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Employee voice in Jordan: Challenges and opportunities

By

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Abstract

Research on employee voice has not paid proper attention to the impact of the national context. Voice forms, methods, and mechanisms are originated in the West and assumed to have a universal operationalisation. In this chapter, we address the need for voice researchers to more carefully consider the role of national contexts, due to their potential impact on employee voice and its forms and mechanisms. We look at the case of the country of Jordan and the wider Middle Eastern region in general. We reflect on country-specific factors that could shape the (dis)engagement of voice in Jordan and the region in general. Moreover, we inductively explore challenges that employees in Jordan face throughout their attempts to express their voice upwards within their institutions. From our literature review and compact findings, we develop future research directions for further context-based voice research in the region.

Introduction

Research on the operationalisation of employee voice and participation has largely recognised its value for organisations and individuals, including increased prosocial behaviours, loyalty (Burriss, 2012), tolerance of difficult working environments (Bakker et al., 2014), increased job satisfaction (Morrison, 2014), and enhanced perceived fairness for employees (Folger, 1977). Employee voice is one of the least researched areas in international HRM (Kwon et al., 2016) and its scholarship has largely focused on voice practices in Western and developed contexts from which it originated (Soltani et al., 2018; Brewster et al., 2007). Western voice practices

have been widely assumed to have a universal application irrespective of context. However, the growing body of knowledge regarding HRM practices in non-Western contexts has refuted the notion of the universalistic approach to practice diffusion and showed that the geographical locale of such contexts matters the most (see Alanezi et al. 2020; Singh et al., 2019; Wood, 2010). In particular, research on the expression of voice has been largely overlooked in the Middle Eastern context and particularly in the country of Jordan. The emerging body of voice literature in the Middle Eastern region in general have shown that several factors such as religious work ethics (Hameed et al., 2020), workforce composition (Arain et al., 2022), and management and leadership styles (Elsetouhi et al., 2022; Mousa et al., 2021; Soltani et al., 2018) influence the operationalisation of voice. However, there are other factors such as religious values, socio-cultural norms, and socio-economic environment that strongly challenge and influence voice expression and silence in the region.

The abovementioned factors are assumed to amplify the management's (as the recipient of voice) power over employees and encourage them to divest in formal voice promoting methods and mechanisms. On the other hand, it is argued that such factors have an inhibiting and suppressive influence on the voice of low level and non-managerial employees resulting in an atmosphere of upward silence, particularly in non-Western contexts (Hameed et al., 2020; Soltani et al., 2018; Morrison, 2014). The work in this chapter looks into the challenges that employees face throughout their attempts of voice expression in the Jordanian private sector. Jordan is an emerging economy located in the Middle East that mainly depends on human capital for development and growth (Alfayad and Arif, 2017). Moreover, unlike other countries in the region, particularly the Gulf states, Jordan is impoverished in valuable natural resources such as oil (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022; Alfayad and Arif, 2017). Crucially, the country remains to be considered a top exporter of human resources to neighbouring countries (Alfayad and Arif, 2017; Nusair et al., 2012). However, in Jordan, the potential of HRM has not yet been

realised and HRM research remains immature in the country and the surrounding region in general (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). In this chapter, we first present a background of the key economic and cultural factors that are likely to influence the practice of voice in Jordan and the wider Middle Eastern context in general. Afterwards, we review the emerging body of literature on HRM practice and employee voice in the region with a particular focus on Jordan. We then briefly discuss the research context and the data, present the relevant findings, and end with a discussion and future research directions.

Literature review

Background on Jordan

Jordan is an Arab country that is situated in the Middle East. Contrary to common misconceptions about the region, Jordan lacks abundant natural resources and oil reserves (Alfayad and Arif, 2017; Darwish et al., 2013). Although Jordan has faced many of the problems of emerging markets, including periodic debt crises, it remains rather more stable than many of its Middle Eastern neighbours (Lucas, 2012; Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). Despite having limited natural resources, the nation does have certain competitive advantages owing to its human resources. Notwithstanding the advantageous human resources, the performance of organisations in Jordan remains mediocre, partly due to the underdeveloped skills of the nation's workforce (Aladwan et al., 2014). Crucially, there is a wide gap between HRM theory and practice in the country (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). The latter is the main reason why additional work is needed to further understand the potential impact of national context and local institutional arrangements on HRM practice and the operationalisation of voice in organisations. We next discuss the major factors that influence HRM practices and employee voice in organisations.

Socio-economic wise, despite its small size and the challenges that the country is facing, the Jordanian economy is positive (CIA, 2018). The main industries that contribute to the growth of the country's economy are the service sector and travel and tourism. In addition, Jordan possesses a noticeable reserve of potash and phosphate which are primarily processed and exported (Ministry of Industry and Trade in Jordan, 2021). Notwithstanding the previous, there is a huge gap between national income and expenses, a constant budgetary deficit, and customary increase in national debt (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). To offset its deficit, Jordan relies heavily on foreign loans and grants (ibid.). In line with the World Bank (2021), Jordan experiences slow growth in its GDP and certain structural difficulties that negatively affected the country's financial stability, making it difficult to offer the younger workforce with sufficient job opportunities. Significantly, Jordan experiences high unemployment rate, rising from 19.0 percent in 2019 to 24.7 percent by the end of 2020. Out of which, youth unemployment rates rose sharply within this period from 40.6 percent in 2019 to 50.0 percent in the last quarter of 2020 (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). Voice researchers maintain that in high unemployment rate contexts, silence is a dominant choice among employees; they are incapable of easily switching between employers and hence they perceive upward voice expression as costly (Kaufman, 2015).

Although Jordan is a low-income country which resulted in different socio-economic environment than other countries in the region (e.g., Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates), Jordan shares the same culture, religion, language, and social values with many other Arab countries in the region. Jordan views itself as an Arab country and it recognises Islam as its official religion - with around 97% of Muslim citizens in 2020 (CIA, 2022). The culture of the Arab countries is predominantly derived from religious teachings, political environment, and their long history in the region (Taamneh et al. 2017). To this end, the culture of Jordan incorporates a significant part of the Arab origin, tribalism, centralisation, regional and

religious customs and traditions, unevolved formal institutions, and a heavy reliance on informal networks to get things done (Darwish et al., 2016).

The latter, widely known as *wasta*, comprise one of the powerful social norms that became interwoven with HRM practices (Haak-Saheem and Darwish, 2021; Harbi et al., 2017). *Wasta*, is defined as “the use of power, relationships and networking to hire people for high position, resolve conflicts or obtain benefits” (Yahiaoui et al., 2021: 774). It embodies interpersonal and tribal relationships which are held in high regard in the country, and they predominantly substitute formal institutions (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). Up to our knowledge, there are no studies that explicitly examined the influence of *wasta* on employee voice. However, as *wasta* is the embodiment of interpersonal relationships, we argue that its influence could be conducive to upward voice. Voice researchers posit that high-quality relationships, inter alia, promote the expression of upward voice; high quality relationships dismantle psychological barriers to voice expression between employees and supervisors (Morrison, 2014).

Jordan culturally scores high on the collectivistic and power distance dimensions, the organisational climate is autocratic, and the management style is predominantly totalitarian as Jordanian managers expect employees to obey them (Sabri and Rayyan, 2014; Al-Faleh, 1987). Notably, there are well-established trade unions and a labour movement in Jordan; however, the underdeveloped formal institutions make it difficult for such unions to express their true voice (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). The empirical evidence suggests that silence is more of a norm than the exception in high power distance countries (see Soltani et al., 2018; Raub and Robert, 2013; Wood, 2010)

The current state of HRM practices in Jordan

Although different organisations would employ different set of HR practices, but HRM in Jordan mainly focuses on four main activities (e.g., Mohammad et al., 2021; Darwish et al.,

2013). First, the appropriate recruitment and selection of new employees is a crucial tactic for organisational success since having the right individuals on board can boost and maintain the organisation's effectiveness. The second activity is training and development that is needed for the continual development of employees' skills and knowledge for task accomplishment (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). Third, performance appraisals, referring to the interim and annual evaluations of employees' performance and are indirectly linked to the overall performance of the organisation. The effective implementation of this activity makes what is required from employees to achieve and how clearer (Al-Zawahreh and Khasawneh, 2013). Organisations typically use performance appraisals to foster the productivity of employees and boost organisational effectiveness through employee goal setting and frequent performance feedback (Schleicher et al., 2018). Performance appraisal is arguably the most HRM activity that frequently operationalises employee voice since it involves meetings and communications between subordinates and supervisors as well as grievance procedures. Finally, the development of rewards and incentive schemes for employees is a central component because it is targeted to motivate and sustain high performance levels from employees (Singh et al., 2013) and significantly contribute to better organisational outcomes (Darwish et al., 2016).

HRM research in the Middle East and Jordan has received very limited attention from scholars. Within this body of literature, the majority of HRM studies were conducted in Gulf countries (see Al Bastaki et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2019; Haak-Saheem and Festing, 2018; Afiouni et al., 2014) that are rich with natural resources and much less research has targeted the remaining countries such as Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan. The empirical studies have, however, highlighted the benefits of taking a more proactive approach to HRM in Jordan for promoting and sustaining future growth (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022; Aladwan et al., 2014). Since there is some sort of embeddedness of voice practices in HRM systems and policies (Soltani et al., 2018), it is crucial to understand the present state of HRM practices and

employment relationships in Jordan to understand the potential of voice operationalisation in organisations.

As stated earlier, Jordan faces several economic and socio-cultural challenges that affect the development of human resources within the country. The HRM practices in Jordan are significantly influenced by the country's national cultural values which were shaped by government regulations and bureaucratic procedures (Darwish and Singh, 2013). Several studies have highlighted an emerging role for HRM as a strategic partner for organisations in Jordan, but its role is limited to administrative application and is somewhat overshadowed by persisting informal institutions. Darwish et al. (2016) maintain that the default norms in HRM practices in Jordan are underpinned by local values, affiliation to clans, and informal community relationships. Consequently, this has generated some issues for organisations' workforce as their employees are often considered to be under-motivated and below proficient. Neither the public nor the private sectors demonstrate a clear application of HRM in strategic decisions or developing HR practices for a company to follow (Darwish and Singh, 2013). Despite this, the majority of organisations in Jordan have HR departments, however, their role is limited to administration; they deal with transitioning employees from recruitment to employment (Budhwar and Mellahi, 2016). To this end, HRM's potential in the country remains underutilised despite the existence of HRM teams and departments in Jordanian private and public sector organisations.

Studies have uncovered that recruitment in Jordan does not follow a methodical objective process for selecting potential employees. In Jordan, applying and securing a position is mainly done through informal connections, i.e., *wasta*, consequently, qualified people find it difficult to secure jobs, and vacancies are mainly occupied by relatives and friends who hold less impressive qualifications (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022; Haak-Saheem and Darwish, 2021; Ali and Weir, 2020). The literature on training and development in Jordan is very limited, and

it is not known whether organisations conduct training activities for employees. Few studies reflect that training and development programs are traditionally offered within the service sector (Darwish et al., 2016; Abu-Doleh and Weir, 1997) and are perceived by employees as a leisure activity, time away from work, and thus, they are mainly offered to close family and friends (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022). The practice of performance appraisal in Jordan is also heavily influenced by informal connections (Al-Lawama et al., 2021; Abu-Doleh and Weir, 2007). Many Jordanian employees perceive performance appraisal as unfair in their organisations and HR managers bemoan its ineffectiveness (Mohammad and Darwish, 2022); performance-related reviews are lacking, and organisations do not facilitate employees' fast growth and progress.

This handful of research insights show that local cultural norms, particularly those relating to *wasta* and informal relationships, contaminate HRM practices and hinder its effective diffusion. Therefore, it is plausible that the previously mentioned cultural norms and economic factors will similarly play a significant role in sabotaging the operationalisation of employee voice in organisations.

Employee voice and silence in Jordan and the Middle East: A contradictory framework

Employee voice is arguably the only mean by which employees share and express their constructive ideas and concerns about work-related issues (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Employee voice consists of two forms; collective and individual voice, the former is an indirect form of voice and is more of a synonym for workers' unions, work councils or committees in organisations. The latter, on the other hand, is more concerned with the day-to-day direct communication by employees in the form of oral or written expression of ideas, concerns, and suggestions (Brewster et al., 2007). Much of employee voice research has been conducted within the employee relations field and focused on the collective representation of voice through workers unions (Kwon et al., 2016). However, HRM practices involve an extensive

number of daily communications where voice is central, since employee voice is concerned with favourable organisational outcomes such as low turnover, enhanced fairness perceptions, and satisfaction, then it became regarded as a cornerstone in the HRM field (Kwon et al., 2016). Albeit its importance to HRM, voice is one of the least researched elements in the field. In this chapter, we focus on individual voice practices in the Jordanian private sector that involve the upward expression of voice in organisations (i.e., from employees to managers). We define voice as an intentional and proactive expression of opinions, concerns, and suggestions with motives ranging from improving the organisation to criticizing the situation (Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne et al., 2003; Van Dyne and LePine, 1998).

As highlighted by the definition, the content and motive of upward voice in organisations vary from simple suggestions and ideas targeted at work improvement to speaking up about critical and serious problems. The former is labelled in the employee voice literature as promotive voice and the latter as prohibitive or problem-focused voice (Morrison, 2014). Liang et al. (2012) define promotive voice as “employees’ expression of new ideas or suggestions for improving the overall functioning of their work unit or organization” (p. 74) whereas prohibitive voice is defined as “employees’ expressions of concern about work practices, incidents, or employee behaviour that are harmful to their organisations” (p. 75). Promotive voice is focused on the future, it suggests new ways of doing things. In contrast, prohibitive voice is both past and future-oriented since it brings out problems from the past that could potentially cause future harm to the organisation. To this extent, the chapter focuses on both promotive and prohibitive upward voice in organisations as well as employee silence.

There are certain cultural norms and Islamic teachings that could provide a platform for promotive and prohibitive voice in Jordan. The literature on voice suggests that a high-quality relationship between employees and managers breaks normative structural authority and allows employees to engage in voice expression, irrespective of the existence of voice practices in

organisations (Morrison, 2014). As indicated earlier, *wasta*, referring to favourable treatment to family and close friends, equates to a high-quality relationship which could enable employees to express their promotive and prohibitive voice upward in Jordanian organisations. Moreover, since Jordan recognises Islam as its main religion, the expression of promotive and prohibitive voice is considered virtuous for the majority of its Muslim citizens. In the Islamic religion, one of the pillars for the ethics of voice expression is mobilising it to command right and forbid wrong (Cook, 2000), similar to voice aimed at improving work (promotive) or preventing harm (prohibitive). Cook (2000: 6) quoting from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) “*The finest form of holy war is speaking out in the presence of an unjust ruler.*” Moreover, the Prophet (PBUH) says “*Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day, either speak good or keep silent*” (Wilkinson, 2013: 432). To this end, exhibiting promotive and prohibitive voice by employees and the ability to receive it by leaders are also believed to be morally and religiously justified. Significantly, there are multiple values in the Jordanian cultural and religious background that provide avenues for voice expression in organisations.

However, as intuitive and important voice seems to be for employees, in reality silence is more of a norm than the exception. Employees perceive that there is more to gain from withholding voice than express it (Soltani et al., 2018). Morrison (2014: 181) states that “a central theme in the literature is that voice is often perceived to be risky.” This is particularly true for non-Western contexts and emerging economies (Soltani et al., 2018; Wood, 2010), including Jordan. Employee silence in the Middle East and Jordan has been severely underrepresented in voice studies and this is surprising since the intermingling of socio-economic, socio-cultural, and religious factors is more likely to also contribute to upward silence in organisations as will be illustrated next. In this regard, we will reflect briefly on how silence could emanate from these factors.

As indicated earlier, there are several economic and cultural factors that would be perceived as risky for employees' voice, and they potentially play a significant role in promoting upward silence in organisations. First, socio-economic factors such as high unemployment rates and financial instability could play an important role in inhibiting employee voice in organisations. Several studies indicated that voice expression could lead to employees losing their jobs or receive suboptimal performance evaluation outcomes (see Soltani et al., 2018; Kwon et al., 2016; Morrison, 2014). Thus, it could be argued that employees in Jordan are more inclined to remain silent to protect their employment and avoid becoming another statistic in the unemployment sea. Moreover, since Jordan scores high on the power distance cultural dimension and Jordanian managers request obedience, employees might fear exhibiting promotive and prohibitive voices. Prohibitive voice, in particular, and challenging the status quo might infer a rogue behaviour from employees and be met with hostile and aggressive reactions from supervisors.

Alternatively, employee silence could be understood as a form of respect to supervisors and managers. Several studies have reflected on the Jordanian management style as paternalistic. Sabri, (2013) and Taleghani et al. (2010) noted that the high-power distance in the Jordanian culture contribute massively to the emergence of paternalistic management practices, leading to centralised authority and closed bureaucratic structure that reflect a culture of power inside the organisation (Sabri, 2015; Hofstede et al, 2010; Sabri and Rayyan, 2014; Sabri, 2004; Hofstede, 2001). Yahiaoui et al. (2021) further maintain that in paternalistic management style, the person providing feedback mainly occupies a senior position and must be respected for their expertise and knowledge. The forces in play here are majorly sourced from fused cultural and religious teachings. Significantly, in relation to parents-children ethics, the Islamic religion professes utmost respect to parents in both Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) teachings and verses from the holy book of Qur'an (Bidin et al., 2019). Thus, likening superiors in organisations

with parents will attach similar sense of responsibility that the Islamic religion requires from children to their parents. This treatment is captured in this verse from chapter Al Isra' [17:23] in Qur'an:

“And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], "uff," and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word.”

In order to understand voice practices and operationalisation in developing countries and emerging markets settings, such as Jordan, it is important to assess demographic, socio-cultural, and socio-economic concerns. The issues of informal network, unemployment, high-power distance, confused cultural and religious values are prevalent and the operationalisation of voice and silence in Jordanian organisations will, arguably, be contingent on these limitations.

What the literature holds for voice and silence in Jordan and the Middle East?

As indicated earlier, Jordan shares the same culture, religion, language, and social values with many other Arab countries in the region and presumably non-Arab Islamic countries (e.g., Iran and Pakistan). Therefore, it is useful to review and reflect on the empirical voice studies that targeted the region. This review is not meant to be comprehensive, but it aims to provide an overview for the current state of affairs of voice research in Jordan and the Middle East.

Interestingly, the very recent and emerging scholarship on employee voice in the Middle East has paid unequivocal focus to promotive and prohibitive voice. These studies are predominantly quantitative, and the majority were conducted in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. To start, Arain et al. (2022) examined the relationship between leader-member exchange (LMX) social comparison and promotive and prohibitive voice in Saudi Arabian private and public organisations operating in multiple sectors by sampling local and migrant workers. The

authors hypothesised supervisor-employee relationship and ‘employees’ value’ to their supervisors as strong predictors to promotive and prohibitive voice in organisations. Significantly, they found that high quality LMX for employees, compared to their peers, to be positively related to promotive voice whereas this relationship was weaker for prohibitive voice. Deeper analysis revealed that both promotive and prohibitive voice practices are only exhibited by local Saudis and the voice of migrants is limited only to promotive voice.

Elbaz et al. (2022) examined employee voice in grievance styles in Egyptian hotels and travel agencies. The authors found that when employees are able to express their voice, they are more likely to handle grievances and resolve peer-to-peer conflicts in a peaceful and cooperative manner such as compromising and avoiding situations of tension. This in turn elevated employees’ job satisfaction and lowered their intentions to leave. Within the same country, Elsetouhi et al. (2022) found a positive relationship between participative leadership and employee voice expression for travel agents’ employees in Egypt which in turn had a positive impact on innovative behaviours such as communicating helpful ideas and solutions to their leaders (i.e., promotive voice).

Voice along job satisfaction were found to mediate the relationship between ethical leadership and employee well-being among employees working in different universities in Pakistan (Ejaz et al., 2022). Karkoulian et al. (2021) study, that was conducted in Lebanon, showed that promotive voice mediates the relationship between high LMX and creative performance for banking employees.

Ta’Amnha et al., (2021) examined the influence of COVID-19 related organisational support (e.g., access to personal protective equipment, frequent testing, and support in case of infection) on employee voice for a sample of pharmacists in Jordan. They found that organisational support positively predicts employee voice as their study showed that with the existence of

organisational support, employees are more likely to engage in positive behaviours and voice both their ideas and concerns. Hameed et al. (2020) investigated the influence of Islamic work ethics on constructive forms of promotive and prohibitive voice among employees and supervisors from various companies in Saudi Arabia. Their study found an indirect relationship that is mediated by employees' moral identity and moderated by perceived voice opportunity. Strong moral identity was found to reduce fear of jeopardising employee-supervisor relationship and thus destruct barriers of voice engagement, and strong perceptions of voice opportunities moderated the engagement of prohibitive voice.

Alfayad and Arif (2017) conducted a more descriptive study that examined the relationship between employee voice and job satisfaction within the Jordanian private sector where voice was found to be positively related to job satisfaction. Finally, Raub and Robert (2013) surveyed front line employees in a multinational hotel chain in the Middle East (Egypt and United Arab Emirates), Asia, and Oceania and found a positive indirect relationship between empowering leadership and voice behaviour. However, the authors stress a weaker relationship in high-power distance countries.

The above reviewed empirical studies mainly reflect on the existence of voice, albeit some do indirectly, in Jordanian and Middle Eastern organisations. Although they indicate the existence of voice in organisations, the nature of these empirical results do not paint an understandable picture on the operationalisation of voice in these organisations. Only few of these empirical studies differentiate between promotive and prohibitive voice in their empirical analysis and theorising (e.g., Arian et al., 2022; Hameed et al., 2020). The remaining seem only to focus on promotive voice or overlook the distinction between them. The findings of these studies posit that there is a very limited platform for the engagement in prohibitive voice in organisations. Crucially, most of these studies examined voice as a mediator or a moderator variable that explains the relationship between some sort of leadership behaviour (e.g., empowering

leadership, ethical leadership, participative leadership, and leader-member exchanges) on employees' and organisational outcomes.

As for employee silence, the empirical studies followed a similar path with reversed variables and constructs, for instance, Bani-Melhem et al. (2021) found a negative relationship between empowerment and employee silent among a sample of United Arab Emirates frontline employees working in hotels. Mousa et al. (2021) found a positive relationship between narcissistic leadership and physician silence. Alternatively, Soltani et al. (2018) examined the operationalisation of vulnerable workers voice in the Iranian construction industry among a sample of managers and construction workers. Their study is among the few, if not the only one, that enriched the literature with inductive empirical insights. Notably, their findings demonstrated that an atmosphere of silence was prevalent. Having an authoritative, command and control managerial style aided the management to be more focused on obtaining results from employees than investing in voice promoting mechanisms. Moreover, workers preferred to remain silent of fear of losing their jobs and therefore they did not engage in either promotive or prohibitive voice expressions.

[Inset Table 1 here]

Context and data

Considering the lack of previous empirical research on employee voice in the context of Jordan, we present a sample of qualitative findings which were conducted in medium sized companies operating in the Jordanian private sector. The data were collected via semi-structured interviews from 20 non-managerial employees from the younger workforce (ages between 24-30) with a focus on their interactions with supervisors during the performance appraisal process

(PA hereafter). The names of the companies were omitted and participants names were changed to protect their anonymity. We used thematic analysis to analyse the data and followed the phases that Marshall and Rossman (2014) outlined, including organising the data on an Nvivo 12 database, coding, categorising, generating themes, interpreting, and seeking an alternative perspective.

Findings

In this section, we highlight the main challenges that the sample employees face.

Socio-cultural challenges to voice suppression and expression

Although PA in the companies follows the best-practice approach through which voice is at its core, silence was a general theme in our inductive analysis. There was a general agreement among respondents that voice expression and participation in the PA process was discouraged by managers and could lead to severe negative repercussions. Therefore, in general, employees preferred to remain silent even if they received a wrongful treatment.

“Managers here like to be respected, arguing with the manager will not get you anywhere, on the contrary, it will create more problems for you.” (Saleem, junior level employee)

The Jordanian culture pronounces respect to hierarchical relationships and loyalty to managers are perceived highly. Speaking up is perceived as challenging to this status quo as employees become labelled negatively as “disrespectful,” “bigmouth,” and “troublemaker.” In the main, any attempt to voice concerns or challenge managerial decisions for the PA would directly damage the employee’s image and reputation in the company, and significantly, negative reputation spreads faster than positive one as expressed by Mohammad, a senior level employee, *“the manager’s will digest any attempt to speak up, even if you have the right to, as talking back to them, they do not take that lightly, they will sabotage your reputation and everyone in the company will know before you do.”* Significantly as the quote shows, such

measure is done, discretely, behind employee's back. Therefore, employees will not be able to take any corrective measure as the damage has taken its course.

Another challenge our inductive analysis uncovered was managerial unpredictable responses. Employees perceived Jordanian managers as moody and emotionally dissonant. This is crucial for speaking up because employees explained that an essential part of calculating the cost-benefit of voice expression is the ability to anticipate managerial responses. In general, our respondents indicated that they are constantly surveying their manager's mood but in the majority of cases, managers do not show their emotions which makes it difficult to anticipate their responses. However, even when managers are in a good mood, the chances of being heard are slim as captured in the illustrative quote by Marwan, a senior level employee, who said:

“My manager was laughing with another manager and, to seize this opportunity, I went to speak to him about a work-related issue....suddenly, his face and tone changed, and he became more serious...he didn't even allow me to finish and started giving me orders on how to approach the issue. It was unfruitful.”

Finally, employees who speak up to improve work-related process and outcomes during performance feedback are perceived as threatening and disdain the manager's way of doing things. They are met with highly defensive and aggressive responses.

“There were two or three times where I suggested some modifications to a particular area in work and I received this exact response from my manager, ‘do you think you know more than me?’”

The inductive analysis shows that employees do not just face socio-cultural challenges that forces them to remain silent but also challenges that bound what they are able to majorly express. Employees' voice expression is mainly limited to the widely accepted value of social hypocrisy in Jordan. Social hypocrisy is a form of expression that mainly relies on inflating the

manager's ego, and it is majorly dishonest, fabricated, and targeted to exaggerate the value of the managers. As Kareem, a senior employee, put it:

“Managers love to hear compliments about themselves, they like to hear things about themselves even if you do not believe they are true. Therefore, I frequently encounter the manager and I start complementing him, for example, about how he played soccer yesterday or about his newly purchased phone. I do not like this, but this is how things are here.”

Employees believed that this might be the only way to express work-related issues and concerns indirectly to managers. For instance, some respondents explained that they can gain the manager's trust by being socially hypocrite and therefore, they find it less difficult to speak up about some issues they encounter while they are requesting performance feedback or when they are setting their annual objectives. Few respondents went the extent that such behaviours significantly enhance their chances of gaining favourable PA outcomes.

“I can gain the manager's trust through socially hypocrite behaviours and will also be on his radar. This increases my chances of having a good evaluation.” (Samer, Junior level employee)

Socio-economic challenges to voice expression

The inductive analysis from the interviews further revealed some socio-economic factors that contribute to low instrumentality of voice expression. Job security and unemployment in the country played a significant role in preventing employees to speak up about their issues and concerns. The respondents highly perceived that speaking up singles an employee from the group and could lead to forced dismissal from work. Saeed, a senior level employee, observed: *“speaking up will make managers dislike me and the environment will become hostile, it is difficult to find work in this country.”* Marwan further noted: *“you need to compromise and prioritise things. I am married, and I have many responsibilities, it is better to keep my mouth shut.”*

Finally, few respondents highlighted the low compensation they receive as a factor that motivates them to remain silent, particularly, among employees in junior levels. Some of these employees indicated that voicing work-related issues and concerns is futile in comparison to the compensation they receive mainly because they are not compensated fairly in relation to the effort they provide. Therefore, they do not find it feasible to speak up.

“Listen, junior positions, not just in our company but in the whole country, do not pay well. I do not expect anything from this company at the moment except gaining experience.”

(Mohammad, junior level employee).

“During the performance feedback meetings, I just listen and avoid talking as much as I can. It is not worth it to speak up when I encounter an issue during work or ask how to do things properly, I do not actually care whether work is done or not. The compensation we receive does not quite cover our living expenses, we actually pay from our own pocket further to commute to and from work.” (Malek, junior level employee).

Discussion and future directions

Despite the increasing significance of understanding voice in organisations, there is a dearth of the current literature and an immature understanding and analysis in relation to the Jordanian context and the Middle Eastern region in general. Thus far, some studies brought to the fore factors that influence the (dis)engagement of promotive and prohibitive voice in Middle Eastern organisations as well as concentrating on voice as a mediator or a moderator to multiple organisational and employee outcomes as discussed previously in the literature review. Mohammad and Darwish (2022) posit that, more recently, Jordan has experienced significant positive changes that altered organisational mindsets and HRM practices in the country which arguably could enhance the expression of voice in organisations. In this light, additional research is essential to further explore and understand the state of voice practices in the country.

In this section, we reflect on some of the key challenges and future avenues for research that may be beneficial to voice researchers and practitioners who are interested in the region.

First of all, the findings that were uncovered in this study mainly reflect on a dominant atmosphere of upward silence in the targeted sample from the Jordanian private sector. Our findings, compactly, demonstrate several multiple cultural and socio-economic factors that contribute to low instrumentality and vulnerability of engaging in promotive voice, let alone prohibitive one. Notably, our findings reflect more complex and distal antecedents to silence that were primarily overlooked in studies that examined voice in Jordan and the Middle Eastern region in general. Despite the very recent growing empirical evidence of promotive and prohibitive voice in Jordan and the wider region, the practice has been largely decontextualised in the majority of the studies. These studies have mainly reflected on proximal variables to voice engagement such as a variety of leadership styles and leader-member exchanges without taking into consideration the influence of the broader context (e.g., Arain et al., 2022; Elsetouhi et al., 2022; Ejaz et al., 2022; Karkoulian et al., 2021; Mousa et al., 2021; Soltani et al., 2018; Raub and Robert 2013). Notably, authoritative and paternalistic management practices, which are more representative and an overpowering trait of the managerial style in non-Western regions and the Middle East (Darwish et al., 2020; Wood, 2010), were missed in these studies. This is unfortunate as it remains unclear whether voice exists in these organisations or not, or whether these findings are reflective of the realities of voice practices on the ground. In particular, as highlighted in our brief findings and in Soltani et al. (2018) study, high power distance between employees and supervisors played a crucial role in the promotion of silence, rather than voice, among the sample employees. In fact, silence is highly underrepresented in current studies as we illustrated in the literature review despite being an overwhelming characteristic in the voice literature (Morrison, 2014). Future studies should concentrate more on silence, as assumed to be more of a norm in the region.

In addition, extant voice studies in Jordan and the Middle Eastern context were quick to convey Western scholars' recommendations of voice studies in non-Western contexts and they predominantly operationalised Western voice models and mechanisms in their investigations. Particularly, the empirical studies we reviewed have mostly relied on Van Dyne and LePine (1998) or Liang et al. (2012) quantitative voice measures. However, in non-Western contexts, such as Jordan, Western voice forms and mechanisms are insufficient to cast the same outcomes as those in developed nations; thus, a new approach to voice practices may emerge in the Jordanian and Middle Eastern settings, where there is more flexible, less structured, and fluid institutional configurations (Darwish et al., 2022; Wood, 2010). To this end, future work could take into consideration the broader economic and cultural factors of the Jordanian context and uncover different nuances of non-Western voice practices for the voice literature. Crucially, we need to disregard Western preconceptions about the universal application of voice practices and incorporate more inductive studies to provide a more contextualised theorisation to voice in the region. This would help voice theorists as well as practitioners to better understand voice in the region and make the required modifications to create effective voice mechanisms and practices that are tailored to the local cultural and institutional arrangements.

Moreover, as noted earlier, it appears that the intermingling religious and cultural values could be both challenging or facilitating to voice practices in the region. However, the influence of local cultural norms and religious values was hardly addressed in extant studies. At the individual level, there could be a confusion to which frame of reference employees invoke to prefer voice over silence and vice versa. HRM studies in general have mainly focused on the cultural ways of doing things such as the prevalent authoritative managerial style (Wood, 2010). On the other hand, very few studies, conceptual in nature, have reflected on the reverse diffusion of Islamic values in HRM practices (see Haak-Saheem et al., 2017; Branine and

Pollard, 2010). Notably, since the dominant religion in Jordan and the Middle East is Islam, then there will be an unequivocal influence of the religion on actors' actions from the reverse diffusion of religious values into HRM (Branine and Pollard, 2010) including how and when they express their voices. There are several values in Islam, as a frame of reference, that equip employees with a religious morality of promotive and prohibitive voice expression in organisations (see Hameed et al., 2020) and it would be interesting to understand voice engagement from this vantage point.

At the same time, these religious values might be complementary or contradictory with local cultural values (e.g., authoritative management style) or bounded by unfavourable socio-economic factors such as high levels of unemployment or low compensation schemes (Kaufman, 2015). This was briefly demonstrated in our findings as for example, there was evidence of voice expression among the sample, but it was mainly limited within the scope of social hypocrisy. Whereas true voice was suppressed for reasons related to fear, high psychological effort from calculating upward voice instrumentality and safety, and those relating to socio-economic factors such as unemployment and low compensation schemes. Future studies could unpack this relationship between the complementary and contradictory hybrid of culture and religion on voice arrangements and mechanisms in Jordan and the Middle Eastern region in general.

It is also important to further explore the concept of *wasta*, or informal networks, on the engagement of promotive and prohibitive voice between supervisors and employees. Again, *wasta* entails an informal exchange among supervisors and subordinates that is highly prevalent in Jordan and the Middle Eastern region (see Haak-Saheem and Darwish, 2021; Harbi et al., 2017). Such informal relationships could be equated to a high-quality leader-member exchanges which could promote upward voice in organisations (Morrison, 2014). Moreover, whether *wasta* could promote voice for some employees and inhibit it for others who are not

well connected informally, is equally interesting and important to understand. It is important to examine voice under these challenging cultural, religious, and economic factors in order to have a holistic understanding of the complexities and realities of voice in Jordan and the wider Middle Eastern region more generally.

Conclusion

The theoretical and empirical work in this chapter attempts to enhance our understanding of the socio-economic, cultural, and religious factors that facilitate or pose obstacles to the manifestation of upward voice in Jordan and the wider Middle Eastern region in general. This chapter stresses the value of paying greater attention to the distal context in order to acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape voice practices in the region. In general, voice practices are indeed influenced by Western values and approaches, but they are also sensitive to the unique cultural, socio-economic, and institutional arrangements of the Jordanian context. While theoretical insights cast cultural and economic values as inhibitors to voice in the region, and empirical findings reflect indirect evidence of voice, we highlighted a different shade for these factors that could simultaneously be both challenging and facilitating to the expression of upward voice. Overall, notwithstanding the reckless and recent emerging developments for voice in the region and their significance, existing literature focusing on Jordan and the wider region is yet very limited and lacks comprehensive understanding and analysis. Closer examination is needed to further explore and understand the state of voice practices in the region and the potential influence of its unique cultural and institutional arrangements on both promotive and prohibitive voice.

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Table 1: Summary of relevant empirical studies on voice in the Middle East

Year	Authored by	Country	Sample	Research settings	Study aim	Voice/silence measure	
1	2013	Raub and Robert	Middle East, Asia, and Oceania	640 front-line employees and supervisors	Large multinational hotel chain – 16 properties	To examine the influence of empowering leadership on organisational commitment and voice behaviour; mediated by psychological empowerment	Dyne and LePine's (1998); Bettencourt, Gwinner, and Meuter's (2001); Bettencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie's (2005)
2	2017	Alfayad and Arif	Jordan	300 non-managerial employees	Large private company	To examine the relationship between employee voice and job satisfaction	Van Dyne and LePine (1998)
3	2018	Soltani et al.	Iran	Interviews with 30 managers and 62 employees	Construction, building material and product manufacturing companies	To examine the extent and nature of precarious workers voice	-
4	2020	Hameed et al.	Saudi Arabia	217 employee-supervisor dyads, including expatriates	Public and private domestic and multinational companies	To examine the relationship between Islamic work ethics and employee promotive and prohibitive voice, mediated by moral identity and moderated by perceived voice opportunity	Liang et al. (2012)
5	2021	Bani-Melhem et al.	United Arab Emirates	285 front-line employees	Five-star hotels	To examine the effects of empowerment, job satisfaction and perceived organisational support on employee silence	Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008); (Xu et al., 2015).
6	2021	Mousa et al.	Egypt	229 physicians	Public hospitals in Egypt	To examine the effect of narcissistic leadership on organisational cynicism, mediated by employee silence	Jain (2015)
7	2021	Ta'Amnha et al.	Jordan	248 community pharmacists	Several pharmacy chains	To examine the relationship between organisational support and employee voice, mediated by job satisfaction and job burnout	Van Dyne and LePine (1998)
8	2021	Karkouljian et al.	Lebanon	301 full-time employees	Banking sector	To examine the relationship between leader-member exchange and creative performance, mediated by voice	Liang et al. (2012)
9	2022	Arain et al.	Saudi Arabia	341 employee-supervisor dyads, including migrant workers	Private and public telecommunication, oil and gas, manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality companies	To examine the relationship between leader-member exchange social comparison on employee promotive and prohibitive voice, mediated by supervisor-based self-esteem and moderated by local-migrant workers.	Liang et al. (2012)
10	2022	Elbaz et al.	Egypt	367 front-line employees	Medium-sized hotels and travel agencies	To examine the relationship of voice on grievance handling style and their influence on leave intentions	Elsetouhi et al. (2018) and Van Dyne and Le Pine (1998)
11	2022	Elsetouhi et al.	Egypt	547 Front-line employees	Two travel agencies	To examine the influence of participative leadership and employee voice on employee innovative behaviours, moderated by job autonomy	Van Dyne and LepPine (1998)
12	2022	Ejaz et al.	Pakistan	254 employees	Multiple universities	To examine the impact of ethical leadership on employee well-being, mediated by employee voice and job satisfaction	Van Dyne and LepPine (1998)

