knowledge of well-informed supervisors and administrators, it is imperative that staff communicate clearly, concisely, and skillfully. This in turn, will have distinct effects on key markers of effectiveness.

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