Toward Reconceptualizing Constructive Employee Voice:

Understanding the Process of Voicing in the Renewable Energy Industry in Kenya

by

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ABSTRACT

Employee voicing facilitates positive changes and experiences for organizations and employees. However, despite a plethora of research on voice in different disciplines, our understanding of the process of employee voicing is still limited. This study seeks to (a) identify the phases that characterize the voicing process and (b) uncover the communicative strategies that characterize the different phases of the voicing process in the renewable energy industry in Kenya. The study utilized a qualitative approach. Namely, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-three renewable energy workers in Kenya who reported to have engaged in voicing. Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. The findings revealed five core phases that characterize voicing: idea formation, planning, initial enactment, reflexive enactment, and outcome. Further, the findings uncovered a variety of communicative strategies that are used in the different phases of voicing. These strategies emerged from the perspectives of different actors such as voicers, voicers' peers, and recipients and their peers who are involved in the voicing process. The findings of this study advance voice theory by reconceptualizing voicing as a process that is highly interactive. Additionally, the findings extend voice theory in three other ways. First, the results demonstrate that power and status disparities in organizations produce hierarchies that inhibit voicing, especially among low power and status employees. Participants discussed how they communicatively navigate these disparities. Second, the results shed light on the ways voicers navigate different risks associated with voicing such as idea stealing and retributions. Third, the findings illustrate the specific ways that positive communicative relationships between peers, and between supervisors and subordinates facilitate voicing. Both supervisors and peers are

highly involved in all phases of the voicing process and thus, contribute to the development and enactment of the ideas. Finally, the findings offer practical ways for cultivating and fostering voicing to voicers, voicers' peers, voice recipients, and organizations in the renewable energy industry.

DEDICATION

To my family: Mom, Dad, Eric, Rose, Moses, Nelly, Hellen, and Diana. You’re my rock!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Employees' input is critical to the success of an organization. Indeed, employee voice facilitates positive outcomes within the organization such as employee motivation, innovation, and positive change (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Kim & Leach, 2020). Given its significance, scholars have increasingly paid attention to employee voice, yielding various typologies and definitions of the concept (for reviews, see Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Mowbray et al., 2015). One of the voice typologies that has gained scholarly traction in the last decade is constructive employee voice. The growth in the study of the phenomenon can be attributed to its potential for significantly shaping individual and organizational outcomes (Van Dyne et al., 1995).

Constructive employee voice is generally conceptualized as expression of ideas, suggestions, and/or concerns or problems to someone within the organization with a goal of improving organizational functions and operations (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Examples of constructive voice include suggesting a creative idea to improve a procedure such as onboarding training for new employees within the organization or expressing concerns about specific practices within the organization that need to be stopped/corrected. As the aforementioned examples demonstrate, there are two forms of constructive voice depending on the function served: Promotive and prohibitive. Promotive voice refers to expression of ideas with the aim of improving future functions of the organization, while prohibitive entails communicating problems existing within the organization that need to be improved due to their potentially harmful effects on the

organization (Liang et al., 2012). Put simply, promotive voice causes or encourages occurrence of positive behaviors, while prohibitive voice seeks to prevent negative organizational practices (Van Dyne et al., 1995).

Further, constructive employee voice can be understood along the lines of the scope. Scope of voice is defined as the "number of different issues that employees express" (Newton, 2018, p. 4). Scope of voice ranges from narrow—voice concentration to wide—or voice breadth. Voice concentration occurs when employees enact the same idea repeatedly or share a limited number of ideas over time to the same or different recipients. For example, an employee could repeatedly express dissatisfaction with informational injustice within the organization. On the other hand, voice breadth involves expressing a variety of ideas in a span of time (Newton, 2018). For instance, an employee may suggest an idea on how to improve the customer service operations, an idea on how to reduce mental illness among employees, an idea on how mitigate workplace bullying, among others.

Research has revealed that constructive employee voice positively influences different levels of the organization. For example, at the organizational level, constructive employee voice enhances decision-making, organizational learning, positive organizational change, creativity, and innovation (Brinsfield, 2014; Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 2003; Farh & Chen, 2014; Kim & Leach, 2020; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Nemeth et al., 2001; Zhou & George, 2001). Within teams, voice has been positively linked to high-quality decision making, financial performance, and team learning (Erez et al., 2002; Farh & Chen, 2014; Li et al., 2017; McKenzie et al., 2011). At

the individual level, constructive employee voice is associated with positive performance evaluations (Whiting et al., 2008), a greater sense of autonomy, reduced stress, and improved job attitude, motivation, and satisfaction (Burris, 2012; Morrison, 2011, 2014). Further, employees engaging in voice behaviors are often perceived as other-oriented and agentic, which may help them improve their social status and reputation within the organization (Weiss & Morrison, 2019). Also, workers who voice are perceived as competent and dedicated to the organization and experience greater feelings of belongingness (Dutton et al., 1997; Ng & Feldman, 2015; Perlow & Repenning, 2009).

Additionally, lack of constructive employee voice in organizations or an inappropriate response to employee voice could lead to negative outcomes. Namely, organizations where employee do not speak up experience increased feelings of isolation, resentment, absenteeism, and turnover among employees (Perlow & Williams, 2003). Further, lack of constructive employee voice impedes organizational learning and development (Argryis, 1977) and undermines creativity and productivity (Li et al., 2017; Perlow & Williams, 2003).

Because of the apparent important implications of constructive voice, scholars have strived to investigate antecedents and barriers to voice (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Milliken et al., 2003; Morrison, 2014; Sherf et al., 2021). For example, it has been documented that employees are likely to engage in voice behaviors when leaders exhibit openness to employee ideas and in organizations with a positive workplace climate (Burris, 2012; Chamberlin et al., 2017). In contrast, low perceptions of workplace freedom of speech, interpersonal justice, and abusive leadership hinder employee voice

(Kim & Kiura, 2020; Kim & Leach, 2020; Morrison, 2014). Taken together, the extant literature has advanced our understanding of voice behaviors within organizations, especially the antecedents.

Problem Statement

Although extant literature has advanced our understanding of constructive employee voice, our knowledge of voice behavior is still limited in several ways that have substantial theoretical and practical implications. First, the current research views voice as a one-time event (Satterstrom et al., 2020). However, voice could be both a one-time as well as an ongoing event. As a one-time event, voice is perceived as a discrete behavior that is not influenced by the history of voice behaviors, or whose outcome does not shape future voicing behaviors. Further, voice is portrayed as a discrete behavior that receives feedback—acceptance or rejection—immediately following its enactment and without undergoing any modification. As an ongoing event, voice is largely shaped by previous histories—either of the organization or an individual—and shapes future voicing behaviors in organizations. Moreover, voice is a continually developing and evolving process as ideas are debated by voicers and their close associates before reaching the intended target. Once enacted, ideas could undergo modification before acceptance and implemented or dismissal.

Additionally, ideas that were formerly rejected could be revived by members of the organization, other than the original voicer, and later be implemented (Satterstrom et al., 2020). As such, voice is a goal-directed behavior that changes over time due to continued effort from different organizational members involved in the voicing process.

Thus, to advance our understanding of voice behaviors, there is need to investigate voice as an ongoing event. Examining the ongoing aspect of voice will allow us to uncover the critical events or stages that ideas go through from inception onwards. Such examination will also highlight how the ongoing interactions among organizational members constitute constructive voicing. Further, by situating interaction at the core of constructive voice, communicative patterns and practices that make voice successful can be unraveled. These communicative practices could be a pathway toward cultivating more constructive voicing that is still comparatively low in organizations (Subhakaran et al., 2020).

The second limitation of the extant voice research is that it primarily focuses on the initial utterance or expression of ideas to the authority figure, while overlooking pre- and post-initial expression moments. Pre-initial expression period is significant in the voicing process as it explains the processes that lead to the enactment of the ideas. In other words, pre-initial utterance phase sheds light on the incubation process of the idea that is later enacted. Further, as the goal of voicing is to improve the organizational functioning, excluding the post-initial utterance phases limits our understanding of whether change actually happens as a result of voicing within the organization (Satterstrom et al., 2020). Relatedly, overlooking post-initial expression phases inhibits our knowledge of how the outcomes of voicing influence employee behaviors. Additionally, focusing only on the initial utterance casts voice as simple process, which contradicts the reality of voicing in organizations.

Third, the extant voice literature has focused on one side of the voicing interaction—either the voicer or the recipient who may include, supervisors, managers, or other authority figures. As a result, prior work has examined the frequency with which employees enact voice in organizations (Liang et al., 2012); the frequency of voice behaviors from subordinate that leaders and managers observe; leader or manager reactions to voiced ideas; and the behaviors leaders should embrace to encourage more voice within organizations (Burris et al., 2008; Detert, & Romney, 2013; Detert & Burris, 2007; Grant, 2013; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). This one-sided focus has led to siloed research on voice that overlooks the interactions that characterize the different stages of the voicing process. Further, the one-sided focus casts leaders or managers as permanent receivers whose only role is to listen to the voiced ideas, while it is the sole responsibility of the employee to carry out the ideas from inception to the final stages of the idea. As the enactment of ideas in organizations occurs in a group setting (Satterstrom et al., 2020), organizational members other than the voicer and the target of the voice are present in the meeting where ideas are shared. Although these organizational members actively participate in the voicing process, their contributions are yet to be empirically examined.

Fourth, there is growing consensus that constructive voice involves both promotive and prohibitive forms, and that both forms of voice are conceptually and empirically distinct (Liang et al., 2012; Li et al., 2020). However, the majority of past research on constructive voice has focused on one form of voice: either promotive or prohibitive (Chamberlin et al., 2017). Promotive and prohibitive forms of voice are not

mutually exclusive in that an employee could enact both promotive and prohibitive ideas within the same interaction episode. In this respect, exploring only one form of voice could hinder a broader understanding of constructive voice. Relatedly, extant research operates under the assumption that the enactment process is similar for both forms of voice. This assumption can be misleading especially because promotive and prohibitive forms of voice serve different functions, with prohibitive voice cast as a riskier form of voice (Liang et al., 2012). Given both forms of voice are beneficial to organizations (Chamberlin et al., 2017), exploring only one form of voice or assuming the enactment process is similar for both forms of voice will inevitably produce incomplete knowledge and understanding of factors that facilitate or hinder the overlooked form of voice. Thus, examining both forms of voice simultaneously could offer insights that can aid in advancement of employee voice scholarship.

Purpose of the Study

In light of the aforementioned limitations, the present study seeks to (a) understand the processual nature of employee voicing from inception to final stages and (b) identify the communicative strategies that workers use throughout the voicing process. These goals will be pursued in the context of renewable energy industry in Kenya. The renewable energy industry in Kenya is an ideal context to study constructive employee voicing because constructive voicing is valued and expected in this context, and it is critical to the longevity of the industry. Namely, the industry is highly competitive due to the growing number of players in the industry, highly innovative, and knowledge intensive. As such, managers encourage voicing especially during regular

departmental meetings in order to (a) help organizations to respond to unforeseen circumstances more quickly than their competitors, (b) constantly upgrade the products to reflect technological advancements, and (c) understand and respond to the dynamic nature of the industry.

To address the first goal, I aim to explore constructive voice as an ongoing, communicative event. Both forms of constructive voicing–promotive and prohibitive– will be examined. Particularly, I adopt a communicative process approach to examine constructive voicing from inception to final stages of the ideas. More specifically, I utilize process as a developmental event sequence approach that focuses on identifying the events that characterize a phenomenon and the order of occurrence of these events (Poole et al., 2000). The central focus of the approach is uncovering the activities that a phenomenon undergoes as it changes over time. Additionally, the study will be in-part guided by the enactment-selection-retention model of organizing (Weick, 1979). Thus, combining the two approaches in the current study will reveal in finer details the critical events or phases in the development of voicing. In doing so, the study aims to reconceptualize constructive voice by offering a different perspective–voice as an ongoing event– that complements the dominant approach to voice as a one-time discrete event.

Second, using communicative lens, the study pays attention to how different interaction patterns and practices among organizational members constitute voicing, in and across its different phases. This communicative approach recognizes that originators of ideas or initial voicers have an important role in the voicing process considering they

initiate the conversation with peers and eventually expressed ideas to the targeted authority figures. Additionally, voice recipients and peers, too, constitute voicing significantly. As voicing often occurs during team meetings (Dutton & Ashford, 2008; Satterstrom et al., 2020), organizational members present in the meetings can constitute voice through interactions. Hence, organizational members are the constituents of interactions whose practices and patterns of communication produce voicing and continually reproduce and change it from inception to the final stages.

Focusing on organizational members' interactional patterns could enrich constructive employee voice scholarship by illuminating communicative strategies that characterize voicing at each stage. I define communicative strategies as coordinated communicative actions that are goal directed. By uncovering the communicative strategies that characterize each phase, the findings could advance scholarship by demonstrating ways to navigate barriers to voicing such as strict hierarchy and risks associated with voicing. Research on issue-selling, a form of voicing enacted by middle-level managers, has documented that power asymmetry shapes how one engages in voice (Dutton & Ashford, 2008). Thus, the current study could uncover ways in which power disparities manifest for supervisor as well as subordinate voicers with respect to their preferred communicative strategies. Further, the communicative approach will cast light into the strategies used by the targeted voice recipients and other members present such as voicers' peers during the voicing episode.

In sum, the current study aims to examine the ongoing and processual nature of constructive voice across multiple interactions and organizational levels. Particularly, the

study seeks to identify the key phases of the voicing process. By examining the interactions between the voicer, voice recipient, and other organizational members such as peers and supervisors, the study elucidates how communication constitutes constructive voicing. Additionally, the study seeks to shed light into the communicative strategies utilized throughout the voicing process to achieve favorable voicing outcomes. Theoretically, the findings from the study will aid in reconceptualizing the voice construct and advance voice scholarship. Practically, the findings will inform better recommendations for managers who wish to cultivate and foster constructive voicing in organizations. Further, the findings are beneficial to employees who wish to engage in constructive voicing.

Organization of the Manuscript

This manuscript unfolds as follows: Chapter two reviews relevant literature on constructive voice. To begin, the theories of employee voice are discussed. This section reviews the theoretical framework, history of employee voice research, and the recent development of employee voice scholarship. Second, as the study focuses on constructive voicing, a definition of the concept is provided. In addition, the differences between constructive voice and other related constructs are discussed. Finally, I synthesize the extant voice scholarship before proposing a new way of theorizing voice. Building on the new approach to voicing, I present the research questions of the study. Chapter three reviews the methods of the study. Particularly, I discuss the research context, participants, as well as data collection and analysis process.

Chapter four presents the findings of the study. First, the findings of the first research question, which sought to understand the core phases in the voicing process are discussed. The data revealed five core phases. Namely, idea formation, planning, initial enactment, reflexive enactment, and outcome. The significance of each of these phases in the voicing process are discussed. Next, the findings of the second research question are discussed. The second research question examines the communicative practices utilized in each of the phases of the voicing process. The data revealed that organizational members involved in the voicing process utilize different communicative strategies to ensure successful outcomes. These strategies are shaped the nature of the idea—promotive vs. prohibitive, risks involved, power and status disparities, and workplace communicative relationships between peers and between supervisors and subordinates.

Finally, in chapter five, I provide a summary of findings before discussing the study's key theoretical contributions, practical implications, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Theories of Employee Voice

The construct of voice was first introduced by Hirschman (1970) in his classic model of exit-voice-loyalty. Hirschman theorized that when employees are dissatisfied with the organizational conditions, employees respond by either leaving the organization (exit) or confronting the dissatisfaction from within the organization (voice). Loyalty was perceived as the moderating factor that influenced the decision to either leave or stay in the organization. Loyal employees were more likely to stay and change the dissatisfactory conditions, while disloyal or less loyal employees preferred leaving the organization. Thus, voice was conceptualized as an expression of dissatisfaction with an organization. Essentially, loyal employees who were dissatisfied with the management were motivated to speak up against the cause of dissatisfaction with a hope of bringing positive change in the organization.

More scholars later extended the definition of voice as the scholarship gained traction across various disciplines. Within the human resources, employee relations, and industrial relations disciplines, employee voice was conceptualized as providing opportunities for workers to interact with the managers in a manner and context that contributes to decisions (Budd, 2004; Freeman & Medoff, 1984). In the management discipline, voice was defined as a "promotive behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge needed to improve rather than merely criticize. Voice is making

innovative suggestions for change and recommending modifications to standard procedures even when others disagree" (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998, p. 109).

Within the communication field, voice scholarship has mainly focused on organizational dissent and upward communication/influence. Organizational dissent is conceptualized as communication of disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational policies, practices, and operations (Kassing, 1998). Organizational dissent scholarship has substantially contributed to the development of voice research by identifying dissent triggering events, goals, types of dissent as defined by the audiences, and strategies. Kassing (2009) reported that dissent can be triggered by various factors that can be classified into three main domains: organizational processes such as decision making; personal interests such as role responsibilities; and wrongdoing such as unethical behaviors. Further, it has been documented that employees dissent to achieve various goals including, seeking emotional support, obtaining information, and changing the target's opinion (Garner, 2009). Finally, different types of dissent have been identified based on the audience: displaced, lateral, and upward dissent. Displaced dissent entails expressing disagreement about organizational policies and practices to people outside of the organization such as family and friends. Lateral refers to dissent directed toward employees occupying similar organizational rank with the dissenter. Upward dissent occurs when employees express disagreement or contradictory opinions to someone above them in the organizational hierarchy (Kassing 1997, 1998).

Upward dissent is considered riskier given the power imbalances between the dissenter and the audience member. As such, scholars have identified different strategies

that dissenters use when enacting upward dissent. According to Kassing (2002), employees utilize five strategies: solution presentation, direct-factual appeal, circumvention, repetition, and threatening resignation. These strategies are often understood in a continuum ranging from most competent to least competent (Kassing & Kava, 2013). Research has classified solution presentation and direct-factual appeal as more competent compared with circumvention, repetition, and threatening resignation (Garner, 2012; Kassing, 2006). Most recent, the focus within the upward dissent scholarship has been on upward ethical dissent, particularly the ways in which this form of dissent can be cultivated and fostered in organizations (Bisel & Adame, 2019; Zanin et al., 2016).

Upward communication/influence is defined as "a deliberate attempt by a subordinate to select tactics that will bring about change in a more powerful target and facilitate achievement of a personal or organizational objective" (Waldron, 1999, p. 253). Similar to dissent work, upward influence scholars have identified tactics that are used by employees, namely: rationality/reason, ingratiation, exchange/bargaining, assertiveness (pressure), coalition, upward appeal, consultation, inspirational appeals, and repetition (Kipnis, 1980; Waldron, 1999). These tactics overlap with the dissent strategies discussed earlier.

As voice scholarship continued to develop, so did the refinement of the concept. For example, Liang et al., (2012) identified two types of voice: promotive and prohibitive. Promotive voice is theorized as sharing ideas that involve future actions that should be taken to improve organizational functioning. Prohibitive voice refers to

expressing concerns about problematic policies that need to be corrected to prevent harmful consequences on organizational operations and functioning (Liang et al., 2012). As these definitions reveal, both types of voice have an underlying goal of improving the organization's operations and functioning. The conceptual distinction between promotive and prohibitive voice offered an important lens of understanding voice with respect to the different functions it serves. Taken together, the distinction has contributed to the refinement of the voice construct.

Building on this line of scholarship, Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) proposed an organizing framework for employee voice behaviors. The scholars identified two dimensions along which voice varies; namely, preservation-challenge and promotion-prohibition dimensions. Preservation-challenge dimension differentiates voice that affirms the organization's status quo (preservation) from voice that is critical of the organization's status quo (challenge). Preservation voice supports the decisions and policies implemented by the management without questioning how things are done. The goal of this type of voice is to sustain the current organizational functioning. An example of preservation voice is praising the current performance evaluation policy within the organization. On the other hand, challenge voice involves articulation of critical opinions by the organization members. This type of voice aims to change organizational functioning. Examples include, calling out problematic policies or practices within the organization that need to be corrected such as vague discrimination policies that do not protect the victims.

Promotion-prohibition dimension differentiates voice that improves or encourages organizational practices (promotion) from voice that hinders or constrains certain organizational practices programs (prohibitive). Drawing on these dimensions, Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) advanced employee voice scholarship by clarifying behaviors that are considered voice. The scholars identified four categories of voice based on the two dimensions: defensive, destructive, supportive, and constructive.

Defensive voice entails opposing changes to organizational policies, practices, or programs even when the changes are warranted or necessary. For example, opposing implementation of a new advanced software to run the organization's operations. Defensive voice mirrors resistance to change and is often motivated by the need to protect the status quo. *Destructive* involves expressing critical opinions about the organizational policies, practices, and procedures with the goal of destroying the organization. For example, complaining about the organizational policies even when the policies are not detrimental to the wellbeing of the organization and its members. *Supportive voice* consists of communicating support for the current organizational policies and practices when the practices are being unfairly criticized. For example, defending organizational practices when others complain of the same practice as being inappropriate.

Finally, *constructive voice* entails expressing ideas with the goal of improving the organization. Constructive voice involves challenging the status quo by introducing new ways of doing things or ways of addressing the problematic policies. For example, suggesting new ways of conducting weekly meetings to ensure that all members present

in the meeting have opportunities to contribute to the discussion. In other words, the suggested new ways should be more effective than previous approaches or should be aimed at improving the weekly meetings. This last type of voice is also the focus of the current study given its potential to significantly shape individual and organizational performance (Van Dyne et al., 1995).

Defining Constructive Voice

Scholars have defined *constructive voice* as upward communication of ideas (e.g., suggestions, opinions, and/or concerns) within the organization with the goal of benefiting the organization and its members through improvement in organizational operations and functions (Liang et al., 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). This conceptualization of voice has primarily guided voice scholarship especially in the management field where voice has been extensively studied. Constructive voice can sometimes be conflated with other forms of employee voice across disciplines. To clarify, the key underlying assumptions in the referenced definition are: 1) it is constructive, 2) it is not always driven by prosocial motives, 3) it is upward, 4) it is internal, and 5) constructive employee voice can be enacted when employees are both satisfied and dissatisfied. In what follows, I discuss each of these assumptions while explaining how they differ from the proposed process view of voice.

First, it is constructive. Both promotive and prohibitive forms of voice are constructive in that they question how things are done and provide solutions with the intention of improving organizational functioning (Maynes & Podsakof, 2014). For instance, employees engaging in promotive voice communicate suggestions and opinions

with a goal of positively transforming organizational practices. Similarly, pointing out harmful practices that need to be stopped improves the working environment and enhances unit performance (Li et al., 2017). Additionally, by introducing new ways of doing things or stopping problematic practices, both forms of voice challenge the status quo and are likely to cause ripples within the organization.

Second, constructive voice is not exclusively driven by prosocial motives. Prosocial refers to the desire to benefit another person or a group of people (Bolino & Grant, 2016; Morrison, 2014). Although there is compelling empirical evidence demonstrating that people with prosocial values engage in constructive voice (Grant & Rothbard, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Lam & Mayer, 2013), other motives could drive constructive voice. For example, engaging in constructive voice could be motivated by the need to enhance individual social status within an organization and self-protection (Van Dyne at al., 2003; Weiss & Morrison, 2019). A process perspective on voice is in line with the assumption that other motives could influence constructive voice. Even more, a process perspective recognizes that motives could change as the voicing process unfolds.

Third, constructive voice is upward. The understanding of the concept has been limited to communication directed toward person(s) in higher organizational rank than the voicer. This because constructive voice is inherently action-oriented given the underlying goal of improving the organization's operations and functions. The implementation of the ideas requires someone who has access to the needed resources to act on the ideas. As such, the definition is limited to upward communication that is

directed to an authority figure who can either act on the ideas or easily access the authority figure responsible for acting on the idea to bring functional change in the organization. A process view on voice departs from the exclusive focus on upward communication. Namely, a process perspective recognizes that other organizational members such as peers are involved in the voicing process. Garner (2013) noted that interactions between dissenters and their peers influence the development of ideas that are later enacted. Additionally, considering previous work has primarily focused on the initial utterance stage that entails sharing ideas with an authority figure, it is within reason to assume that peers are involved in the pre- and post-initial utterance stages of the voicing process that are yet to be uncovered. Thus, a process view contends that voicing involves both horizontal and upward communication of ideas.

Fourth, constructive voice is internally-directed. Although organizational members share work-related suggestions or concerns with people outside of the organization such as family and friends, constructive voice has been understood within the boundaries of the organization. Namely, constructive voice that is directed toward powerful organizational members who have the authority or access to resources that allow them to act on the voiced ideas. A process perspective on voice not only recognizes horizontal communication that characterizes the voicing process as discussed earlier, but also acknowledges the role of other organizational stakeholders such as customers and competitors in the voicing process. As customers interact with internal stakeholders such as employees, it is possible that these interactions influence the voicing process.

Fifth, constructive voice can emerge from satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the organization. Although initial work on employee voice framed it as a behavior that stems from dissatisfaction (Hirschman, 1970), subsequent research has demonstrated that even employees who are satisfied engage in voice behaviors (Farrell & Rusbult, 1992; Kassing, 2001). Therefore, constructive voice can be enacted by satisfied and dissatisfied employees.

Overall, the study focuses on constructive voice that is broad enough to account for (a) both promotive and prohibitive forms of voice that occur within the organization, (b) the role of other organizational members, other than the voicer and recipient, in the voicing process, and (c) voice that occurs in both dyadic and group settings. Finally, it is worth noting that the study focuses on constructive voice that targets organizational operations and functions, which differs from voice that aims to enhance moral values within organizations. Also, the constructive voice being examined allows all organizational members to enact voice despite their job roles. In other words, all employees ranging from frontline workers to middle-level managers can engage in voice.

Differentiating Constructive Voice from Related Constructs

Beyond the typologies of voice that have been identified, extant literature has generated several constructs that share conceptual similarities with constructive voice but are ultimately different. These constructs include organizational dissent, upward influence, and issue-selling. Thus, to achieve conceptual clarity on constructive voice, I explicate the key differences between constructive voice and the aforementioned related

constructs. In doing so, I foreground the importance of recognizing constructive voice as a distinct construct.

Organizational Dissent

Organizational dissent refers to expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational policies, practices, and operations (Kassing, 1998). Organizational dissent is a form of voicing, hence, overlaps with constructive voice in some ways but it is also different. First, drawing on the above definition, dissent is limited to expression of disagreement. Thus, while constructive voice can stem from both satisfied and dissatisfied employees, engaging in dissent is driven by dissatisfaction with organizational practices, policies, or operations. This means that the promotive aspect of constructive voicing is excluded from the dissent conceptualization.

Second, dissent can be directed toward individuals who are not members of the organization, as is the case with displaced dissent; however, constructive voice is limited to expression of ideas to someone within the organization. Third, dissent can be lateral—expressed to people in the same organizational rank as the dissenter or upward—directed to organizational members who are above the dissenter in the organizational hierarchy (Kassing, 1997, 1998). Lateral and upward dissent are considered to be mutually exclusive. This differs from constructive voice in that a single idea is directed both horizontally to peers and upwardly to the authority figures. In other words, lateral and upward constructive voicing are not mutually exclusive. Lateral communication occurs in the initial stages of constructive voice, also known as the incubation period of the ideas, that are characterized by interactions between the originator of the idea and peers. Once

ideas are developed, communication of ideas is directed upward where voicers and their peers share the ideas with an authority figure for the purpose of improving the organizational functioning and operations. Despite the differences, there are some overlaps between voice and dissent. For example, both prohibitive constructive voice and articulated or upward dissent are enacted with a goal of addressing problematic organizational practices and policies for the benefit of the organization and its members.

Upward Influence

Upward influence is theorized as a "deliberate attempt by a subordinate to select tactics that will bring about change in a more powerful target and facilitate achievement of a personal or organizational objective" (Waldron, 1999, p. 253). Upward influence is directed to an authority figure within the organization. Additionally, upward influence can be motivated by both self-interests and prosocial motives. However, upward influence is not necessarily constructive because the ideas enacted by the subordinate do not always challenge the status quo. Moreover, constructive voice can be both lateral—directed to peers such as during incubation period of the ideas—and upward—expressed to an authority figure especially during the initial utterance stage. Further, upward influence is defined and subsequently enacted by a subordinate, while constructive voice can be enacted by both subordinates as well as others in positions of power such as supervisors and managers. Finally, upward influence research focuses on the tactics used by the subordinates to influence the target (Kipnis et al., 1980; Krone, 1991; Waldron, 1999). On the other hand, constructive voice research moves beyond tactics to examine

other aspects such as types of constructive voice, its underlying motives, its antecedents, and consequences.

Issue-selling

Conceptualized as attempts by the middle-level managers to influence top managers (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), issue-selling is equally similar to, yet different from constructive voice. For example, if the issues being raised by the middle-level managers are aimed at bringing functional change within the organization, then issue-selling qualifies as constructive voice. However, issue-selling is also distinct in that it limits its enactment to middle-level managers. Conversely, constructive voice can be enacted by employees across different ranks including subordinates.

Understanding Constructive Voice

Traditional Approaches to Constructive Voice

Constructive voice has been theorized as a one-time single event that is driven by an individual employee (cf. Chamberlin et al., 2017; Morrison, 2014). Viewing voice as a one-time discrete event has generated research that reflects a rather exclusive focus on the acute voicing, or the moment when the employee shares the ideas with the authority figure. This perspective has largely shaped the voice measurements that have been developed over the years. Particularly, these measurements contain items that exclusively focus on the initial utterance of the ideas. For example, some of the items in popular voice measurements include "communicates his/her opinions about work issues to others in this group even if his/her opinion is different and others in the group disagree with him/her," and "raise suggestions to improve the unit's working procedure" (Liang et al.,

2012). Although the measurements have been instrumental in advancing employee voice theory, voice research is yet to uncover how the voiced ideas are processed and responded to after enactment. Additionally, an exclusive focus on the initial expression phase overlooks the pre- and post-initial utterance phases that are crucial in understanding the voicing process. Essentially, the pre-initial expression phase sheds light on the events that lead to the utterance of the ideas. On the other hand, the post-initial expression phase offers insight into the events that follow the occasion in which ideas are first shared with an authority figure.

Viewing voice as a one-time event has generated a variance approach research that examines variables that influence that event—employee voice. As a result, research on this concept has predominantly focused on antecedents of voice. For example, Morrison (2014) identified numerous factors that influence constructive voice. These factors are classified into five categories of antecedents: namely, individual dispositions; job and organizational attitudes and perceptions; emotions, affect, and beliefs; supervisor and leader behaviors; and contextual factors. In many ways, these categories of antecedents have been the basis of voice scholarship in the last decade. Each of these categories are discussed in the following section.

Individual Dispositions

Individual dispositions refer to characteristics of individuals that influence one's behaviors (Motowidlo et al., 1997). The characteristics include demographic attributes such as gender, age, tenure, and employment status, as well as deep-level attributes such as personality types. Examples of personality types that have been examined include,

agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and proactiveness (Detert & Burris, 2007; Fuller & Marler, 2009; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). Individual dispositions are believed to shape individual employee voice behaviors in various ways. For instance, research has shown that older and male employees are more likely to enact voice behaviors compared to younger and female employees (Artistico et al., 2003; Simpson & Lewis, 2005). With respect to the influences of the personality types on employee voice, it has been documented that characteristics such as assertiveness, extraversion, and achievement-orientation are positively associated with constructive voice behaviors (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Morrison, 2014). Additionally, workers with high proactive personality are more likely to engage in voice behaviors (Liang & Gong, 2013). On the other hand, employees exhibiting neuroticism and agreeableness are less likely to engage in voice (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; LePine & Van Dyne, 2001; Venkataramani & Tangirala, 2010).

Job and Organizational Attitudes and Perceptions

Another set of antecedents to voice that has garnered scholarly attention relate to attitudes held by the employees with respect to the job and the organization. Research indicates that the attitudes and perceptions of job and organization affect the amount voice behaviors in organizations. For example, employees who experience job satisfaction or satisfied with their workgroup are more likely to engage in voice (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012). Similarly, employees who perceive organizations to be fair, supportive, and decentralized are more likely to engage in voice behaviors (Burris et al., 2008; Kim & Kiura, 2020; Kim & Leach, 2020; Zhang et al., 2014). In contrast,

employees are less likely to engage in voice behaviors when they perceive high psychological detachment from the organization (Burris et al., 2008).

Emotions, Affect, and Beliefs

Employees' emotions, affect, and beliefs about their work and work environment also shape voice behaviors. This is especially true for employees occupying lower organizational ranks who experience more barriers to speaking up. When employees experience psychological safety, they are more likely to speak up (Liang et al., 2012). On the other hand, fear inhibits employee voice (Lebel, 2016). Employees will be hesitant to speak up if they feel that doing so would lead to negative consequences for them (Burris et al., 2008). When it comes to affect, research shows that there is a curvilinear relationship between positive affect and voice behaviors. Very low levels and too high levels of positive affect are negatively associated with employee voice (Lam et al., 2014). This is because at very low levels of positive affect, employees are less motivated to engage in any extra-role, discretionary behaviors such as employee voice. Employees with too high levels of positive affect believe that the organization and employees are doing well and thus, such employees do not see the need to engage in challenging behaviors such as constructive voice (Lam et al., 2014).

Supervisor and Leader Behaviors

Another key category of antecedents that enables or constrains employee voice is supervisor and leader behaviors. Leaders are often targets of voice since they have access to valuable resources and have knowledge of how change works within the organization (Yang, 2021). As such, scholars have examined how supervisors and leaders' behaviors

within the organization affect employees' propensity to speak up. Research in this area has identified various leadership styles that lead to speaking up; namely, transformational, servant, high leader-member exchange, ethical leadership, and leader openness (Burris, 2012; Detert & Burris, 2007; Sun et al., 2019). Conversely, abusive leadership, autocratic leadership, and low leader-member exchange tend to hinder employee voice (Farh & Chen, 2014; Peng et al., 2019). Additionally, supportive managerial behaviors and openness to ideas encourage employees to speak up as such behaviors mitigate perceived risks of voicing (Detert & Burris, 2007; Kurtessis et al. 2007).

Contextual Factors

The environment within which an employee operates also shapes their voice behaviors. One of the contextual factors that has been extensively studied is workplace climate. For example, Kim and Leach (2020) found that workplace freedom of speech enhances promotive voice behaviors. Similarly, a climate that encourages knowledge sharing leads to more employee voice (Lee et al., 2014). In contrast, employee voice is hindered by a negative climate characterized by lack of support and riskiness of speaking up (George & Zhou, 2001).

Overall, the emphasis on antecedents to voice within the traditional voice research has significantly enhanced our understanding of key predictors of voice. Additionally, the knowledge on antecedents of voice has laid the groundwork for construction of complex models of voice that have advanced voice theory, especially through identification of proximal and distal antecedents of voice (cf. Chamberlin et al., 2017). Further, the

traditional research has also highlighted gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. For example, scholars have called for more research related to antecedents of voice in multinational and culturally diverse organizations (Yang, 2021).

Beyond examining the antecedents, the current voice scholarship is limited to an examination of the dyad—voicer and recipient of the voice. The underlying assumption is that only the voicer and the recipient are key in understanding voice in organization. This has resulted in myopic research that either focuses on the voicer or the recipient, presumably the manager. For example, there is a plethora of research on perspectives of the voicers (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001) and perspectives of the target (Fast et al., 2014; Subhakaran et al., 2020; Whiting et al., 2012). Although voice episodes involve a voicer and a target, it rarely takes place in isolation. Put simply, very often there are peers who witness their colleagues expressing their voice and other managers who are included in the conversation. This is especially true in contemporary organizations where workers are involved in collaborative activities in the workplace (Cross et al., 2016). Thus, traditional voice research fails to account for the multiple perspectives both at higher and lower organizational levels that can exist in a voicing process. Namely, voicers' perspectives, targets' perspectives, and observers' perspectives can all exist for the same voice episode (Morrison, 2011).

Constructive Voice in Sub-Saharan Africa

Although extant literature in employee voice is predominantly Western (Khatri et al. 2012; Morrison 2011, 2014), voice research within Sub-Saharan Africa is gaining momentum owing to the growing recognition of employees as critical to organizing

(Machokoto & Dzvimbo, 2020). However, employee voice in organizations and subsequently in research is comparatively lower in Sub-Saharan Africa than in Western cultures given the hierarchical and collectivistic cultural values prevalent in Africa. Namely, hierarchy produces status disparities in organizations where low-status employees are cast in structurally disadvantageous positions (Lee et al., 2019; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Additionally, employees in highly collectivistic cultures are less likely to engage in voice behaviors as doing so is perceived as a threat to group cohesiveness and harmony (Kwon & Farndale, 2020).

Due to the scarcity of indigenous theories of employee voice from the African perspective, employee voice scholarship in Africa often draws on voice models from the West. Thus, similar to voice literature in the West, employee voice in Africa has focused on examining factors that affect voice behaviors in African-based organizations. For example, Amah and Oyetuunde (2020) investigated the effects of servant leadership on employee voice in Nigeria. Kitur (2021) examined the relationship between employee voice and performance in Kenya. Additionally, the influences of individual factors on voice have also been examined. However, in contrast to the studies grounded in the western culture, research examining individual factors in Africa has focused on explorations of the effects of specific demographic attributes such as age, marital status, geographical location of the employee, level of education, and number of years of employment (Machokoto & Dzvimbo, 2020). Some of these demographic characteristics are considered more proximal predictors of voice in Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, employees who are older, married, educated, from urban areas, and have worked in the

organization for a longer period are more likely to engage in voice behaviors compared to their counterparts (Machokoto & Dzvimbo, 2020). This is unique to the African context where, for instance, wide economic disparities result in limited access to higher education for all. As such, employees with higher education are perceived to be more knowledgeable and are regarded in high esteem, making it easier for them to engage in voice behaviors. Similarly, employees from rural areas are perceived as having conservative mindset, hence, less likely to engage in voice behaviors. The conservative mindset involves beliefs such as respect for the elders and seniors in organization. To such employees, speaking up could be seen as disrespect to the authority figures (Emelifeonwu & Valk, 2019).

Beyond individual factors, scholars have also explicitly investigated cultural influences on voice. For example, Emelifeonwu and Valk (2019) found that the cultural aspect of respecting elders leads to preference for anonymous voicing in organizations. Further, tribe and ethnic identities shape voice behaviors. Employees are likely to share ideas with an authority figure who comes from the same tribe or ethnic group as the voicer. This is because voicers perceive such authority figure to be part of their ingroup given their shared tribal similarities (Ward et al., 2016). As far as barriers to voice are concerned, the scholars identified labor market conditions as a key barrier to speaking up. Majority of the Sub-Saharan countries are characterized by high unemployment rates that make it even harder to enact a voice for fear of losing jobs. Namely, high unemployment rates amplify the perceptions of risk of speaking up; hence, employees are hesitant to engage in voice (Emelifeonwu & Valk, 2019).

In sum, voice research in Sub-Saharan Africa thus far has taken a similar trajectory to Western literature. For example, there is an emphasis on examining the antecedents to employee voice in Africa. Despite the similarities, African scholars have explored how unique factors such as labor market conditions, collectivistic culture, and certain demographic attributes shape voice behaviors. Exploring these specific antecedents that are unique to the African context could lead to important implications for managers and employees working in the region. Although employee voice research in Sub-Saharan Africa is growing, the amount of research lags behind other parts of the world. Consequently, more voice research in this region is still needed.

Communicative Approaches to Voicing

The extant literature largely takes a variance approach toward understanding voice. Although some scholars have stated that employee voice is a process rather than a one-time discrete event (Garner, 2013; Mowbray et al., 2015), empirical work that reflects the processual nature of voicing is lacking. In other words, the understanding of voice as a process remains theoretical and speculative, with little empirical evidence to demonstrate how the process unfolds. For instance, Garner (2013) proposed a process approach toward understanding organizational dissent. Garner theorized dissent as a process that is characterized by three sequential events or phases: namely, precipitation, initial conversation, and residual conversation. Precipitation refers to the moment when an employee identifies problematic policies and practices and decides to speak up about them. Thus, precipitation is the subprocess that leads to a dissent conversation. The second phase, initial conversation, entails the moment when the dissatisfied employee

expresses concern about the problematic policies, operations, or practices. Finally, residual conversation involves the interaction that follows the initial expression. This phase encompasses the dissent recipient's response to the dissent. The final phase also determines if the dissent was effective or not.

Beyond identifying phases, Garner advocated examining the role of other organizational members in the dissent process. Echoing Garner's proposal, Wahlin-Jacobsen (2020) underscored the importance of examining interactions between the voicer and the target that characterize voicing by arguing that such an examination will illuminate finer details regarding how managers react and respond to voiced ideas. Thus, the current study theorizes that constructive voice is an ongoing, interactive phenomenon. This theorizing goes beyond the areas and foci of traditional research in constructive voice, and utilizes a social constructionist perspective that positions communication at the center of, and recognizes the complexity that characterizes, voicing. Particularly, this perspective emphasizes that social reality such as constructive voicing is produced through interactions among organization members. An important aspect of the communicative approach to voicing is that it widens the understanding of voicing as a practice that involves multiple organizational members and across organizational levels, not only voicers. Namely, interactions among voicers, voicers' peers, and managers or recipients of a message, constitute constructive employee voice. Garner (2013) argued that the speaker's peers may participate in the construction of constructive employee voice. For example, employees sometimes consult their peers to solicit feedback on the ideas/concerns prior to sharing with someone in a higher organizational rank.

Further, research in the domain of issue-selling has documented that voicers often involve their peers to foster issue-selling success (Dutton et al., 2001). However, voicers peers' involvement has been viewed as a mere numerical strength to achieve management buy-in. In this respect, the extant research has overlooked the specific contributions from the peers, and how these contributions shape the process of constructive voicing. Therefore, taking a communicative view on constructive voice invites us to account for the contributions of other organizational members in the voicing process.

Theorizing constructive voice as a process also allows us to pay attention to the context within which constructive employee voice occurs. In the dissent literature, it has been reported that employee dissent behaviors are influenced by past experiences and histories such as a manager's final response to dissent (Garner, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003). Thus, a process approach which departs from the emphasis on initial expression of ideas enables us to account for communicative practices that characterize the pre- and post-initial expression moments of the voicing process. Additionally, a process lens toward constructive employee voice elucidates the complex nature of voicing by highlighting the role of individual and organizational factors such as storytelling and histories in shaping the voicing process.

Moreover, a process approach enables us to closely trace voiced ideas over time. The dominant perspective views voice as a single one-time event, with research examining the variables that influence voice. This variable analytic view overlooks what happens to voiced ideas over time from ideation to implementation or rejection of the ideas, and the aftermath of the implementation or rejection. Particularly, voice is depicted

as a one-time event that is either rejected or accepted in the moment. Although the extant literature has documented that the majority of upwardly voiced ideas, especially from low-power employees are rejected in the moment, not all ideas are met with an immediate rejection (Satterstrom et al., 2020). Besides, some ideas that are rejected at the moment may be revived later by other organizational members and accepted for implementation (Fast et al., 2014).

Further, there is an underlying assumption that voiced ideas are implemented or rejected in their initial form. Recipients of voice and other organizational members present during the voicing episode are not passive audience members; rather, they may respond by agreeing, contradicting, and/or extending the initially voiced ideas. In turn, the organizational members' contributions and subsequent interactions could modify the initial ideas. Thus, voiced ideas could undergo modification before the final rejection or acceptance and implementation. Despite the growth in voice scholarship, research that highlights the complex interactive process that generates modification of the already-voiced ideas is limited. Modification of ideas tend to be fueled by the need to enhance the effectiveness and acceptability of the ideas. A communicative approach toward constructive voice could offer insights into the specific communicative practices that lead to the idea modification.

Taken together, a communicative view on constructive voice advances voice scholarship by interrogating the taken-for-granted assumptions prevalent in the existing literature. Further, it helps us illuminate the salient practices that characterize the process of voicing from voice inception to final acceptance or rejection. Exploring these

communicative practices is a step toward refining voice construct, advancing theories of employee voice (Suddaby, 2014). Indeed, important practices that employees should embrace or avoid if they wish to bring about positive organizational change through voice will be uncovered. Highlighting the significance of examining the dynamic and processual nature of voice, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What are the core phases of the voicing process in organizations?

RQ2: What are the communicative strategies that workers use in each phase of the voicing process?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Context

The research context for this study is renewable energy organizations in Kenya. Kenya's renewable energy industry has been named one of the leading sectors in Africa due to the remarkable growth in the number of renewable energy organizations (Butu et al., 2021; Ondraczek, 2014). There are different types of renewable energy organizations including solar, wind, geothermal, and hydropower organizations (Nderitu & Lambaino, 2021). Of these, solar energy organizations are the most vibrant as solar energy penetration into domestic use in the country has been very successful (Nderitu & Lambaino, 2021). Renewable energy organizations play a critical role in the provision of affordable and environmentally safe sources of energy especially in the rural parts of Kenya that have no access to electricity (Kiplagat et al., 2014; Mwai et al., 2021). Thus, renewable energy organizations can improve the standards of living in the rural parts of Kenya, and consequently reduce the poverty levels.

The renewable energy industry is an ideal context to study constructive employee voicing for several reasons. First, it is highly competitive due to a growing number of players in the industry in Kenya. The relatively low cost of establishing organizations in Kenya and the Kenyan government's intervention in promoting the use of renewable energy have led to an influx of renewable energy organizations within the country (Butu et al., 2021). Further, the increased number of renewable energy organizations can be attributed to the growing demand for renewable energy, especially solar energy in rural

parts of Kenya that have no access to the electricity grid (Adungosi & Odollo, 2020). Thus, managers and other authority figures regularly encourage employee voice because it helps organizations to respond to unforeseen circumstances more quickly than their competitors. Second, the renewable energy sector is highly innovative. The players in this industry depend on information from the customers and workers to be able to constantly upgrade the products to reflect technological advancements.

Third, the sector is knowledge intensive. Namely, organizations in the renewable energy industry rely on employees to a large extent to provide information that is key to understanding and responding to the dynamic nature of the industry. In this respect, constructive voicing occurs frequently and is critical to the sustainability of organizations in the renewable energy sector. Fourth, renewable energy organizations primarily serve people living in the rural parts of Kenya, especially people with no access to electricity. As the number of people without electricity in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to increase by 11% by 2030 (Butu et al., 2021), studying the voicing process in the renewable energy industry could uncover ways of fostering voice, and consequently improve organizational practices and facilitate innovations. Such positive organizational transformation could benefit the residents particularly in rural areas, and subsequently enhance their standards of living. In sum, the characteristics of the renewable energy industry reveal that constructive voice is valued and expected in this context, and it is critical to the longevity of the industry.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited following purposive, maximum variation, and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is used to ensure that the data gathered fits the research goals (Tracy, 2020). Given the present study's goals of tracing the voicing process, purposive sampling was used to limit the recruitment of the participants to those employees who had engaged in constructive employee voice. This was achieved by providing a definition of constructive employee voice in the recruitment message, and only interviewing participants who reported that they had engaged in constructive employee voicing during the past year. Limiting the engagement of voice to one year allowed the researcher to report findings that reflect current organizational reality.

Maximum variation sampling technique is a strategy used to achieve diversity within the sample in terms of qualities, attributes, and situations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Essentially, maximum variation ensures that "many different variations of the data in a given case are explored" (Higgintbottom, 2004, p. 16). In the current study that focused strictly on employees working in the renewable energy sector, the sample was diversified to achieve demographic richness and to avoid collecting biased opinions. Namely, I recruited participants who varied in age, gender, organizational rank, years worked, organizational departments, size of the organization they worked in, and location of the organization.

Snowball sampling is designed to study people who share certain characteristics as it "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of

others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). As a former employee in the Kenyan renewable energy industry, I made an initial call for participation to five of my former colleagues who are still working in renewable energy organizations. The five colleagues then referred me to their current and former coworkers, and the chain of referral continued. The snowball technique helped to expand the participant pool. All sampling techniques utilized in this study were used concurrently.

After receiving IRB approval from a large southwestern University, the researcher recruited participants using WhatsApp, a popular messaging app in Kenya, to recruit participants. Although all participants received a standard recruitment message (see Appendix A), the recruitment message was preceded by a personalized informal check-in based on the prevailing relationship between the researcher and the potential participant. For example, the check-in messages sent to my former coworkers differed from those sent to participants who were referred by other participants.

Participant Demographics

Twenty-three employees working in the renewable energy sector participated in the study. Participants consisted of 12 men and 11 women, with their ages ranging from 23 to 52 years (M = 32.30, SD = 7.91). The number of years worked in their current organization ranged from 0.5 to 18 years (M = 4.52, SD =4.04). Participants represented seven renewable energy organizations from both urban and rural parts of Kenya. The sizes of these organizations ranged from small (21 employees) to large (978 employees). Participants worked in different departments and had different levels of education. Please

see Table 1 for a summary of participant demographics. Although I had a question asking participants' ethnic tribe, the question was later dropped from the interview protocol when participants expressed concerns of sharing their tribe given the negative connotation of tribalism especially around national elections period; the national elections will be held in August 2022.

Data Collection

Upon IRB approval, data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. All interviews were conducted over Zoom and ranged in length between 43 and 86 minutes (M = 61, SD = 10.42). Each participant received a $20 gift card as compensation. Although all interviews were conducted in English, three interviewees answered some parts of the questions in Swahili. With the permission of the participants, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by a Swahili-English translation and transcription expert. On average, each interview generated 19 single-spaced pages of data. The researcher who is fluent in both Swahili and English verified the accuracy of all transcripts before commencing data analysis.

Table 1

Participant Demographics (n = 23)

Gender		Education Level		Hierarchical Level		Department	
Men	12	Bachelor's Degree	14	Subordinates	13	Customer Service-onboarding	4
Women	11	Diploma (an approximate equivalent of an associate degree in the US)	9	Immediate Supervisors	7	Customer Service-outbound	3
				Managers	3	Sales and Marketing	5
						Training and Development	2
						Logistics	3
						Maintenance and Repairs	2
						Information & Technology	1
						Credit Collection	3

One-on-one interviews were preferred because they offer opportunities to gather more candid and in-depth information about the phenomenon being studied. One-on-one interviews are also appropriate when the phenomenon under study is considered sensitive (Ryan et al., 2013). The phenomenon under the current study–employee voicing–is considered sensitive due to risks of speaking up that some employees experience such as retributions (Detert & Burris, 2007). Hence, participants might hesitate to share their voicing experiences in a group setting especially (a) if they have negative voicing experiences and (b) in the presence of authority figures or peers close to authority figures within their organization. Thus, one-on-one interviews with assured confidentiality was the most appropriate way of gathering data that attended to the study's research questions without jeopardizing participants' employment.

The semi-structured approach was appropriate primarily for the following reasons. First, it allows complex perspectives of the participants to be heard regarding the phenomenon under study (Tracy, 2020). Using a semi-structured approach means that when an interviewee introduced a topic pertinent to the study but outside of the current interview question, I pursued the interview in that direction while being conscious of the time allocated for the interview. For example, when participants started discussing how they communicate whenever they are invited to contributed to the planning subprocess by their peers, I allowed them to discuss their experiences even though the interview guide did not have a question asking how participants communicated whenever they are invited by their peers to refine ideas. In short, I had a series of questions that I intended to ask but

allowed the conversation to wander if the participant had something surprising, interesting, or counterintuitive to share.

Second, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to learn the important or meaningful aspects of the phenomenon under study from the participants' perspectives. The important aspects about the phenomenon from the participants' view is particularly helpful in the current study which sought to understand the communicative strategies utilized by employees throughout the voicing process. Third, a semi-structured approach allowed me to ask follow-up questions when necessary that aided in achieving rich descriptions of employee voicing. Collectively, one on one semi-structured data collection techniques produced rich and in-depth information pertaining to constructive employee voicing within the renewable energy sector in Kenya.

Given the study's goal of understanding the voicing process as well as identifying the communicative strategies that characterize the voicing process, the researcher used informant and respondent interviews. Informant interviews involve relying on participants who are veterans of the scene (in this case the organization) and have a wide level of knowledge pertaining to the scene, and consequently the phenomenon under study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The current study's sample included employees who had worked in the renewable energy sector for a relatively longer period of time –about 8 to 18 years. These participants had in depth insights on employee voicing processes and the voicing culture within the renewable energy organizations. Respondent interviews entail engaging participants or "social actors who all hold similar subject positions and have experiences that directly attend to the research goals." (Tracy, 2020, p. 159). In the

current study, I interviewed employees who had engaged in employee voicing. Further, I strived to interview participants in similar hierarchical ranks to allow me opportunities to compare and contrast their responses pertaining to the research questions.

At the start of the interview, participants were required to give verbal consent to participate in the interview. Next, the interviews began with questions centered around their organization's culture. These opening questions took the format of experience questions. These types of questions aim to prompt stories that interviewers can refer back to due to their relevance to the phenomenon or context under study (Tracy, 2020). Particularly, participants were asked to tell a story of how it is like working in their current organization. Participants were also asked to describe relationships they had with their peers as well as their supervisors and managers. These questions were helpful in reducing any uncertainties and tension before asking questions directly related to the phenomenon of the study–employee voicing.

After opening the interview, I then asked questions that directly related to employee voicing. The majority of interview questions about employee voicing followed the generative questions format. Generative questions consist of "non-directive, non-threatening queries that serve to generate (rather than dictate) frameworks for talk" (Tracy, 2020, p. 166). Within the larger umbrella of generative questions, I utilized different types of questions including tour, timeline, and hypothetical questions. Tour questions generate responses that provide descriptive knowledge about an activity of phenomenon (Tracy, 2020). In the current study, tour questions were aimed at providing

detailed accounts of voicing. For instance, I asked participants to recall a time they shared ideas with someone higher in the organizational rank and describe the ideas they shared.

Once participants described the ideas they had shared, I then asked them to take me through the various stages of voicing. Tour questions are effective tools of data collection especially when accompanied by timeline questions that seek to add contextual knowledge to the tour questions (Tracy, 2020). Thus, I asked timeline questions such as: "what are the events that led to the formation of the [insert the ideas described by the participants]. Finally, I asked hypothetical questions to generate interesting insights on the phenomenon under study (Tracy). Examples of hypothetical questions asked are: "if someone came up to you to seek advice on how to voice, what advice would you give them?" and "when you imagine an ideal voicing environment, how would that look like for you?" Beyond generating responses that were contextually rich with interesting insights, these generative questions served to relinquish control to the participants and allow them to take the lead in directing the conversation.

After answering all employee voicing related questions, participants completed a short questionnaire asking demographic information (e.g., age, gender, hierarchical rank, industry tenure, size of the organization) (see appendix A). With the permission of participants, interviews were recorded for verbatim transcription. To ensure participants' confidentiality, any information that could lead to identification of the participants was removed from the data, and participants were assigned pseudonyms. The audio recordings of all interviews were deleted upon completion and verification of transcriptions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A grounded theory is inductively derived in that the researcher focuses on the emerging themes to guide the data analysis. Building a theory grounded on data requires a systematic data collection and analysis of the data pertaining to the phenomenon under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, in a grounded theory approach, "data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationships with one another" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Grounded theory approach was appropriate in the current study because voicing is a complex phenomenon that requires multiple steps and involves multiple actors. For example, with respect to steps, voicing entails idea development and the conversations where the idea is expressed, debated, and a decision is made pertaining the idea. At the very least, voicing also involves multiple actors such as voicer, the recipient, and other organizational members who are present in the voicing episode and are not necessarily the originators of ideas or targeted recipients. Therefore, given the inherent complexity of voicing, a grounded theory approach would allow the researcher to capture the process of voicing in a deeper and richer way, as well as the nuances that characterize the process (Charmaz, 2014; Maxwell, 2005).

Consistent with the steps described in the grounded theory approach, I began by immersing myself in the data while conducting the interviews to identify the emerging themes. During this process, I aimed to identify *what* was present in the data. Understanding the data at the early stages allowed me to refine the interview guide along the way to explore the research questions more effectively. To further make sense of the

interview data, I iterated between the emerging findings and past related literature, experiences, and research interests. Particularly, I discussed my project and emerging themes with friends and read related literature on employee voice (e.g., Bain et al., 2021; Satterstrom et al., 2020), process theory (Poole et al., 2000), and enactment-selection-retention model of organizing (Weick, 1979).

Self-Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity refers to "people's careful consideration of the ways in which their past experiences, points of view, and roles impact their interactions with, and interpretations of, any particular interaction or context" (Tracy, 2020, p. 2). Self-reflexivity allows the researcher to recognize the ways in which their background influences how they conduct research–data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Thus, engaging in self-reflexivity means that the researcher is mindful of their positionality and its influence in the research process. In doing so, the researcher is able to mitigate any biases in the research process (Cunliffe, 2004). In this respect, I practiced self-reflexivity throughout the research process in the following ways.

First, as a former employee in a renewable energy organization, I anticipated that my initial sampling would comprise of employees from my former organization. Given that interviewing employees from only one organization could undermine my understanding of the voicing process in the renewable energy industry, I began recruiting participants from other organizations. Further, my experiences working in the renewable energy industry enabled me to discern the insider information; however, I was aware that these past experiences could influence how I interpret participants' narratives, especially

the narratives that contradicted my personal experiences. I mitigated this bias through two practices. To begin with, I suspended the urge to seek narratives that were consistent with my experiences.

Next, I engaged in member reflections to (a) confirm to increase the probability of accuracy of my interpretations of their lived experiences and (b) solicit feedback/insights that could strengthen the interpretation of the data. Particularly, after analyzing data for the first research question, I invited seven participants who had indicated interest during the interview to reflect on the phases I had identified. More specifically, participants were encouraged to critique the findings, paying attention to whether the findings represented the stories they had shared during the interview. Although I had initially identified four phases of the voicing process from the interview data, during the member reflections' process the participants discussed the importance of splitting one of the phases into two, yielding five phases.

Second, I engaged in negative case analysis during the coding process. Negative case analysis is a practice of actively seeking deviant data that contradicts the emerging themes (Tracy, 2020). Engaging in negative case analysis enhances the credibility of the findings as it "discourages the practice of cherry-picking data examples that only fit early explanations and ignoring discrepant stories or points of view" (Tracy, 2020, p. 229). For example, when employees discussed how they communicated in ways that prioritized benefits over cost when planning to enact voice, I sought data that reflected employees prioritizing costs over benefits during the planning process. Negative case analysis led to elimination of some codes and addition of other codes. As such, I engaged in negative

case analysis to reduce any biases of exclusively seeking codes that conformed to the already identified codes.

Coding Process

Coding is a process of examining the data and assigning phrases to the data in order to make sense of what is present in the data (Saldana, 2016). In the current study, I engaged in primary cycle, secondary cycle, constant comparative method, hierarchical coding, and process analysis. After verifying the accuracy of the first seven interview transcripts, I uploaded them into Nvivo qualitative software and began primary-cycle coding. During this initial coding activity, I immersed myself in the data with a goal of understanding what was going on in the data (Charmaz, 2014). I engaged in line-by-line analysis in this part to make sense of the data. Although the initial goal was to identify a code for each line, I later transitioned to sentence by sentence and in some cases phrase analysis as it was difficult to make sense of the data or assign codes for each line. While coding, I aimed to answer at least two questions: What is this? and What does it represent? I added more transcripts to the software as I completed more interviews.

After first round of coding, I engaged in secondary-cycle coding whereby I critically evaluated the codes identified in the primary cycle coding phase and synthesized and categorized them into interpretive concepts. For example, I categorized behaviors or actions that described how ideas emerged together. Examples of such behaviors and actions include, chatting with customers and sitting in the office brainstorming with colleagues. Throughout the coding process, I utilized a constant comparative method to compare data applicable to each code and organize codes based

on similarities (Charmaz, 2014). I used hierarchical coding to identify and organize secondary-level codes into umbrella categories/themes that made conceptual sense. The hierarchical categories/themes were determined by the extent to which words or phrases captured issues related to the research questions. For example, I initially assigned the code *ideation* to the codes that referenced the emergence of ideas. I continued to refine the hierarchical codes based on feedback from the participants, friends, and colleagues.

For the first research question, I further analyzed the data using a process lens. Integrating the process into the analysis is important in grounded theory because it allows the researcher to link sequences of action as they pertain to a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Hence, I used the process analysis to organize and link the different phases of voicing that emerged from the data. This part of analysis involved identifying common transition words or phrases such as "next stage" or "following that" that signaled a distinct event that followed what had already been discussed. Notably, although the analysis stages above—primary, secondary, hierarchical, and process—are described in a sequence, the analysis process involved iterations among the different stages and between data and theory in a non-sequential manner. The final analysis yielded five codes for the first research question (summarized in Table 2) and 17 codes for the second research question (summarized in Table 3). The five codes for research question one, which also represent the five phases of the voicing process are summarized in Figure 1. The final codes for both research questions were determined using the following criteria. First, when a code occurred frequently across all the interviews or across a unique category of participants being examined. For example, codes that

occurred frequently among supervisor voicers were identified and reported. Second, when theoretical saturation was achieved, and no new codes could be identified from the data.

Table 2

Codes for the Phases of Voicing

Code	Frequency of Occurrence
Idea Formation	23
Planning	18
Initial Enactment	23
Reflexive Enactment	19
Outcome	16

Table 3

Final Codes for Communicative Strategies

Code	Frequency of Occurrence
Highlighting one's agency and competency when soliciting input	13
Sharing ownership of the idea	15
Mitigating risks using hypothetical language	18
Prioritizing benefits over costs	16
Identifying anticipated risks and rewards	15
Masking responsibility	18
Recognizing recipient's authority and influence	12
Embracing the language of teamwork	18
Voice amplification	17
Seeking clarity and commitment	13
Directed sensegiving	7
Hesitation, passivity, and false promising	7
Emphasizing objectivity	13
Gatekeeping by invoking organizational policies	16
Use of gratitude	11
Invoking quality-improvement of the idea	16

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Phases of the Voicing Process

The first research question explored the phases of the voicing process in the renewable energy industry in Kenya. Extant literature on employee voice presents voice as a one-time event that is largely shaped by individual dispositions and organizational factors such as leadership behaviors. As a result, much of the research on employee voice has examined the individual and organizational level antecedents to employee voice. Additionally, prior work on employee voice is characterized by a rather exclusive focus on only one party of the interaction, such as when employees enact voice or how targeted recipient responds to the voiced ideas. Recognizing the limitations of traditional voice research, communication scholars have examined voice beyond the traditional dyad of voicer and manager. For example, Garner (2013) theorized dissent, a form of employee voice, as a process characterized by three phases, namely: precipitation, initial conversation, and residual. Although this approach toward understanding voice is promising, to date, these dissent phases have yet to be explored empirically.

My findings are, therefore, first to offer empirical evidence that indeed voicing is an ongoing event characterized by different phases. The findings of the current study revealed that voicing is best described as a process that involves idea formation, planning, initial enactment, reflexive enactment, and outcome. These core phases of the voicing process are summarized in Figure 1. Although the participants consisted of both voicers as well as recipients of voice, all phases were identified from the voicer's

perspective. Voicers' perspectives were preferred because they are originators of voicing, making it plausible to trace the voicing from the initial stages, prior to the ideas reaching the recipient.

From the findings, these phases are connected and fit together to form a voicing event, but each phase can represent an end of the voicing episode. For example, planning phase could be the final phase of a voicing event especially if voicers and their peers decide not to enact the ideas. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that the voicing process does not always necessitate the occurrence of all the five phases. For example, an event that undergoes all phases except planning or outcome phases could still be considered voicing. Some participants explained that once their ideas had developed, they proceeded to the initial enactment phase without undergoing the planning phase. Although from Figure 1 voicing might appear like a linear process, the phases of the voicing process do not always occur in a linear or sequential manner. For example, some phases can occur simultaneously such as idea formation and planning. In some cases, participants reported engaging in reflexive enactment after the receiver had communicated the outcome of the voice. The nonlinearity of the voicing process is captured through the double-sided arrows. Finally, the figure also captures the interactivity of the voicing process by illustrating the different actors involved in each of the phases.

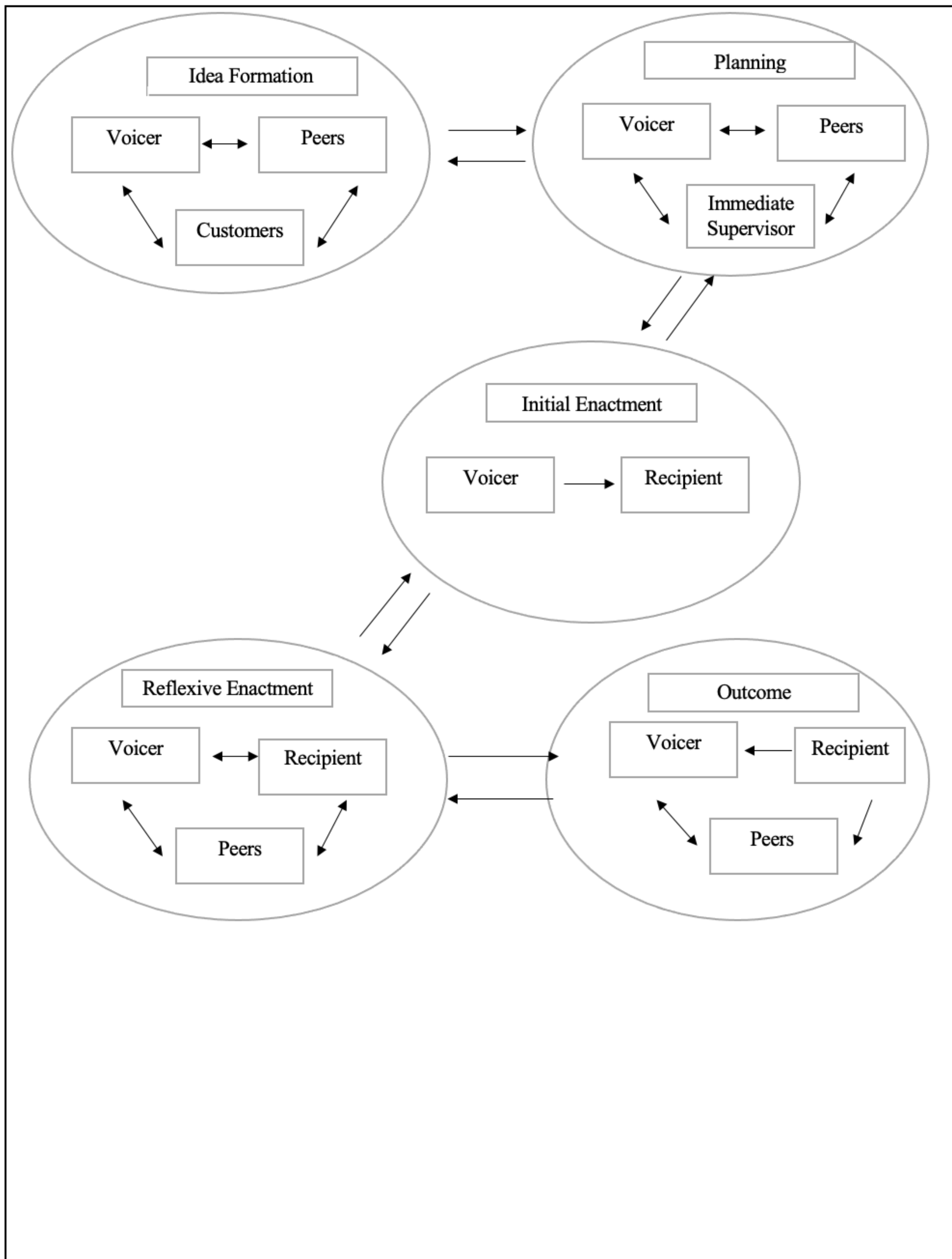

Figure 1: *Conceptual model of the voicing process*

In what follows, I present the different phases of voicing. First, I provide an explanation of what each phase entails. Second, I discuss the importance of each phase in the voicing process. Third, I highlight the interactivity of each phase. Collectively, the findings elaborate the complex voicing process within the renewable energy industry in Kenya.

Idea Formation

Across the interviews, participants identified idea formation as the earliest stage of the voicing process. This phase represents the emergence of an idea aimed at improving organizational functioning and operations. The idea could be both suggestions on how operations and functions could be improved or harmful practices within the organization that need to be stopped. Idea formation represents the earliest point of voicing as the employee is motivated to pursue this opportunity further by bringing it to the attention of someone in authority within the organization. To date, the initial phase of voicing has been conceptualized as a psychological process that involves only the individual who eventually shares the idea with someone in authority (Morrison, 2014). The individual employee generates the idea and communicates it to an authority figure. This conceptualization has led to a corpus of research examining cognitive antecedents to voicing. Other works have theorized idea formation as a passive interaction process where the voicer imagines the recipient's response to the idea, and these imaginations, in turn, shape the idea formation process (Cloven & Roloff, 1993; Kassing, 2009a).

In contrast, the data revealed that idea formation is a highly interactive process that involves the potential voicer and other organization stakeholders such as peers and

customers. Although sometime ideas could emerge at the individual level without any interactions, the findings demonstrated that more often than not, the full formation of these ideas takes place at a collective level through conversations with peers. However, within the renewable energy industry, a majority of the participants reported that ideas emerged during conversations with peers and/or customers. For example, in her statement, Khloe, a subordinate, explained that her idea was stimulated by an interaction she had with a customer and later her peers. She stated:

> The [idea] I was telling you about, I was talking with the customer who asked about a security bulb. This was very interesting and innovative, so I started brainstorming about it of course with colleagues and before the end of the day I had an idea ready to table. (Khloe, customer service representative)

When I followed up with Khloe to understand the need for brainstorming with colleagues after the idea had developed, she explained that the conversation with the customer sparked a thought which later solidified into an idea during her interaction with the peers. In other words, it is after her conversation with the peers that she knew she would express the idea to an authority figure. She described idea formation as a two-part process that was shaped by both customers and peers.

Khloe’s two-part process to idea formation was not an isolated case. Wema, another customer care representative, echoed Khloe’s sentiments. Wema explained how her idea stemmed from a conversation with a peer, but fully developed after an interaction with the customers:

> My colleague asked if I could speak to one of her customers after lunch who could not understand Swahili. This request made me think of why we cannot have customer reps assigned to regions based on their mother tongue instead of the current situation. Again, I did not think much into it until a customer called me speaking in Luo which I did not know well. So, yeah, I knew it was about time to think about how to bring this to the attention of the team leader. (Wema, customer service representative)

Similar to subordinates, supervisors also ideated through conversations with peers. For instance, Azil described how a check-in conversation produced an idea that later significantly shaped the organizational operations and functioning. He stated:

> We were just having a casual conversation with colleagues during lunch. And somehow, we ended up asking each other how our new employees were performing. The company had hired new employees, and the three of us had each received new employees to work under us. While listening to different reports from my fellow team leaders, which were mostly negative, the idea of training [new workers] came to mind. (Azil, supervisor)

As evidenced above, conversations with peers facilitated the idea formation for both supervisors and subordinates. However, unlike subordinates, supervisors did not ideate with customers given they rarely interacted directly with customers. Further, the findings revealed that ideas could develop from observing or listening to other organizational members' conversations without actively contributing to the discussion. For example,

Kasuku, a supervisor, discussed how the idea he shared with his manager emerged from a conversation he witnessed between his peers and their subordinates.

In sum, the findings demonstrate that idea formation is primarily an interactive process in the renewable energy industry. Conversations with peers and customers yielded ideas that employees later shared with authority figures. Further, even when employees were not directly interacting with their peers and colleagues, witnessing others' conversations stimulated ideas among workers. Although ideating through conversations with peers and customers could be consistent across different organizations, it is possible that the interactive ideation process demonstrated by the participants is unique to the renewable energy sector given most functions are executed as a team compared to individual.

Planning

Once the idea was developed, participants advanced to the planning phase where the idea's feasibility was assessed. Planning involves steps taken in preparing to express the ideas to an authority figure within the organization. Both supervisors and subordinates described the phase as a foresight process that involves communicating about the strategic actions that will be taken to achieve the desired voicing outcomes. The goals of planning were to refine the message of the conversation—elements of content, structure, and order of the idea—and to prepare for the interaction. In some cases, participants used the planning phase to practice the enactment process through role play. Participants described planning as a critical part of the voicing process given its focus on

both content of the idea and the presentation of the message, which enhanced voicers' confidence and perceptions of efficacy.

Within the renewable energy sector, planning is a highly interactive process that involves different organizational members other than the target of the voicing. Supervisors reported involving their peers in the planning phase, while subordinates involved both their peers and immediate supervisors. Subordinate voicers involved their peers when the recipient of the voice was the immediate supervisor, while immediate supervisors were enlisted when the target of the voice was the manager. Immediate supervisors were also involved whenever employees perceived their ideas as complex.

As stated earlier, planning focused on refining the content of the idea and strategizing the delivery of the idea—or initiating, maintaining, and ending the conversation about the idea with the authority figure. Organizational members participating in the planning process refined the content by developing and strengthening the rationale of the idea. This involved identifying benefits of the idea and the potential beneficiaries. Further, as employees had recognized that management evaluated positively ideas that were directly linked to the reduction of debt default among customers, refining ideas during the planning involved a discussion of how the proposed idea would solve the recurring problem of customers defaulting on the payments of the solar products that were sold on hire purchase. Cecily, a subordinate, explained this:

> The goal was to make sure the idea is improved to make it attractive to the management. So, we talked about how it would reduce OOC [out of credit customers which is an equivalent of defaulting customers] which was at 46%.

> Like the idea I shared of introducing M-wallet, we brainstormed ways to make it relevant to OOC or how it would drop the OOC levels. Luckily, we could easily do that with our idea, which was not the case for all ideas. (Cecily, customer service representative)

In addition, planning focused on the process of initiating and sustaining the voicing conversation with authority figures. This aspect of planning involved agreeing on how the voicer would present the ideas during initial utterance, identifying the evidence that would be shared by the voicer as well as peers, and selecting the individuals who would amplify the already voiced ideas.

> We planned by talking about how the conversation would progress. For example, how I would open up the conversation about the idea. You know, it can be very intimidating to stand up in the presence of all the bosses to say something. so having that opening statement in advance is helpful. (Wyclif, customer service representative)
>
> Another thing was to agree on who would stand up to support the idea. No offense but I don't like surprises. I personally prefer people who understand the idea well to support it during the presentation. (Kasuku, supervisor).

Throughout interviews, subordinate participants expressed that involving employees who had previously voiced was instrumental in preparing for the conversation. For example, Kanini, a sales and marketing agent, shared the following:

> To avoid being caught off guard, our experienced colleagues tried to [anticipate] possible responses from the managers and came up with a counter-argument for

> the statement. This was really helpful in building confidence even as we approached the meeting [where voicing occurred].

These findings illustrate that voicers can ensure an effective voicing with proper planning. Further, the findings reveal that involving other organizational members, especially those with prior voicing experiences, led to a high-quality idea and bolstered the voicers' confidence. Similar to the idea formation phase, planning casts voicing as an interactive process that is rarely a product of an individual effort.

Taken together, planning lays the groundwork for effective voicing in a variety of ways. Underscoring the significance of this phase in the voicing process, participants used terms such as "pre-make it or break it stage" and "the backbone of it [voicing]" to describe planning as it shapes how the subsequent phases of the voicing unfold. Further, planning helped manage uncertainties through seeking feedback from employees who had previously voiced ideas in the current organization. Feedback from coworkers is a fundamental resource in organizations (Bisel & Arterburn, 2012). Additionally, planning aided in mitigating some of the risks associated with voicing. Organizational members involved in the planning phase were keen to detect and anticipate risks as well as develop strategies to curb those risks. Although the majority of the participants discussed engaging in planning prior to expressing the ideas to the authority figure, it is important to note that not all voicing includes the planning stage. Moreover, the magnitude of planning varied depending on the nature of the idea. For example, simple ideas required less planning compared to more complex ideas such as ideas that required the approval of top-level managers before implementation.

Initial Enactment

After planning, the analysis identified initial enactment as the next phase of voicing. This phase represents the initial overt expression of the ideas by the voicer or the moment the target of the voice receives the ideas for the first time. Hence, the initial enactment phase occurs when an employee makes suggestions on how to improve organizational operations or points out the problematic practice that needs to be corrected. Participants described this as an important phase because it serves as an opportunity to create positive initial impressions on the part of the voicer. The need to create positive impressions was primarily reported by first-time voicers. Initial enactment is distinct from other phases in that the focus of the interaction is on the voicer who initiates the conversation with an authority figure. These voicers noted that the initial enactment phase ensured that the originator of the idea retained the spotlight and received credit for the ideas, especially when the voiced ideas were later evaluated positively. Within the renewable energy industry, initial enactment occurred in a group setting. Namely, most ideas were enacted during regular meetings where the voicer, voicer's peers, and recipients of the voice were present. For subordinate voicers, enacting ideas in a group setting made ideas public information, which made it easier for their peers to later revive the ideas that were ignored or unfairly dismissed.

Participants identified two audiences for voice—immediate supervisors or someone above the immediate supervisor such as managers. Multiple factors informed the choice of audience members. On the one hand, immediate supervisors were recipients of ideas (a) due to the strict hierarchy that prescribed the chain of command, (b) when

subordinates had a positive relationship with the immediate supervisors, and (c) when the immediate supervisor had the power to act on the voiced ideas. Subordinate voicers preferred to share ideas with immediate supervisor to “avoid looking bad and making their supervisor look really bad in the eyes of the manager.” Thus, the need to manage self and immediate supervisor’s faces influenced the selection of immediate supervisor as the recipient of the ideas.

On the other hand, subordinate voicers shared ideas directly with the managers when they had either a positive relationship with the manager and/or a negative relationship with their immediate supervisor:

> Again, my previous experiences of being frustrated by the supervisor made me go to the manager. I did not have the best of relationship with my immediate supervisor and like I said, he could not look at issues objectively. The manager was also a nice person, I had a very good relationship with him so it was easy to talk to him directly. (Munene, customer service representative)

Additionally, subordinate voicers preferred expressing ideas directly to the managers if the immediate supervisor lacked the authority or resources to act on the voiced ideas. Rose, a customer service representative, exemplified this:

> I chose to go to the manager because the issue I wanted to discuss could only be addressed by the manager, not the team leader. With the team leader, he would have to tell the manager, too, which would prolong the whole process. (Rose, customer service representative)

Rose was keen to explain that she sought the approval of the immediate supervisor before engaging the skip level manager. As she had not engaged the immediate supervisor in the previous phases such as planning, Rose noted that seeking the approval of the immediate supervisor was necessary to mitigate supervisor's perceptions of the voicer as a competitor. Additionally, immediate supervisors who were informed by the subordinate voicers about their intentions to share ideas with the manager were more willing to support the voicer, especially if they evaluated the ideas positively. Rose's sentiments of seeking approval from the immediate supervisor were echoed by other subordinate voicers.

In contrast, the majority of powerful voicers, supervisor and manager voicers, reported sharing ideas directly with the individual responsible for acting on the idea even when the voice recipient was not their immediate supervisor:

> I shared the idea with the director who was the final decision maker on the matter of concern. This saved me a lot of time and led to quicker decision-making of the issue….for me, going to my immediate boss, the regional manager, would be a waste of time. He did not have the power to approve or reject the idea but of course I kept him on the loop on everything regarding the issue. (Obetta, manager)

Supervisor/manager and subordinate voicers' accounts reveal that the impacts of hierarchy on the voicing process were more pronounced for subordinate voicers. While powerful voicers could directly voice to the employee mandated to approve the idea without seeking the approval of the immediate supervisor, subordinate voicers did not

have similar privileges. Additionally, it appears that the quality of the relationship between subordinates and immediate supervisors, and between subordinates and managers influenced the choice of the recipient of the ideas. As evidenced above, subordinate voicers opted to express ideas to the authority figure with whom they shared a positive relationship.

In sum, participants' narratives revealed that the initial enactment phase not only served as an opportunity to share ideas with the authority figure, but also a chance to build rapport with the recipient of the voice and manage self and recipients' faces. Participants overwhelmingly described this phase as a short-lived moment as the conversation quickly transitions to the next phase where other organizational members participate.

Reflexive Enactment

Participants described reflexive enactment as the third phase. This phase entails the conversations that follow initial enactment of the ideas. As the conversations build on the already-voiced ideas, new meaning of the ideas could emerge from the interactions in this phase. Unlike in the previous phase where it is primarily the voicer speaking with the authority figure(s), the reflexive enactment phase is highly interactive as different organizational members become part of the conversation. Reflexive enactment is distinct from initial enactment in that the conversation transitions from primarily one-way communication with a defined speaker and recipient(s), to an ongoing interaction where the different organizational members involved are simultaneously speakers and recipients of the idea.

Within the renewable energy industry, the reflexive enactment phase is characterized by conversations among the voicer, the targeted recipient(s), and the peers witnessing the voicing episode. As the conversations build upon the already-voiced ideas, organizational members shape the ideas in a variety of ways in this phase. For instance, targeted recipients of the voice contributed by (a) asking questions to help everyone in the meeting where the voicing occurred to make sense of the ideas, (b) highlighting the weaknesses of the voiced ideas and encouraging the voicer and peers to address these weakness, and (c) offering suggestions that in some cases lead to idea modification. The original voicer offered additional evidence and answered questions pertaining to the voiced ideas. Finally, voicers' peers amplified the ideas by highlighting the significance of the ideas and sharing additional evidence to support the voiced ideas. Overall, different actors in this phase experience versions of double-interact where they are constantly acting, responding, and adapting. Kasuku explained how the reflexive enactment phase manifested for him:

> Once I had tabled [initially shared] the idea, the manager immediately said that the idea was brilliant at the face value but she would want to hear more about the expected returns if they were to invest in the training of agents as I had suggested. (Kasuku, supervisor)

As Kasuku illustrated, this initial response from the manager served as a gateway for negotiations to begin. Peers then joined the conversation by amplifying the already voiced ideas. Kasuku was quick to note that sometimes peers' contributions preceded manager's response. Although peers supported the voicer by answering some of the

questions from the recipient of the voice, voicers noted that sometimes the recipient asked questions that were specifically directed to the voicer. As a result, this phase was described as a challenging but equally rewarding as debating the ideas sometimes led to new insights that shaped the ideas positively. For instance, participants explained how questions and suggestions from the voice recipients facilitated further development of the ideas. Other participants echoed the importance of peers' support and the challenging nature of the reflexive enactment phase. For Damon, a sales and marketing agent, he recognized the important role of the peers, especially in addressing the questions asked by the voice recipients. Thus, for voicers and their peers, the conversation that followed the initial utterance of the idea was often a difficult process because it involved a lot of persuasion on their part.

> As much as my colleagues were there to support the idea, and they did so from the heart, it was a very difficult process. You see, at the end of the day colleagues believe you are the most knowledgeable on the topic so sometimes they will leave the difficult questions for you to answer. So, you are forced to really think and answer a difficult question in a limited time. (Damon, sales and marketing agent)

Participants' narratives depict the reflexive enactment phase as a challenging highly persuasive process that is also characterized by uncertainties. However, having supportive peers during the voicing episode lessened the challenges associated with this phase.

Collectively, the findings reveal that voice recipients and voicers' peers largely constitute voicing as much as the voicers. Although prior literature has documented that it

is difficult to study the conversation that follows the initial enactment of voicing (Garner, 2013), the findings illustrate that reflexive enactment is a critical phase in the voicing process, and thus, warrants further examination. Notably, reflexive enactment phase could occur and recur at different times especially when the meetings were adjourned before the negotiations about the voiced ideas were completed. In such cases, the discussion on the ideas was revisited at a later meeting. This phase was described as sometimes one of the time-consuming phases in the voicing process.

Outcome

The analyses identified the outcome as the final phase of the voicing process. This phase occurs when the authority figure who was the initial target of the voice communicates the decision pertaining to the voiced ideas. Voice recipients typically communicated the outcome of the voicing after the negotiations described in the reflexive enactment phase. Ideally, a successful voicing results in acceptance and implementation of the ideas, while unsuccessful voicing leads to a rejection.

Participants in the renewable energy industry in Kenya discussed a variety of outcomes of the voicing that they have experienced including, conditional acceptance, temporary acceptance, partial acceptance, full acceptance, overt rejection, and covert rejection. Full acceptance is when ideas are approved without any modifications or changes. That is, ideas were accepted in the original form that the voicer initially shared. This type of acceptance was rare within the renewable energy sector as the majority of the ideas were modified before implementation. Further, full acceptance was reported by

powerful voicers as Jaber, a manager, stated: "The following month the idea was fully implemented. My sales agents started receiving a monthly retainer."

Jaber's response was echoed by Obetta, a manager. In Obetta's case, his ideas were fully accepted a week after the enactment, "within a week, the director called me to his office and said that they would begin the process of setting up the service center in Kisumu within the next month." The intermediate managers' narratives revealed that their ideas were not only fully accepted, but also the turnaround time was shorter (under 2 months) compared to that of supervisor and subordinate voicers. However, unlike supervisors and subordinates, the manager voicers were tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the idea. Thus, although the managers were satisfied with the acceptance, they were aware that the acceptance led to additional responsibilities of facilitating the implementation process.

Partial acceptance occurred when only parts of the idea were considered for implementation in the long run. Closely related was the conditional acceptance outcome, which entailed acceptance of the ideas only if the conditions listed by the recipient could be fulfilled. Subordinates and their immediate supervisors identified partial and conditional as the most common types of acceptance they received after enacting ideas. Participants described receiving justifications for why their ideas could only be partially or conditionally accepted. As participants' accounts demonstrated, the majority of the participants reported that voice recipients often accepted only parts of the idea or required certain conditions such as idea modification be fulfilled before acceptance.

> I got the response that the idea would be accepted under two conditions. First, that they introduce more criteria for incentives and secondly, if it was successful after piloting it for a few months. So, they would implement it partly and then see the results. They also said they would start with our department first before moving to other departments. And it will start rolling by the end of the following month. And that they would be putting up the structures and strategies of the incentives in the remainder of the current month. So between that day up to the end of the month, we are putting in strategies of who gets what and when they do what. (Malik, supervisor)

> I can say partially implemented. Cause they did not change everything I had suggested. For example, in this customer list, you can see maybe there's a few phone numbers that have been added but the agent's name was not added. I had requested for inclusion of both, but they only approved and worked on only one of the two items. In that case, I was able to know the customer who I am dealing with and where they're coming from. I have their alternative number. Yeah. But the problem was again, they didn't include the agent's name or limit agents to certain regions. (Cecily, customer service representative)

Although both promotive and prohibitive voicing received partial and conditional acceptance, complex ideas that required more organizational resources for implementation were susceptible to partial acceptance.

Temporary acceptance was described as approval and implementation of the ideas for a short period of time, mostly under a year. This form of acceptance was common

when (a) the ideas involved were prohibitive and (b) when the managers opted to pilot the ideas before full implementation and the implementation was not successful.

> I would say short term acceptance. I say this because my idea was accepted and implemented. That is, we started receiving timely information but then that only lasted a couple of weeks, and we were back to square one, it died. We stopped receiving all the information in time. We have tried to bring up the same problem again, but the same thing happens. That is, it's fixed temporarily. This makes our department frustrated. (Munene, customer service representative)

Finally, rejection manifested in overt or covert ways. Overt rejection occurred when the voice recipient explicitly communicated that the ideas voiced would not be considered for implementation due to different reasons such as lack of merit or adequate resources. Covert rejection occurred when the voice recipient failed to communicate a decision pertaining to the voice. Participants reported that it was a common practice for voice recipients to dismiss the voiced ideas but never communicate their decision. Thus, recipients perceived the ideas to have been rejected after a prolonged period of silence.

Participants' narratives illustrate that voicing outcomes are nuanced and dynamic. In addition to the different types of outcomes reported, voicers reported that they sometimes received multiple outcomes for the same voiced idea. For example, when there was more than one manager during the meeting where the voicing occurred, managers would communicate differing outcomes for the same idea. For example, participants reported receiving conditional and partial acceptance. Sometimes participants received different outcomes such as rejection and conditional acceptance for the same

idea from one manager. Receiving multiple outcomes for the same idea was common when voicers and their peers appealed the rejection. The findings reveal that power and status shape the voicing outcomes. For example, it appears that subordinate voicers were the main recipients of the temporary acceptance and covert reject outcomes. Further, only powerful voicers reported receiving full acceptance, while subordinates and their immediate supervisors received partial and conditional acceptance. Overall, the findings demonstrate that voicing is a process that is characterized by different phases that lead to either positive or negative outcomes or somewhere in between for the voicers.

Communicative Strategies used in the Voicing Phases

The previous section demonstrated that voicing is a complex process marked by five core phases. Participants' narratives cast voicing as an organized interactive process owing to the interactions among organizational members that characterize each of the phases. To further contextualize each of these phases, the second research question asked about the communicative strategies that employees utilized in different phases of voicing. The findings generated different communicative strategies that voicers use in each of the phases to achieve the goals of the specific phase and by large, the desirable voicing outcomes. The communicative strategies identified for each phase are summarized in Table 4. As the language used in organizations is to some extent guided by the logic that exists as part of the organizational culture (Johnson, 1987), participants discussed the strategic ways they communicate across different phases within the renewable energy industry culture. In addition, other factors influenced the ways voicers and recipients communicated including, the form of voicing (promotive or prohibitive), perceptions of

power and status of the voicer, the peers, and recipients of voices, relationships between voicers and between voicers and recipients of voice, among others. In the section that follows, I discuss the different strategies used in each of the phases of the voicing process. These strategies emerged from perspectives of supervisor voicers, subordinate voicers, observers or people witnessing the voicing episode, and targeted voice recipients.

Table 4

Communicative Strategies for Each Phase

Idea Formation	Planning	Initial Enactment	Reflexive Enactment	Outcome
Highlighting the other's agency and competency when soliciting input	Prioritizing benefits over costs	Masking responsibility	Voice amplification	Emphasizing objectivity when rejecting ideas
Sharing ownership of the idea	Identifying anticipated risks and rewards	Recognizing recipient's authority and influence	Seeking clarity and commitment	Gatekeeping by invoking organizational policies
Mitigating risks using hypothetical language		Embracing language of teamwork	Directed sensegiving	Use of gratitude
			Hesitation, passivity, and false promising	Invoking quality-improvement of the idea

Idea Formation

Idea formation is the earliest point of the voicing process that represents the moment an employee identifies a problematic practice or policy that needs to be corrected and/or a way organizational operations and functions could be improved. In the renewable energy industry, ideas often stemmed from conversations with customers and/or peers. When idea conception begun outside of an active interaction such as from personal hobbies or previous work experiences, workers engaged their colleagues to further brainstorm the idea. Participants enlisted their colleagues to seek initial feedback on the idea, which informed the decision to pursue (or not) the idea further. Thus, idea formation phase is significant as it initiated the voicing process. The need to generate a high-quality idea compelled potential voicers to utilize different communicative practices when ideating with both peers and customers. As the interviews revealed, the communicative practices that characterized this phase were both retrospective and strategic. For example, some practices were retrospective because prior to communicating with peers or customers, employees were unaware that ideas would emerge from the conversation. Similarly, the communicative practices were strategic when potential voicers intentionally engaged their peers and/or customers to further develop the ideas. Participants discussed using the following strategies: highlighting other's agency and competency when soliciting input, sharing ownership of the ideas, and mitigating risks through hypothetical language.

Highlighting other's Agency and Competency when Soliciting Input

Voicers highlighted competency and agency of when soliciting input on ideas

from customers and peers in comparatively low status. As participants described, most of the customers were a great source of ideas given their firsthand experiences as the end users of the products/services offered by the renewable energy organizations. Further, conversations with customers served as sources of ideas because customers had close contact with competitors' products. However, as external stakeholders, customers lacked much direct influence in the organization's operations and functions, leaving them in comparatively lower status than internal stakeholders. Thus, when ideating with customers, participants emphasized customers' agency to make them feel valued and a part of the organization. For example, Wema, a customer service representative, revealed that she used phrases such as "you have a say in what happens in this company" when ideating with the customer.

Additionally, tenured participants disclosed that it can be difficult to ideate with their non-tenured peers due to perceived status difference between the two groups. Tenured employees occupied a comparatively high social status compared to nontenured workers. The effects of status difference can be more prominent in the context of voicing that is considered more knowledge-intensive and high power-distance cultures such as Kenya, where tenureship is associated with more wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, tenured employees were compelled to find ways to navigate the status differences while ideating with their lower status colleagues. As Cecily described, tenured employees highlighted nontenured employees' competency when ideating.

> Sometimes when you go to your junior colleagues asking for feedback on ideas, they might think you are being sarcastic. In my experiences, some of these juniors

> have really good contributions but they can hesitate to share them especially if they have only been with the organization for a shorter period compared to you. So what I do is make them feel empowered by opening with something like, "this organization is so lucky to have a brilliant employee like you. I personally like your thinking and would like to get your input on…" for the record, I only say this when I mean it and not to try and manipulate the employees. And it works. I see them loosening up and genuinely providing input. (Cecily, customer service representative)

Echoing Cecily's sentiments, Kanini explained that highlighting the peer's competency was more effective when it was preceded by an acknowledgement of the employee as a newcomer (e.g., I know you are new here, but I want you to know that I value your input). As she explained, some of the non-tenured employees in large organizations were reluctant to participate in the idea formation subprocess as they assumed the tenured employees were unaware of their employment status. As such, Kanini communicated her awareness of the employee's tenure status to reduce participation hesitancies among the lower status employees. Relatedly, Azil, a supervisor, revealed that newcomer employees were reluctant to participate in the idea formation subprocess because they perceived the invitation to share their input as an opportunity to be evaluated and judged by their peers. Thus, explicitly recognizing newcomers' competency eased the tension among newcomer employees, allowing them to share their feedback.

Past literature has documented that nontenured employees are less likely to speak up with ideas in organizations (Avery et al., 2011). The lack of voice especially among

low status employees produces hierarchical mum effect within organizations (Bisel et al., 2012). While prior work has understood hierarchical mum effect in the context of initial expression of ideas, the findings demonstrate that the reluctance to engage in voicing begins in the idea formation phase for nontenured employees, especially when they perceive large status differences with their tenured counterparts.

Sharing Ownership of the Idea

Both supervisor and subordinate voicers noted that they navigated the idea formation phase by inviting their peers to share ownership of the idea. Particularly, once ideas started emerging, potential voicers invited their peers to collaborate on the idea instead of presenting it as an individual's idea. This strategy was mainly used when employees were ideating with peers occupying comparatively higher social status than them. For instance, new employees reported to have used this strategy when seeking input from their veteran colleagues. This communicative practice was primarily used in organizations where voicing was formally or informally recognized and rewarded. As Munene explained, sharing ownership of the ideas served as an incentive for veteran employees to share their voicing experiences with the newcomer employees given the potential win-win outcomes for both parties.

> You have to be smart when you are asking your colleagues what they think of your ideas. Some of them may have great contributions but won't tell you because they don't stand to benefit from it directly. For instance, if you suggest this jingle, how do I benefit from it? So, what I did is tell Chris that I would say this was a collective idea so that Chris could give me his honest opinion considering he had

> been with the organization for twelve years. He knew the ins and outs compared to me who was there for only one and half years. So, I said to him, "I was thinking about how we can create more awareness about our products and improve our marketing techniques, and I wanted your thoughts on this idea before I tell the boss. In fact, I am thinking we can make this to be our idea, not my idea, and present it as a team. (Munene, customer care representative)

Sharing ownership of the idea with employees in high social status was preferred when the ideas were prohibitive rather than promotive. As Nelly illustrated, collaborative prohibitive voicing was less likely to be met with an immediate rejection as managers perceived team ideas to be more legitimate compared to individual prohibitive voicing. Further, even when prohibitive ideas were rejected, such rejection was not accompanied by negative consequences such as being labeled a troublemaker or losing one's job.

> When the idea is likely to cause chaos or major changes, it is better to have your long-serving colleagues agree to partner with you. So, what I did was request her to partner with me in pushing for the idea. In as much as we are in the same level [organizational rank], she has been in that position for now 6 years and has maintained a good reputation with the manager. So getting her on board for this tricky issue [prohibitive idea] would validate the concern at least in the eyes of our manager who had a history of shutting down individual ideas [individual voicing]. Again, it was necessary for me to get her on board and others if I wanted to keep my job in time of COVID when they were firing people right, left, and center. (Nelly, supervisor)

The above example from Nelly reveals that sharing ownership of the idea acted as a buffer against risks associated with prohibitive voicing.

Research on issue-selling, a concept related to voicing, indicates that inviting collaboration and sharing ownership of ideas negatively impact the credibility of the original voicer, especially if the issue is perceived positively by the recipient. This is because the positive evaluations of the idea will be attributed to the team as opposed to the originator of the idea (Dutton & Ashford, 2008). As a result, employees are sometimes hesitant to invite peers to share ownership of the ideas. However, in the renewable energy industry, sharing ownership of the ideas was a powerful tool for low status employees to mitigate the risks associated with prohibitive voicing.

Mitigating Risks Using Hypothetical Language

Participants reported that they communicated in an ambiguous and hypothetical manner during idea formation. Particularly, employees solicited feedback on ideas without disclosing that they intended to share the ideas with someone in authority. This communicative strategy was common when employees were engaging members of their outgroup. For example, participants discussed using hypothetical language when seeking feedback from peers they did not have a close relationship with or peers they could not fully trust, but these peers had a good reputation within the organization. Other voicers used the strategy when discussing ideas with powerful individuals in the organization who had a history of claiming credit for others' ideas. Voicers also used the strategy to prevent other organizational members from presenting ideas as their own without

crediting the originator of the idea. Both supervisor and subordinate voicers admitted to have used this communicative strategy. For example, Malik stated:

> One thing I have to say though is when you are asking. Something I did was ask for the colleagues' thoughts without disclosing that this is an idea I intend to move forward with. You see, sometimes these colleagues could go behind your back and quickly suggest these ideas as their own without giving credit where it is due. And before you know it, they are being recognized [for "their ideas"] during the meetings. (Malik, supervisor)

Malik's experience was not isolated. Munene termed idea stealing as a common practice in his organization especially from immediate supervisors. He recounted how his immediate supervisor consistently presented others' ideas as his own, which prompted Munene to embrace hypothetical language whenever he discussed ideas with him. Although immediate supervisors were rarely involved in the idea formation subprocess, Munene explained that his supervisor would inquire about the ideas especially when Munene was seeking his supervisor's approval to enact ideas to the manager.

Additionally, this communicative strategy was used to manage the potential voicer's face. Employees resulted in interactions marked by hypothetical language when they had concerns about the quality of the idea or were unsure whether their peers would evaluate the ideas positively. As employees did not want to be perceived as incompetent by their peers, they used hypothetical language to gauge peers' perceptions of the ideas. When the peers evaluated the ideas negatively, the potential voicer abandoned the idea without losing face.

In sum, the communicative strategies discussed above show that idea formation is a more complex subprocess that is often characterized by competing goals. For example, while sharing ownership of ideas could lead to development of better ideas that have high probability of being accepted, participants were aware that openly sharing one's ideas could lead to idea stealing. Thus, voicers had to navigate the risks of idea stealing while pursuing idea improvement through collaboration with peers. These strategies reveal the tensions that characterize the development of ideas and voicing in general.

Planning

Prior work on voicing operates under the assumption that when employees have ideas to share, they proceed to enactment without planning. Although this could be true for some ideas and voicers, voicing within the renewable energy industry included a planning phase. Planning involved refining the content and preparing for This preparation consisted of refining of the content of the idea by collecting supporting evidence to enhance its quality, and strategizing on the delivery of the idea. In the planning phase, both subordinate and supervisor voicers primarily involved organizational members with whom they shared a close relationship and who had prior voicing experiences. Participants discussed using two communicative strategies to ensure successful planning: namely, prioritizing benefits over costs and identifying anticipated risks and rewards of voicing.

Prioritizing Benefits Over Costs

Throughout the interview process, the majority of the participants discussed the importance of prioritizing benefits of the ideas about to be voiced and the primary

beneficiaries of the ideas. It, therefore, came as no surprise that employees communicated in ways that prioritized benefits during the planning stage. This communication strategy was motivated by the management's preference for the benefits of the ideas. Participants who had prior voicing experiences explained that during the enactment of the ideas, managers often asked the voicers to explain the benefits of the ideas for different stakeholders, especially for the organization. Both supervisor and subordinate voicers reported communicating with their coworkers in ways that prioritize benefits over costs in the planning phase to align with management's preferences. In turn, aligning with the management would lead to positive outcomes. Kiamati exemplified this below:

> Whenever I enlist colleagues to help refine the ideas, I always ask them to think of the benefits of the ideas. With the problem I just described, for instance, I asked my colleagues to think of ways buying our own truck would be beneficial compared to continued use of Wells Fargo and G4S courier services…of course I did this because I knew [from previous experiences that] when I step into the boardroom, all managers will be asking about is the benefits of stopping the current courier services and that could save the company money. (Kiamati, supervisor)

Kiamati reflected on how his organization was an economic site that was concerned with increasing the profits. Thus, he and other voicers were keen to prioritize benefits and link these benefits to potential profits for the organization in the planning phase. In a different account, Damon reflected a similar notion of prioritizing benefits over costs when interacting with his peers during the planning phase. Damon prioritized benefits

especially when planning for prohibitive ideas to encourage his coworkers to generate more benefits that, in turn, helped to mitigate negative perceptions or labeling of prohibitive voicing as mere complaining. Namely, prioritizing benefits over costs served to foreground the importance of correcting the harmful practice. Damon illustrated this:

> For me, emphasizing benefits when preparing to talk to the boss is important because it prepares me to soften any immediate negative views of the idea by the manager. When you are pointing out problems in the organization, it can be tricky. So it's good to think about how to proactively prevent the immediate negative reaction that leads to rejection or being seen as a complainer. (Damon, sales and marketing agent)

Damon further explained that communicating in ways that prioritized benefits over costs generated numerous benefits to draw from when it was time to share the ideas with the authority figure. Consistent with Damon's narrative, Khloe stated that she also prioritized benefits over costs to encourage peers to brainstorm more benefits. However, for Khloe, having a plethora of benefits allowed her to sift them and select high-quality ones, which acted as evidence during the enactment subprocesses. In sum, although communicating in ways that prioritized benefits was common in the planning phase, it appears that the reasons for using this strategy varied across voicers.

Identifying Anticipated Risks and Rewards

One of the goals of planning was to reduce uncertainties around the enactment of ideas. In pursuit of this goal, participants discussed how they highlighted anticipated risks of the ideas or enacting ideas when communicating in the planning phase. Although both

supervisor and subordinate voicers reported using this strategy, supervisor voicers' narratives reflected identification of both risks and rewards. Voicers focusing on identifying anticipated risks explained that the strategy was used as a gateway to generate responses that would mitigate the risks and associated negative consequences. Rose, a customer service representative, explained: "I focused on expected obstacles [risks] to get myself and colleagues to research more on how to overcome these obstacles."

Rose's sentiments were echoed by other voicers. For example, Lawi illustrated that communicating in ways that oriented toward risks was important for him when planning to enact prohibitive ideas, which are considered riskier than promotive ideas (Liang et al., 2012). In his organization, managers were reluctant to consider prohibitive ideas especially when the ideas questioned management's behaviors or required financial obligation for implementation. Lawi recounted how some of his colleagues experienced retributions for enacting prohibitive ideas, he stated "I witnessed my colleagues miss out on promotions they deserved just because they disagreed with the manager's behaviors." As such, he was keen to ensure that he and his colleagues were aware of as many potential risks as possible to craft ways to manage these risks.

As evidenced above, it appears that participants especially subordinate voicers closely paid attention to potential risks of the voicing in the planning phase. However, some supervisor voicers opted to communicate in ways that focused on potential rewards of voicing. Kariuki explained as follows:

> Thinking of potential rewards and costs is important to me when preparing to share ideas with my boss. But I have to say rewards are close to my heart for

> different reasons. I also see myself as an optimist, so I prefer to think of the positive of course without being ignorant to the costs. (Kariuki, supervisor).

Upon further inquiry, Kariuki explained that planning phase was often characterized by "over focusing" on the risks at the expense of potential rewards that were equally important as they were additional evidence that strengthened the idea. He also explained that focusing on rewards allowed him to discover more organizational problems that could be addressed by the idea.

Although voicing in general can be viewed as an act of intervention given its goal of improving organizational functioning and operations, planning phase appears to be an intervention for the voicing process. Namely, it is in this phase that workers use analytical lens to make critical choices about the enactment of the ideas. In the renewable energy industry, prioritizing benefits over costs and identifying anticipated risks and rewards were pathways to achieving desired outcomes. Overall, these communicative strategies offer insights into the complicated decision-making process that characterizes voicing.

Initial Enactment

This phase represents the moment the voicer shares the ideas with the targeted recipient for the first time. This part of the conversation rests on the voicer who shares the ideas with the targeted recipient. Participants explained that the originator of the idea mainly shared the ideas with the recipient(s). Given that this phase is centered on the voicer, the strategies utilized emerged from the perspectives of subordinate and supervisor voicers. In their narratives, participants recounted utilizing the following

communicative strategies: masking responsibility, recognizing recipient's authority and influence, and embracing the language of teamwork. As participants were aware that the conversation would quickly transition to multiparty interactions once the voicing enters reflexive enactment phase, they used strategies that would create a positive first impression as a pathway to desirable voicing outcomes. Overall, participants described initial enactment as a tension-laden phase owing to the uncertainties surrounding how the ideas will be initially perceived by the recipient.

Masking Responsibility

Supervisor and subordinate voicers primarily used this strategy when initially enacting prohibitive ideas. Essentially, voicers avoided directly blaming the recipient of the voice even when the recipient was responsible for the problematic practices being highlighted by the voicer. Instead, participants referenced the department or the organization. Notably, the rationales for using this strategy differed between supervisor and subordinate voicers. Subordinate voicers used this strategy due to face management concerns. For example, Wyclif explained that he preferred to use the strategy to avoid "embarrassing" his supervisor. Other subordinate voicers used this approach to create a initial positive impression and potentially prevent immediate rejections. Kanini explained this: "I like him to see me as an objective worker who focuses on issues not people." Kanini further narrated how masking the responsibility strategy often prevented immediate rejections. Additionally, by masking responsibility, subordinate voicers avoided jeopardizing opportunities for future voicing. Khloe illustrated this below:

> Even when it is as clear as day that the team leader [immediate supervisor] is hundred percent to blame for the problems like coming up with confusing schedules and lack of clear communication, I cannot dare directly tell him that I have an issue with his approach. What I did is blame the organization by saying the organization's communication structures are frustrating the employees. When you blame my team leader [immediate supervisor], he will not listen to you now and in the future. (Khloe, customer service representative)

When I further inquired about the effectiveness of shifting the responsibility, Khloe admitted that it was not the best practice especially in the long term. Withholding the name of the individual responsible only led to reactionary actions on the problematic practices instead of permanently addressing the problematic practice. This is because the person responsible for the problematic practice may remain unaware of the implications of their actions. However, she was quick to explain that sometimes masking responsibility gets the action done even if temporarily, which was a good reprieve.

For supervisors, masking responsibility extended beyond the recipient of the voice. Participants discussed referencing the department or organization when voicing to an authority figure who was directly responsible for the problematic practice or had a close relationship with the person responsible. Karani explained:

> When the person you are telling the issues to is the same reason why you have issues or their close colleagues, you have to be careful how you go about the conversation. For me, I just won't name the person but will talk about the department as a whole. The minute I name them or their friends, they will quickly

> try to clear their names instead of focusing on the issue. I would rather we talk about the real issue here. (Karani, supervisor)

In this example, Karani reveals that masking responsibility among supervisors was motivated by the need to prevent defensive responses from the managers, and instead focus on the issue being raised. He further narrated that supervisors were particularly hesitant to call out the name of the perpetrator to avoid being perceived as someone with external locus of control. As he explained, such perceptions reduced chances of being considered for a promotion or leadership position within the organization.

It has been documented that the need to appear effective and in control as a manager/leader may demotivate managers from accepting a prohibitive idea given it is an acknowledgement of their shortcomings (Dutton & Ashford, 2008). Consequently, voicers result in masking the responsibility to save recipient's face and potentially be heard by the manager. While this strategy may be effective in the short term especially for subordinate voicers, the data reveal that employees wishing to permanently address the problematic practice might need to consider other strategies. For supervisor voicers, masking responsibility proved to be an effective way to restrict the focus of the conversation to the problematic issue rather than the perpetrator, but the strategy could not guarantee nonrecurrence of the problematic practices.

Recognizing Recipient's Authority and Influence

A recurring communicative strategy among the voicers was recognizing the recipient's authority and influence. This strategy was more prevalent when engaging in promotive voicing, and was used mostly by subordinate voicers. By recognizing how the recipient of the voicing was influential in the formation of the ideas, participants aimed to reduce chances of immediate rejection. Immediate rejection of voiced ideas was common when supervisors perceived their subordinates as a threat to their jobs and positions as it was common for top management to reward those engaging in voice through promotions. Further, recognizing the recipient's authority and influence served to create positive impressions of the ideas and voicer, as well as strengthen the relationship between the supervisor and subordinates. Ruto explained this below:

> For example, I always opened my ideas [voicing] with something like this: "I wanted to thank you for your exemplary leadership and our conversation last week about how we can make our department the top department in the company…" when I open like this, the supervisor will not think I am trying to take the spotlight or his job. He won't see me as a competitor but a team player. (Ruto, Customer service rep)

Ruto's narrative reveal the underlying perceptions of competition between voicers and recipients that often characterize voicing. As a result, voicers have to navigate voicing in ways that invoke mentorship, rather than competition with the recipient. Additionally, recognizing the recipient's authority served to reinforce the strict hierarchy, and acknowledged the higher position of power occupied by the recipient in comparison with the employee. This is unsurprising given the high-power distance in Kenyan context.

> I had to be calculative with how I talked with the team leader. The thing with him is he was power hungry and listened to those who recognized his power, so whenever I had an idea, I would begin by thanking him for his leadership and how I enjoyed having him as my boss. I did that to show that I respected the protocol and recognized him as the person with power in the situation. (Wema, customer service representative)

This except, similar to Ruto's, indicates that the initial expression of ideas required using ingratiation on the part of the voicer especially when expressing the ideas to recipients who were insecure about their jobs or perceived the voicer as a threat.

Overall, recognizing recipient's authority and influence strategy was primarily used by subordinate voicers. Given the context within which the voicing occurred is considered a high power-distance culture, the findings reveal that perceptions and implications of power-distance could be more pronounced in lower organizational ranks compared to upper ranks.

Embracing the Language of Teamwork

Both supervisors and subordinates discussed that they embraced the language of teamwork when initially expressing ideas to authority figures. Language of teamwork was marked by the use of collective terms such as "we" instead of "I". In doing so, participants avoided coming across as self-centered or as individuals who were only concerned about employee interests as opposed to organizational or customer interests. Using the language of teamwork also demonstrated that the employee was a team player, which is highly encouraged across renewable energy organizations. Additionally, using

teamwork language indicated that the idea was from the team and not just one person. As Kanini remarked, ideas from the team were less likely to be immediately dismissed compared to ideas from an individual employee.

> Of course, when I express an idea, I have to use "we" instead of "I" even when this is purely my idea of course with the contributions from my colleagues, but I am the original source. I use *we* because that will mean it is a group idea, like every team member is in on it. We usually do this to prevent the supervisor from saying no to our ideas. You see, if he says no, he will be saying no about 12 times [be]cause we are 12 of us in our team. But when you use I, he will easily say no to one individual. (Kanini, sales and marketing agent)

Extending Kanini's statement, another subordinate illustrated that using the language of teamwork served as a relational maintenance strategy between peers. As Wanjiru explained below, peers were more willing to participate in future voicing endeavors such as brainstorming ideas and voice amplification when the voicer had a history of using collective language during initial enactment of ideas. She stated: "when I talk in plural during the meetings even my colleagues will feel represented and will be likely to help refine the ideas when I need them next" (Wanjiru, customer service representative).

Wanjiru further narrated that she was keen to refrain from keeping the spotlight to herself when initially enacting ideas and instead, use the language of teamwork to recognize her peers' contributions to the ideas. As some of her peers were present in the meeting where ideas were enacted, Wanjiru explained that recognizing peers' contributions strengthened trust between her and the peers and helped her to maintain

positive relationships with them. Wanjiru's example demonstrates the important role of peer relationships in the voicing process.

Although the primary goal in the initial enactment phase is to share ideas with the authority figure or targeted recipient, voicers strived to achieve this goal effectively. Namely, voicers were aware that how they communicated the ideas was as important as the ideas they were enacting. As such, voicers used strategies that allowed them to enact ideas while at the same time building rapport with recipients and maintaining positive relationships with their peers.

Reflexive Enactment

This phase entails the conversation that follows the initial enactment and builds upon the voiced ideas. As earlier stated, this phase was highly interactive as it involved conversations among voicers, recipient(s) of the voice, and peers or other organizational members present during the meeting where the ideas were voiced. The different social actors in this phase engaged in collective sensemaking to further process the voiced ideas, and to determine the feasibility and importance of these ideas. Indeed, participants described reflexive enactment as another critical phase because the conversations that occurred during this phase largely shaped the voicing outcomes. Several communicative strategies characterized this phase. As the majority of members present in the meeting where ideas were enacted actively participated in the reflexive enactment subprocess, the communication strategies identified in this phase reflected those of voicers and their peers and recipients of the voice–the supervisors or managers. In what follows, I discuss

the strategies that emerged from the voicers and peers' perspective and the strategies utilized by the recipients of the voicing.

Voicers and their Peers' Strategies

The interview data revealed some overlaps as well as distinct communicative strategies utilized by the voicers holding different job roles within renewable energy organizations. For example, both subordinate and supervisor voicers reported using voice amplification. Further, supervisor voicers sought clarity and commitment from the target when communicating in the reflexive enactment phase. Below, I discuss each of these communication strategies.

Voice Amplification

Across interviews, both supervisor and subordinate voicers discussed how their peers amplified the initial voicer's ideas during the reflexive enactment phase. Similarly, the voicers reported that they also amplified their peers' ideas whenever the peers were initial voicers. In particular, voice amplification involved publicly endorsing the voiced ideas and vouching that the ideas (a) were of high-quality, (b) would solve important organizational problems, and (c) are feasible. Participants amplified their colleagues' ideas to increase the visibility of the idea, show support to the initial voicer, and consequently influence management's perceptions of the quality and legitimacy of the idea.

> As a good colleague, I publicly support my colleagues' ideas so that the manager can see this as a high-quality idea that we are all in support of. Even with my idea, my peers endorsed it after I had shared. In fact, they immediately did that before

> the team leader could utter a word to influence her into accepting it. (Azil, supervisor)

This except reveals that the timing of the amplification was important. As Azil describes, amplifying the ideas prior to the recipient's response served to influence the recipient's perception of the ideas. Additionally, amplification enhanced the reputation of the individual amplifying the idea. Wyclif explained that:

> Endorsing your colleague is a win-win situation for me. Yes, I am doing it to support my colleague but to build my own reputation as a team player and committed employee. By the way, it is something we often do in our company, but you have to be very intimate with the idea so that in case you are asked a follow up question, you can comfortably answer. (Wyclif, customer service representative)

Here, Wyclif illustrates the significance of familiarizing with the ideas on the part of the peers in order to be able to amplify these ideas more effectively. In line with Wyclif's experiences, other participants noted that deep knowledge of the ideas was important to effectively amplify the ideas. Such knowledge allowed the peers to provide specific examples about their experiences that served as additional evidence for the voiced ideas. For example, Kasuku, a supervisor, explained how he amplified a colleague's idea by claiming that a similar idea—which he explained in detail—had worked in his previous organization. In doing so, Kasuku aimed to persuade the voice recipient to consider approving the idea. Kasuku's example was not isolated, other participants explained how

voice amplification was often accompanied by additional evidence to influence the recipient to accept the ideas.

In an interesting revelation, participants explained that voice amplification served to combat anticipated opposition of the ideas from some peers. Not all peers present in the meeting where idea enactment occurred were privy to the idea before the meeting. Even more, not all organizational members in the meeting openly supported the already voiced ideas. Given organizational politics and competition among peers, especially in organizations where voicing was rewarded, voicers and their close associates anticipated some resistance from some of the peers and other organizational members such as other managers attending the meeting where ideas were enacted. Namely, voicers and their close associates predicted that some peers might be more critical of the ideas. Thus, voice amplification countered the anticipated resistance as Lawi explained:

> It [voice amplification] was necessary to cool off some colleagues who might have had the thought of shutting down the ideas because of politics, jealous, show off, or other reasons. You know, this place can be a funny environment. (Lawi, Technical support)

As Lawi continued to narrate the importance of the amplification, the significance of peer relationships in the voicing process was illuminated. Particularly, Lawi explained that voicers and their close peers anticipated resistance from peers with whom they did not share a close relationship.

Seeking Clarity and Commitment

Supervisor voicers explained that they sought clarity and commitment from voice recipients with respect to the voiced ideas. Voicers explained that it was a common practice for voice recipients to respond to the voicer and peers in ambiguous ways after the initial enactment of the ideas. For example, voicers recounted receiving false promises from the voice recipients that they would further follow-up with top management on the idea and revert. In reality, voice recipients neither followed-up nor responded to the voicers. In other circumstances, voicers asserted that they received responses such as “the ideas are good, we shall revisit them in future conversations” (Nelly, supervisor) or “I will need more time to think about the ideas then revert as soon as possible.” (Karani, supervisor). In this respect, voicers endeavored to get some clarity and commitment on the voiced ideas from the recipients in the reflexive enactment phase. Kiamati, exemplified this below:

> I had been fooled enough times. This time, I made sure I clarified everything. When he [voice recipient] said that he will get back to me with a response ASAP, I politely asked when exactly I should expect to hear back. I was not buying the ASAP thing anymore. (Kiamati, supervisor)

Kiamati response shows that this strategy was inspired by multiple frustrations from voice recipients. These frustrations prompted Kiamati to seek clarity that focused on the turnaround time for the response. In a similar line, Jaber equally sought clarity from the voice recipient. She stated:

> I had no option but ask him when I should expect to hear back from him. That is, the timeline of his response. I explained that the idea needed urgent attention, and that knowing when to expect the response would help my communication with my team [employees working under her]. Yeah, I wanted him to commit to providing me with a response. (Jaber, manager)

In this example, it appears that the voicer not only sought clarity from the recipient, but also framed the idea as urgent to get the recipient to make some commitment to the voicer on when he would provide a response to the idea. Jaber further explained that getting the clarity and commitment on when to receive a response gave her the *greenlight* she needed to revive the stalling ideas in the future. Additionally, Jaber narrated that seeking clarity and commitment prevented the voicers from negative descriptions such as being described as “employees who are obsessed with their ideas” when they later revived the previously ignored ideas. Notably, seeking clarity and commitment strategy was mostly reported by powerful voicers.

Voice Recipient(s)’ Strategies

As earlier stated, voice recipients actively participated in the negotiations that characterized the reflexive enactment phase. Hence, supervisors and managers interviewed discussed the communicative practices they utilized when interacting with voicers and other organizational members present during the meetings where the voicing occurred when they were on the receiving end. The communicative strategies used included: directed sensegiving and hesitation, passivity, and false promising.

Directed Sensegiving

Sensegiving refers to “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Voice recipients reported sensegiving discursively by providing suggestions on specific actions that employees should take to improve the idea. Directed sensegiving was used when recipients perceived the idea to be beneficial and were genuinely interested in improving the idea. Ben illustrated how sensegiving manifested:

> Whenever employees come up to me with ideas that I like, I try to respond with suggestions that I believe could improve the idea given I am a bit knowledgeable about the organization. For example, when [an employee’s name omitted] came to me with the idea of a new software, I suggested he modify the idea by adding more modules to the software so that we can use it in a variety of customer service tasks instead of just customer ticketing…I did this to also protect myself, I wanted to advocate for an idea that could solve a variety of problems and not just one. (Ben, manager)

In this except, it appears that directed sensegiving was used to not only improve the idea, but also protect voice recipient’s face. Voice recipients were not always final decision makers on ideas. In such cases, they advocated for the ideas to the top management on behalf of the original voicer. In other words, voice recipients took the role of secondary voicers when advocating for the ideas to the top management. Voice recipients used directed sensegiving to ensure high-quality ideas as they were aware that top

management would assume that the secondary voicers have endorsed the ideas. Additionally, recipients used sensegiving strategy when they needed more time to further process the idea before communicating their decision as illustrated by Malik:

> Sometimes I need time to process the idea before making any commitment, so what I do is respond by suggesting things they need to think about as far as the idea is concerned. This buys me more time… I would also pose questions that they need to think about. In the end, I also help them [voicers and their peers] get new thoughts about the idea that they probably did not have before (Malik, supervisor)

Malik's experience reflects a case where voice recipients used directed sensegiving strategy as a pathway to sensemaking. As he explained, voice recipients provided suggestions and asked questions to facilitate further sense making process on the part of voicers and their peers. Additionally, directed sensegiving also allowed the recipient more time to make sense of the idea.

Hesitation, Passivity, and False Promising

Supervisors reported using hesitation, passivity, and false promising strategy for a variety of reasons. For example, when they (a) evaluated the employee ideas positively but they were not the final decision makers on the idea and were unsure how top management would respond to these ideas, (b) were not convinced that the idea was good enough and worthy of consideration but were afraid to inform the employee to avoid discouraging them from future voicing, and (c) did not want to commit to the acceptance/implementation of the idea.

> So, what I typically do is respond with uncertainty. You see, sometimes the employee could be a good person and I have a good relationship with him or her, but their idea is not very good. I don't want to embarrass the employee by saying this idea is crap, so what I do is just be ambiguous in my response. You know, say something like, I don't know if this is a good or bad idea, I will need time to think about [it] and follow-up further [with top management]. Truth of the matter is, I know it is a bad idea, but saying so would crash the employee and they will probably never say a thing again. (Kariuki, supervisor)

Upon inquiring on the effectiveness of this strategy, Kariuki acknowledged that the strategy was effective in that the unmerited ideas were not considered for implementation and that he still maintained a good relationship with the voicers and their peers. However, he was quick to note that the strategy was ironic as recipients of voicing typically expected employees to speak with more certainty especially when discussing how the ideas would benefit different stakeholders.

> I know, it's ironic of me to sit here and praise a strategy that is contrary to what I typically ask of my employees (Kariuki, supervisor).

Outcome

In the outcome phase, the voice recipient communicates the decision pertaining to the voiced ideas. Voicers reported receiving different types of outcomes including temporary acceptance, partial acceptance, conditional acceptance, full acceptance, overt rejection, and covert rejection. Similar to other phases, the findings suggested that participants utilized communicative strategies in the phase. The data revealed that the

communicative strategies varied across different types of outcomes. For example, the communicative strategies that characterized overt rejection include emphasizing objectivity and gatekeeping by invoking organizational policies. Full acceptance was communicated through gratitude, while conditional and partial acceptance were communicated by invoking quality-improvement of the idea. Although the communicative strategies discussed emerged from the voicers' perspectives, where necessary, I highlight the voice recipients' perspectives who had communicated voicing outcomes.

Communicating Rejection

Emphasizing Objectivity when Rejecting Ideas

Voicers reported that voice recipients overtly rejected ideas by highlighting their objectivity in the decision-making process pertaining to the idea. According to the voicers, voice recipients emphasized objectivity when rejecting prohibitive ideas rather than promotive. Wema described this strategy below:

> My supervisor almost always began by explaining that his decision on the stated [voiced] ideas was unbiased whenever he was rejecting ideas. I think he did that to protect himself from negative judgement, which means employees will not go to him in the future with their ideas. Like the issue I told you about, he responded by saying that he is human, he makes mistakes but his decision on the idea is certainly not a mistake or biased in any way, rather, it is a culmination of wide consultation and very objective analysis of the idea. (Wema, customer service representative)

From Wema's account, it appears that voice recipients were concerned about how voicers or their subordinates would perceive them. As such, emphasizing objectivity served as a relationship maintenance strategy on the part of the voice recipient. In a similar vein, Kiamati narrated that he used this strategy while rejecting the ideas. Kiamati was aware that voicers sometimes questioned whether rejection of ideas was in way tainted by the recipient's perceptions of credibility and knowledge of the voicer. Thus, recipients emphasized objectivity to assure the voicers that the decision to reject the ideas was informed by the nature of the idea and not the person voicing.

Gatekeeping by Invoking Organizational Policies

Voicers narrated how supervisors often rejected their ideas by invoking constraining organizational policies. In their narratives, voicers stated that recipients explained that the constraining policies were beyond their control as Wanjiru explained below:

> What I have repeatedly seen my supervisor do is be so quick to use the company's policy as an excuse for not accepting ideas. And when you ask why we can't change this policy which is a roadblock, she will say that is the job for the top management and that I should go to them. For example, the idea I was telling you about providing incentives for employees, my supervisor said it is against the company policy to provide incentives in the middle of the year. This supervisor did not even take time to think through the idea. (Wanjiru, Customer service representative)

Wanjiru's response reveals that subordinate voicers viewed the use of organizational policies to reject ideas as an excuse-based and patronizing. Voicers explained that managers were looking for excuses from the policies to reject the ideas and not because the ideas were bad.

On the other hand, voice recipients overwhelmingly acknowledged that it was difficult communicating the rejection decision to voicers. This is because rejection could impact future voicing behaviors. As such, recipients were compelled to strategically communicate the negative news. Invoking constraining organizational policies involved highlighting the organization's policy that constrained the supervisor from accepting or implementing the ideas. One of the supervisors shared the following:

> Whenever I have to reject ideas from my employees, I have to think carefully on how I communicate that because that will determine whether this employee will approach you in the future with ideas. In my case, I communicate what the company policy can and cannot allow as far as accepting and implementing ideas is concerned...sometimes it's true the policy prevents me but I have found using the company policy reasoning to be effective as it doesn't crush employees feelings. Most of my team members are understanding of the things I can and cannot do and so it is always a smooth process. (Karani, Supervisor)

According to the supervisor, resisting ideas by arguing that the ideas are not worthwhile to consider would negatively impact employees' confidence and stifle voicing. Thus, rejecting ideas without criticizing the quality of the ideas proved to be an effective way for the recipients. Further, voice recipients revealed that they used this strategy after an

earlier false promise of following up with the authorities. False promising to further pursue the voiced idea by following up with authorities was a common practice as an alternative to immediate rejection. Thus, supervisors and managers admitted having used false promising only to later reject the ideas. Voice recipients posited that they avoided rejecting ideas immediately following the enactment to prevent employees from perceiving the supervisors as closed-minded.

Communicating Acceptance

Communicating Full Acceptance Through Gratitude

Full acceptance outcome was primarily reported by powerful voicers—supervisors and managers. These voicers reported receiving compliments and praise from the voice recipient when an acceptance decision was being communicated. This strategy was prevalent when communicating full acceptance of both promotive and prohibitive ideas. Kasuku described his experiences with this communicative strategy.

> When your ideas are good and they accept them, be prepared for soft talk. The supervisor throws so many compliments and praises to a point you might think you made a scientific discovery. Sometimes these compliments feel fake. Like the other day the supervisor told me how I am the best thing that happened to the company in 2021 just because I came up with a training package for our field team. Can you believe that? (Kasuku, supervisor)

Kasuku further explained that he rarely received feedback from his immediate supervisor—a manager—on how his ideas could be further improved at least before the implementation. He attributed this lack of feedback to his high-ranking position and role

within the organization. Although he appreciated the full acceptance, Kasuku noted that sometimes managers are hesitant to be critical of the ideas even when they had feedback that could further improve the ideas. The manager's hesitancy stemmed from fear of losing key employees in the organization or the voicer resisting the feedback by failing to oversee the implementation process of the idea. As a result, organizations implemented ideas that could have been further improved with feedback. Kasuku's sentiments reveal an interesting paradox of power and influence in the organization, whereby voicers with power and influence enacted ideas without concerns of rejection or negative outcomes, but also the power hindered them from receiving helpful feedback on the ideas.

In line with the voicers, voice recipients acknowledged to have used gratitude while communicating acceptance. However, voice recipients also expressed experiencing dissonance especially when accepting prohibitive ideas. As Ben explained, accepting a prohibitive voice was on the one hand an admission of his failure as a manager, which could negatively impact his reputation. On the other hand, the idea was important and lack of accepting it could undermine his department's performance.

> I have to admit it is not easy. Some of the employees' ideas indirectly show my weakness as a manager, but what do you do if what they are complaining about is valid and stopping it could have better outcomes? I just have to swallow the bitter pill and hope that they don't obsess over my minimal shortcomings. (Ben, manager)

Invoking Quality-Improvement of the Idea when Communicating Conditional or Partial Acceptance

Conditional and partial acceptance outcomes were reported mostly by subordinate and low-status supervisor voicers. Voicers explained that voice recipients invoked quality-improvement of the idea when communicating conditional and partial acceptance. Namely, voice recipients stated the conditions that needed to be fulfilled before the acceptance or implementation of the ideas. Fulfilling the conditions prior to acceptance improved the ideas and led to more benefits. Additionally, voicers noted that the recipients eliminated some aspects of the idea (partial acceptance) to ensure only high-quality ideas were implemented.

> My supervisor was one of the most straightforward person I have worked with. After the back and forth I was telling you about [negotiations in the reflexive enactment phase] and her consultation with the top management, she came back with a clear list of things that we needed to address before the idea could be accepted. She even explained why the things she suggested matter. I really liked that there was no inbetween [ambiguity]. I knew exactly what we were supposed to do, and why we are doing it. This [her feedback] is something I always think about whenever I want to share ideas. (Cecily, customer service representative)

According to the voicers, conditional acceptance was often accompanied by more specific directions on what was needed to be fulfilled before acceptance. Voicers reported appreciating such clarity because it helped them to improve their current ideas and future ideas. Overall, voicers evaluated the strategy positively.

Voice recipients reported using this strategy when communicating conditional and partial acceptance. Supervisors began by first complimenting the idea, stating the condition that had to be fulfilled before they could accept the idea or the parts of the idea that would be eliminated, and then expressing excitement about the idea and how they were looking forward to later accepting the modified high-quality idea. Supervisors explained that this strategy led to high-quality voicing in the future.

> One thing I know is no idea is perfect. There is always room for improvement, but sometimes employees are so blinded to notice any loopholes of their ideas. So, what I consistently do, especially when some parts of the idea are good, is provide a layered response. That is, I appreciate the idea, then point out the discrepancies of the idea and ask them to resolve the discrepancy before I can accept the idea. I [have] found doing this keeps them [employees] on their toes and the next time they come to my office, they have more polished ideas than previous ones. I think I am doing a great job of creating critical thinkers and good problem solvers. (Jaber, manager)

Collectively, the findings reveal that the communicative strategies used by the recipients when communicating the decision pertaining to the voiced ideas was not only contingent on the type of the outcome being communicated, but also the implications of the strategy on the future voicing behaviors as well as the relationships between the voicer and the voice recipients. Through these findings, we discover that even supervisors and managers are keen to maintain a positive relationship with the subordinates. This discovery is particularly unique to the renewable energy industry where the supervisors' annual

evaluations largely include subordinates' perspectives. As these subordinates' evaluations of the supervisors and managers tend to be anonymized, it is conceivable why voice recipients would want to maintain a good relationship with the voicers.

In sum, the findings reveal that voicing is a complex process that is influenced by different factors such as the nature of the ideas. These findings contribute to the voice theory in four ways. First, the findings could provide a different angle of understanding upward voicing. Namely, the findings could lead to a reconceptualization of voice as a process. Second, the findings demonstrate that power and status hierarchies substantially shape the voicing process. Even more, the findings offer insights on the ways voicers could effectively navigate these hierarchies when voicing. Third, as voicing is an inherently risky endeavor, the findings explicate novel ways of mitigating the risks experienced in different phases of voicing. Fourth, the findings demonstrate how access to resources (or lack thereof) could impact voicing experiences and outcomes. Beyond theoretical implications, the findings could have important practical implications for the different actors involved in the voicing process. The next chapter discusses implications for theory and practice.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The goals of the study were twofold: namely, to (a) identify the phases that characterize the voicing process and (b) uncover the communicative strategies that characterize the different phases of the voicing process in the renewable energy industry in Kenya. To address these goals, I interviewed twenty-three renewable energy workers in Kenya who reported to have engaged in voicing. Participants' narratives revealed five core phases of the voicing process in the growing renewable energy industry. These phases offer insights into how voicing unfolds from inception to the decision stage. Further, through the findings, communicative strategies that characterize the different phases of voicing were uncovered. By illustrating the communicative strategies used by voicers—both supervisor and subordinate voicers, voicers' allies or peers, and voice recipients and their allies, the findings cast voicing as a collaborative process that is promoted through strategizing. Collectively, the findings advance voice scholarship by demonstrating how communicative practices shape the process of voicing. Below, I summarize the findings for each of the two goals.

The first research question explored the core phases of the voicing process. The findings revealed five phases: idea formation, planning, initial enactment, reflexive enactment, and outcome. Idea formation represents the moment where ideas start to develop. These ideas would later either be shared with an authority figure or be discarded. Idea formation is often an interactive process that involves voicers, voicers'

peers, and customers. Planning entails the preparation to enact ideas to the authority figure. This second phase is highly interactive as it includes voicers, their close coworkers, and sometimes voicers' immediate supervisors who further refine the idea and strategize on the enactment of the idea to achieve desired outcomes. The third phase, initial enactment, refers to the initial utterance of the idea to the targeted recipient—often an authority figure within the organization. This is the moment where the target of the voice becomes aware of the suggestion on how to improve organizational operations and functions and/or problematic practices that could be harmful to the organization if not corrected. Although this is also an interactive phase, the conversation is centered on the voicer expressing the ideas. Reflexive enactment entails a sensemaking process concerning the voiced ideas. This is a highly interactive phase that is characterized by conversations among voicers, recipients, and other organizational members present during the meeting where ideas are enacted.

Outcome represents the fifth and final phase of the voicing process. This phase involves communication of the decision pertaining to the voiced ideas. Compared to the preceding phase, the outcome is a less interactive phase as the attention shifts to the target of the voice who is responsible for communicating the decision on the voiced idea. Voicers receive different outcomes for the voiced ideas including temporary acceptance, partial acceptance, conditional acceptance, full acceptance, overt rejection, and covert rejection. Notably, the fifth phase of voicing does not always indicate the end of the voiced idea. As the data revealed, voicing is an ongoing process whose outcomes shaped future voicing behaviors. For instance, voicers and their close associates revived ideas

that were initially rejected either overtly or covertly. Similarly, voicers, especially powerful voicers, appealed some outcomes such as partial acceptance when they believed the rationale for the outcome received was unmerited.

The second research question investigated the communicative strategies that workers use in each phase of the voicing process. The interviews revealed that workers strategically communicated across the different phases to achieve the desired outcomes. Each phase of voicing served a unique purpose, prompting organizational members to embrace strategies that effectively serve the purpose of the phase and achieve desired voicing outcomes. Further, as members of the organization occupying different hierarchical ranks engaged in voicing, there are reported differences in terms of the preferred communicative strategies for these members. For example, while subordinate voicers used communication practices that were less face threatening such as recognizing the recipient's authority and influence, supervisor and manager voicers used strategies that might be perceived as face threatening (e.g., seeking clarity and commitment from the recipient) especially in high power-distance cultures such as Kenya. Additionally, even within subordinate voicers, the preferred communicative strategies differed along the lines of tenure status and form of voice–promotive vs. prohibitive.

Despite the differences, there were some overlaps in terms of the strategies used by supervisor and subordinate voicers owing to the shared goal of effectively voicing to bring positive changes to the organization and its members. For example, the findings demonstrated that both supervisor and subordinate voicers gravitated toward communication patterns that would not only lead to desired outcomes, but also maintain

positive relationships with their peers. This pattern of communication manifested through embracing the language of teamwork when initially enacting ideas. Similarly, voicers amplified their peers' ideas in part to support them and consequently maintain positive peer relationships. Additionally, both supervisor and subordinate voicers reported to communicate in ways that aimed to minimize the different risks associated with voicing such as use of hypothetical language to combat idea stealing.

In sum, communicative strategies used across the five phases of voicing were influenced by power and status disparities between peers and between voicers and recipients; the different risks associated with voicing such as nature of the idea, idea stealing, and fear of retribution; and the nature of the communicative relationships between peers and between subordinates and supervisors. The revelations in participants' accounts demonstrate the complexity of the voicing process and significantly advance voice scholarship and practice. In the next chapter, I discuss these theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

The study makes significant contributions to voice scholarship and advances voice theory in four main ways. First, the study demonstrates that voicing is a communicative process that unfolds across five core phases. These phases are communicatively constituted through interactions among different organizational members including the voicer, voicers' allies or peers, customers, recipients of the voice, and other organizational members present during the voicing episode. Second, the findings illustrate how power and status disparities shape the voicing process within the renewable energy industry in Kenya. Additionally, the findings illuminate the ways workers navigate the power and status disparities that often act as barriers to voicing. Third, the findings show how voicers mitigate risks associated with voicing. Fourth, the findings reveal the important role of communicative relationships between peers and between subordinates and supervisors in the voicing process. Particularly, the results indicate that effective voicing is largely a function of communicative relationships, especially between peers. Each of these four main contributions are discussed next.

Reconceptualizing Voice as a Communicative Process

Although majority of extant literature in voice has viewed the concept as a one-time discreet event, scholars have begun to take a process approach toward the concept. For example, Mowbray et al. (2015) invoked voice as a process that is characterized by factors such as motive, content, and channel. Similarly, Garner (2013) theorized dissent, a form of employee voice, as a process characterized by three phases: precipitation, initial conversation, and residual conversation. Despite the theoretical propositions, empirical

work that elucidates the different events that characterize the process of voicing and how these events are (re)produced and maintained is still scant. Even more, although communication has been invoked in some definitions of voice (for a review, see Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014), voice theorizing is yet to reflect a constitutive view of communication. A constitutive approach encourages us to explore the ongoing, interactive processes of producing organizational phenomena (Ashcraft et al., 2009). By taking a communicative process lens in the current study, the findings advance the voice scholarship by revealing that voicing is an ongoing communicatively constituted process that is characterized by five events or phases: idea formation, planning, initial enactment, reflexive enactment, and outcome. Voicing as a communicatively constituted process means that communication is the site where the five core phases are established. Put simply, ideas are incubated, developed, enacted, negotiated, modified, and approved/rejected in and through communication. Further, the communicative theorizing underscores the significant role of organizational members' interactions in constructing the different phases, and consequently the process of voicing.

The communicative approach toward voicing enables us to identify and understand the different subprocesses of voicing that have not been captured in prior scholarship, yet they are critical to a holistic understanding of the employee voicing. For example, the results demonstrate that voicers engage in planning once ideas have been identified. Planning was described as one of the critical phases in the voicing process given voicers and peers involved in the planning engage in communication design, whereby they (a) further refine the message or the idea to improve its quality and (b)

prepare for the interactions that underlie the enactment of the idea. The planning phase has been overlooked in the prior literature leading to an assumption that once employees identify the ideas, they proceed to enacting these ideas to an authority figure.

Additionally, the current study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that voicing is more than the initial utterance of the ideas to an authority figure. Before the initial utterance, employees identify, develop, and refine the idea that would be later shared. Additionally, these employees prepare and practice enacting these ideas with their peers before sharing these ideas with the intended target of the voice. After the initial utterance, organizational members–voicers, recipients, and other organizational members present in the meeting where ideas are enacted–engage in a sensemaking process to further process the idea before a decision is communicated. Thus, the findings indicate that voice recipients' decision regarding the voiced ideas is preceded by extensive discussions or negotiations among organizational members (Wahlin-Jacobsen, 2020). These findings build on the previous voice scholarship that has primarily focused on the initial utterance of the ideas. By examining voicing through a communicative process lens, the findings offer insights into pre- and post-initial utterance phases of voicing, which are critical in understanding and cultivating more voicing.

Moreover, the findings advance voice scholarship by demonstrating that the outcomes of voicing are more nuanced than what has been documented in past work. Although there is minimal research documenting how recipients of voice respond to voiced ideas (Burris, 2012), extant literature has implicitly depicted voice outcomes as a dichotomy consisting of either positive (acceptance) or negative (rejection). Acceptance

is often displayed through implementation of the ideas (Ashford & Dutton, 1993). The findings illustrate that recipients' responses to voiced ideas reflect a continuum rather than a dichotomy. For instance, acceptance of ideas can range from temporary, partial, conditional, to full acceptance. Similarly, rejection can range from overt to covert. In overt rejection, the recipient of voice explicitly informs the voicer that the ideas have been rejected, while covert rejection occurs when recipients fail to communicate the decision pertaining to the voiced ideas. As such, covert rejection is often assumed after a prolonged silence on the voiced ideas or a lack of explicit communication of the decision.

Further, examining the process of voicing revealed that voicers can receive multiple outcomes, sometimes contradictory outcomes, for the same idea. For example, ideas that were rejected following their enactment, some of them were later revived and ultimately reached implementation. The findings extend prior work that indicates that initial rejection may not always be the ultimate outcome of the voicing process (Satterstrom et al., 2020). Certainly, these different outcomes have differing implications on voicers and their peers, and their relationship with the recipient. For example, the implications of full acceptance on voicing behaviors may differ from the implications of conditional or partial acceptance. Thus, a process perspective offers a unique angle of theorizing voicing that attends to all possible outcomes of the voiced ideas and their intended and unintended consequences.

By examining voice through a communicative process lens, the study adds to the literature by unraveling the role of organizational members other than the voicer in the voicing process. Namely, the findings illustrate that voicing is a collective interactive

process that involves voicers, voicers' peers, voice recipient(s), and in some cases customers. The interactions produce different communication practices that constitute the core phases of voicing. This communicative theorizing of voice substantially departs from prior research. For example, Morrison (2014) depicted voice as an individual process where an individual employee engages in a decision calculus when deciding whether or not to speak. Here, an employee assesses the risks that come with speaking up and the probability of the idea leading to change. However, the data revealed that voicers involve their peers and other organizational members from inception of ideas to the decision stage of the voicing process. These findings further elucidate the specific contributions from voicers' peers and voice recipients throughout the voicing process. For instance, peers serve as soundboards and amplify the voiced ideas in the idea formation and reflexive enactment subprocesses, respectively. Overall, voicing is rarely a function of an individual actor's cognition.

In sum, theorizing voicing as a communicative process demonstrates that voicing is at its core communication. This is because voicing is produced, reproduced, and maintained through communication patterns among organizational members. A communicative approach calls us to not exclusively focus on the people interacting with each other. Rather, to also consider the role of non-human entities (e.g., texts, routines, and script) in influencing the organizational reality (Cooren, 2006). In the findings for the current study, hierarchy produced by power and status disparities emerged as a non-human entity that shapes the voicing process. In the next section, both human and non-human entities that shape the voicing process are discussed.

Power and Status in Voicing

The current findings extend voice theory by demonstrating the role of power and status in voicing. Particularly the findings illustrate (a) how power and status disparities shape the voicing process and (b) how organizational members communicatively maneuver these disparities when voicing. Prior research has documented that lack of power and status inhibits voicing. Namely, power and status disparities can reproduce a hierarchy that limits participation opportunities especially for employees in lower organizational ranks (Kim, 2018a; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). As a result, employees in low-status and power are hesitant to enact voice (Kim & Kiura, 2020; Lam & Xu, 2019), which leads to hierarchical mum effect within organizations whereby subordinates choose equivocation or opt to remain silent rather than dissent (Bisel et al., 2012). Consistent with prior literature, the findings revealed that the renewable energy sector was characterized by a strict hierarchy that acted as a barrier to voicing. Even when the voicer's immediate supervisor did not have power and resources to act on the voiced ideas, voicers were compelled to share ideas with the immediate supervisor due to the strict chain of command that prescribed that immediate supervisor should be the first point of contact for subordinates. Although such arrangements reduce role ambiguity (Bisel et al., 2012; Magee & Galinsky, 2008), the strict hierarchy could prolong the voicing process and subsequent implementation if ideas are accepted, especially if the person responsible for the implementation of ideas is in the upper echelon of the organization. Thus, it may take organizations that adhere to strict hierarchy longer to experience the benefits of the voiced ideas or correct problematic practices and policies.

The findings corroborate that power and status shape the voicing outcomes. Satterstrom et al. (2020) noted that low-power employees experienced immediate rejection. The findings of the current study also revealed that employees in high power and status receive more favorable outcomes of voicing compared to their counterparts in lower organizational positions. Specifically, powerful voicers such as supervisors and managers often reported that their ideas were fully accepted and implemented within a short turnaround. Voice recipients sometimes reject ideas not because they are bad, but due to a lack of capacity to take on additional workload such as overseeing the implementation of the ideas (Howell et al., 2015). Employees occupying high power and status positions have access to information and resources that allow them to oversee the implementation of ideas. Thus, voice recipients are likely to accept powerful voicers' ideas because doing so may not lead to additional workload for the recipients. Although previous studies have shown that accompanying a voiced idea with solutions leads to favorable evaluations of the idea by the manager as it reduces manager's workload (Whiting et al., 2012), it appears that having the capacity to oversee the implementation of the idea makes the idea even more attractive to the recipients.

Power and status disparities manifest in the voicing process through the choice of communicative strategies. While subordinate voicers' communicative strategies oriented toward managing risks and uncertainties surrounding voicing, powerful voicers' strategies reflected reward-orientation. For example, subordinate voicers described that they shifted the responsibility of problematic organizational practice from the recipient of the voice to the organization or department to avoid losing face or being viewed

negatively. On the other hand, powerful voicers used the same communicative strategy with a goal of redirecting the conversation to the voiced idea and its potential payoffs. These findings illustrate that people with less power have heightened sensitivity to threat and risks, which makes them engage in risk-reduction and conformity behaviors. On the other hand, employees with power are reward-oriented and, thus, their behaviors are driven by the need to maximize rewards. Further, the findings demonstrated that power and status shaped and were shaped by voicing. Namely, low status and power acted as a barrier to voicing; however, voicers and voicers peers who amplified the ideas gained status from enacting voice, especially when ideas were accepted and implemented. These findings advance voice theory by demonstrating that voicing is a pathway for status attainment for both voicers and their peers.

Finally, the findings offer insights into how employees who are structurally disadvantaged communicatively navigate the power and status disparities when voicing. For example, low-status voicers opted to share ownership of the ideas with those in higher social status. Such sharing of the ownership buffers low-status employees from potential rejection of ideas and negative consequences such as job loss. Thus, the findings revealed the alternative communicative practices that allow for greater democracy for employees without threatening the management. Further, it appears that even high-status employees communicatively manage the status disparities when voicing. High status voicers reduced the status difference by highlighting the agency and competency of a low-status employee when soliciting input.

Mitigating the Risks of Voicing

Prior research has explored ways to reduce perceptions of risk when voicing (Nehmbard & Edmondson, 2006; Morrison, 2014). For example, cultivating a climate of psychological safety and inclusive leadership behaviors such as openness can lessen perceptions of retributions among voicers. Notably, prior work has primarily focused on the ways voice recipients can mitigate risks. This paints an image of lack of agency on the part of the voicers. However, the findings contribute to the voice literature by illustrating ways voicers can mitigate the risks associated with voicing. Prior work has recorded that employees well recognize the sometimes futile nature of trying to change the status quo and the personal risks involved in speaking up (Milliken et al., 2000). Further, it has been documented that employees are reluctant to engage in voice behaviors because they are afraid of negative consequences such as retribution (Detert & Trevino, 2010). Despite the inherent risks of voice, employees still engage in voice behaviors given the potential benefits of voicing for both employees and organizations. This extant voice literature illuminates the inherent tension that exists for employees; that is, it is not safe to engage in voice yet engaging in voice is beneficial for both employees and organization (Morrison, 2014). The findings of the current study advance the voice literature by offering valuable insights on the ways to manage the tension.

First, the findings suggest that voicing in a group setting, rather than a dyadic setting consisting only the voicer and recipient, could mitigate risks of immediate rejection. Prior research has documented that voicers, especially low-status voicers are often met with immediate rejections following initial utterance of an idea (Satterstrom et

al., 2020). For this reason, such voicers are reluctant to engage in voicing behaviors owing to the inconsequential nature of voicing or potential negative outcomes for them. However, the findings indicate that voiced ideas are less likely to be immediately rejected in a group setting. The lack of immediate rejection offers an opportunity for ideas to advance to the reflexive enactment phase where further sensemaking of the ideas through activities such as asking clarifying questions about the idea and providing additional evidence take place. As new meanings emerge in the sensemaking process, ideas that otherwise would have been rejected immediately could be considered. These findings contradict implicit theory of voice that suggest that employees should not voice in public settings to avoid embarrassing themselves.

Second, the findings contribute to the literature by underscoring the role of the planning phase in mitigating the risks of voicing. Namely, the findings demonstrate that in the planning phase, peers identify anticipated risks associated with the idea and craft response strategies. Further, by involving immediate supervisors during the planning phase, voicers receive valuable advice on how to enact ideas in ways that adhere to the organizational norms of voicing. Additionally, involving immediate supervisors in the planning stage allows for subordinate voicers to *skip the voicing protocol* or strict chain of command without negative consequences. This is because such subordinate voicers can initially express the idea directly to the authority figure responsible for acting on the idea or is much closer to the final decision maker.

Third, the findings offer insights on the ways to mitigate risks associated with the nature of the idea being enacted. Broadly, constructive voicing is considered a risky

behavior given it challenges the status quo (Burris, 2012). Even more, prohibitive voicing that is corrective in nature is riskier as it calls for certain practices and policies to be stopped (Liang et al., 2012). In managing the risks associated with constructive voicing, and especially prohibitive voicing, the findings suggest inviting one's peers who have a positive reputation to share the ownership of the ideas. A collective idea is considered more legitimate and reduces chances of the originator of the idea being perceived as a troublemaker or complainer.

Finally, the findings demonstrate ways to navigate the risk of one's ideas being stolen by peers or other organizational members. Participants reported that idea stealing was a common behavior in the idea development phase. Both peers and immediate supervisors stole and presented others' ideas as their own. As a result, participants' communication was marked by hypothetical language when seeking feedback on ideas to prevent idea stealing. Idea stealing poses a risk to the voicer especially in organizations where having one's ideas recognized could lead to professional gains such as promotion (Ploeger-Lyons & Bisel, 2021). It has been documented that employees are reluctant to confront supervisors' unethical behaviors especially if the contentious behavior could threaten a supervisor's face (Bisel et al., 2011; Zanin et al., 2016). As idea stealing is considered a face-threatening act (Ploeger-Lyons & Bisel, 2021), these findings are particularly important as they show how to navigate idea stealing in organizations. Confronting the transgressor may not always be feasible on the part of the victim—voicer; hence, using hypothetical language when ideating may be a promising pathway toward preventing idea theft in organizations.

Communicative Relationships and Voicing

The study advances voice research by revealing the role of communicative relationships on voicing process. Although organizations are sites of different communicative relationships, the findings of the current study revealed that communicative relationships between peers and between supervisors and subordinates substantially shape the voicing process. Prior work has documented that peers are important in the organizing process as they serve various functions including access to both instrumental resources–knowledge and information sharing and job-related feedback—and emotional resources such as showing empathy and understanding (Anand et al., 2010; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Peruone, 2007). However, the specific contributions from these relationship in the context of voicing remain unclear. The findings advance voice theory by elucidating the ways in which positive high-quality interactions with one's peers influence voicing.

First, peers significantly contributed to the development of the ideas. The findings revealed that some ideas that were later enacted emerged from conversation with peers. Additionally, even when ideas emerged from voicer's past voicing experiences or conversations with customers, voicers sought feedback on the ideas from their peers. Second, planning process largely depended on voicers' peers. Indeed, participants reported that they enlisted peers with whom they shared a close relationship when strategizing on the enactment process. Peers contributed to the refinement of the idea by identifying anticipated risks and generating ways to mitigate these during enactment. Where necessary, peers also shared their experiences that served as evidence to support

the voicers' ideas. Third, upon enactment of the idea, peers amplified the voicer and the ideas through public endorsement to legitimize the ideas and enhance the credibility of the voicer. Amplification of the ideas and the voicer influenced the recipient to evaluate ideas more positively. Fourth, peers revived ideas that were unfairly rejected. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that voicer's positive relationships or interactions with peers facilitates the voicing process.

Similarly, positive relationships with the supervisors and managers have implications on the voicing process. Immediate supervisors were also involved in the planning process. These supervisors contributed to the idea refinement and provided advice to the voicers on how to effectively enact ideas for the first time, and respond to voice recipients' questions pertaining to the already-voiced ideas. The advice took the form of communicative strategies to embrace. Further, positive relationships with managers provide voicers with easy access to managers who may have the authority to act on the voiced ideas. As the findings revealed, such access facilitates a short turnaround time for the enacted ideas. This is because voicers can directly enact ideas to the party responsible for implementing ideas even when the party is not the immediate supervisor. In other words, voicers with positive relationships with the managers can bypass the strict hierarchy without negative consequences. Further, as managers and supervisors tend to be recipients of ideas in some situations, having positive relationship with them led to desirable outcomes.

In sum, the findings reveal the specific ways positive relationships with managers and supervisors facilitate the voicing process. Previous scholarship has reported that

supervisor-subordinate relationships influence employee voice behaviors. Namely, high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationships facilitate open communication between the parties (Fairhurst & Chandler, 1989), reduces social and power distance (Waldron, 1991), and enhances trust and leads to more support (Krone, 1991). These outcomes of high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationship are positively associated with initial enactment of ideas. The findings of the current study advance voice theory by demonstrating that the implications of high-quality supervisor-subordinate relationship extend beyond the initial enactment of the ideas, to other equally important phases of the voicing process.

Collectively, the findings advance the existing voice literature by revealing that successful voicing is contingent on one's positive communicative relationships with peers and supervisors. Indeed, prior research has documented that employees with positive workplace relationships are better equipped to manage challenges and risks at the workplace. Thus, the findings lend support to prior work by demonstrating how positive or high-quality communicative relations with peers and supervisors shape the voicing process.

Practical Implications

Extant organizational scholarship has long emphasized the need to offer practical advice for improving organizational process and practices especially with respect to managing change, tensions, and contradictions that permeate organizational life (Putnam et al., 2016; Tracy, 2016; Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Thus, to move beyond describing and theorizing the voicing process, the findings offer important implications for the different actors involved in the voicing episode, namely: voicers, voicers' peers, voice recipients, and organizations. These implications offer practical ways to cultivate and foster voicing in organizations.

Voicers

My findings illustrate the phases that characterize voicing and the different communicative strategies that can be employed across the phases of voicing. Although prior experiences in voicing may lead to better voicing strategies and experiences over time, the findings offer a practical guide on how to voice effectively. First, voicers need to recognize the importance of the planning subprocess. As the findings revealed, planning is one of the critical phases in the voicing process as other employees provide valuable insights that refined the content and helped the voicers better prepare for the interactions in the subsequent phases.

Additionally, voicers need to involve other organizational members in the voicing process. The findings demonstrated that involving others led to insightful inputs both at the initial stages as well as in the advanced phases of voicing. For example, voicers discussed how their peers enhanced the probability of idea acceptance through voice

amplification. Voice amplification influenced the recipients' perceptions of the idea as a high-quality one that deserves attention. Thus, by involving other organizational members in the voicing process, voicers could benefit from enacting ideas that are likely to be received positively.

Further, the findings offer insights on effective communicative strategies to use in order to achieve positive outcomes. Depending on their job role within the organization, the voicers have a wealth of strategies to draw from when voicing. These strategies enable the voicers to effectively manage the risk that is embedded within the voicing. By embracing communicative strategies, voicers will be equipped with skills set to navigate power and status disparities more effectively and enact more voicing. Additionally, as different forms of voice are evaluated differently, with prohibitive voicing considered riskier in comparison with promotive, the findings provide a toolkit to enable voicers to engage in prohibitive voicing in ways that do not lead to undesired outcomes for the voicers.

Voicers' Peers

The findings revealed that the capacity to bring voiced ideas to implementation does not reside with leaders/recipients and voicers alone. Other organizational members witnessing the voicing episode, especially the voicers' peers, can shape the outcome of the voicing. Particularly, peers can facilitate positive outcomes of the process by legitimizing the voiced ideas. This public endorsement of ideas can positively shape the recipients' perceptions of the ideas, communicate support to the voicer, and bolster one's reputation within the organization. Supporting the voicer could encourage them to engage

in more voicing behaviors which could lead to positive consequences for organizations as well as the members. In the same vein, peers could help revive the ideas that were unfairly rejected or rejected for short-term constraints such as temporary financial crisis. Once ideas are enacted, they cannot be unheard; therefore, peers can keep the ideas alive by reviving them later on, such as when the organization has recovered from the financial crisis.

Voice Recipients

The findings can inform managers or voice recipients on the best ways to cultivate and foster voicing within the renewable energy industry. Prior research has documented that voice recipients are critical in shaping the voicing climate of an organization (Burris, 2012). Particularly, their responses shape the climate of voicing by inviting or inhibiting future voicing (Edmondson & Nembhard, 2006). Thus, the findings underscore the need for voice recipients to pay attention to how they respond to constructive voicing. Furthermore, recipients need to pay attention to the effects of the communicative strategies that they use when communicating different types of outcomes. As the findings illustrated, some of the strategies that recipients used were not perceived to be effective by the voicers. For example, while managers perceived gatekeeping by invoking organizational policies as an effective way of communicating rejection, voicers viewed this strategy as patronizing. Therefore, managers wishing to respond effectively might want to consider strategies that will not be perceived negatively by the voicers such as invoking quality-improvement of the idea.

Organizations

Organizations that wish to cultivate and foster voicing can benefit from the findings in the following ways. First, they can reduce barriers to voicing by implementing policies that support voicing. Voicers expressed that they had to find strategic ways of enacting voice without being labeled as complainers, troublemakers, among other negative consequences. Thus, organizations can incorporate and implement policies that protect voicers from negative consequences of voicing. While the policies could serve as short term ways of reducing barriers, in the long term, organizations need to materialize voicing. Particularly, employees suggested that they would feel safer to voice if they are protected by the employment contract. Thus, organizations should consider incorporating a voice protection clause in employment contracts that will safeguard employees, allowing them to enact voice freely.

Furthermore, as employees particularly in collectivist cultures such as Kenya, look up to the organizations for support and care, organizations can communicate such support through eliminating the strict hierarchy that voicers are expected to adhere to when voicing, even when the hierarchy does not serve the interests of voicers. For example, voicers reported sharing ideas with the immediate supervisors due to the strict hierarchy even when the immediate supervisor did not have the authority or resources to act on the idea. As the immediate supervisor had to voice the idea to the party responsible for deciding on the idea, following the strict hierarchy delayed the decision-making process relating to the particular idea. By eliminating the hierarchy, organizations will enable quicker management decision-making on the idea.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Despite the important theoretical and practical implications, the study has limitations that point to promising directions for future research. First, the current study only relied on interviews for data collection. While interviews provide important insights on voicing, interviews only are prone to social desirability. For example, participants in the current study extensively discussed the positive communication strategies that they used throughout the voicing process, with rare discussions of negative communicative practices such as sabotaging each other, which has been reported by previous studies (Satterstrom et al., 2020). Although it is possible that such cases are minimal within the renewable energy industry, pairing interviews with other methods of data collection such as observations could have revealed more information on the voicing process. Further, using observations would have allowed the researcher to capture the voicing interactions in real time and take note of important behaviors that the participants might have overlooked or forgotten.

Second, this study was conducted in one industry—renewable energy industry—and in one country—Kenya. The success of renewable energy organizations heavily hinges on voicing. Namely, the industry is highly competitive due to the growing number of players in the industry, highly innovative, and knowledge intensive. As such, managers encourage voicing especially during regular departmental meetings in order to (a) help organizations to respond to unforeseen circumstances more quickly than their competitors, (b) constantly upgrade the products to reflect technological advancements, and (c) understand and respond to the dynamic nature of the industry. In this respect,

although focusing only on renewable energy industry led to in-depth understanding of the voicing process in this industry, the findings should be interpreted with caution as it is possible that these findings cannot be transferred to other industries or same industry in other countries that have different perceptions in terms of the significance of voicing.

Finally, the findings of the current study may be prone to recall biases. Employees were asked to recall sharing ideas with someone in authority and to trace these ideas from inception to the final stages. Although this approach revealed the key phases of the voicing process, interviews are subject to recall biases (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Thus, it is possible that participants forgot to share important details of the voicing process during the interview. Therefore, future related research should consider a more crystallized approach to data collection that incorporates more techniques that can complement one another to offer even more nuanced theorizing of the voicing process.

Future studies should continue to further examine the processes of voicing in a group context rather than in a dyadic setting. Extant literature has operated under the assumption that voicing occurs in a dyadic setting with the voicer and the recipient of the voice. However, the findings revealed that the majority of voicers enact voice in a group setting for various reasons. Additionally, ideas enacted within organizational contexts are a function of different organizational members who shape the idea throughout the voicing process. Examining the practices of voicing in a collective setting is critical for building voice theory that is in line with the organizational reality.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT MESSAGE

E-mail/ WhatsApp Interview Invitation Message

Dear Prospective Participant,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Heewon Kim in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. I am collecting stories about your constructive employee voice behaviors.

We are defining constructive employee voice as an upward communication of novel ideas/suggestions and/or pointing out problems within the organization with the goal of benefiting the organization and its members.

I am recruiting individuals to participate in a recorded individual interview that will last between 45-60 minutes. The preferred channels of interviewing are Zoom or WhatsApp. To participate, you must be over the age of 18 years, a current employee in the renewable energy sector in Kenya, and must have engaged in constructive voice at your workplace.

If you choose to participate in this study, please contact Mary Kiura on WhatsApp at +1 309 532 7085 or email at mkiura@asu.edu. A $20 gift card will be provided as an appreciation for your time.

Your participation is completely voluntary; your identity will not be tied to your responses. There is no penalty for choosing not to participate in this study. Furthermore, you have the right to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or adversely affecting your relationship with Mary, Dr. Kim, or Arizona State University.

If you have any questions, please contact Mary Kiura

Thank you,
Mary Kiura
Hugh Downs School of Communication
mkiura@asu.edu

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me a story of what is it like working here?

2. When you want to speak up about things happening in the organization (could be negative or positive), who do you normally share with?
    a. Describe the relationship between you and the person.
    b. Describe the relationships between you and other people who do the same kind of jobs in your department or organization.

3. I would like you to recall a time in the last one year when you suggested ideas to the authorities with the goal of improving the organization.
    a. Who did you suggest these ideas to?
        i. If peer or external voicing, ask why?
    b. Describe the idea(s) you suggested.
    c. Take me back to when you first thought of the ideas.
        i. How did the ideas come about?
        ii. When you first came up with the idea, did you pre-plan to talk with your supervisor/manager about these ideas?
            1. If yes, how did that look like? Who was involved and why? what was their contribution?

OR

        iii. Prior to sharing these ideas with the manager/supervisor, did you discuss these ideas with anyone else in the organization?
            1. If yes, who and why?
            2. What was his/her/their contribution to the idea?

4. I want you to take me through from the moment you had the ideas formed.
    a. What happened next?
    b. You mentioned that you involved XX and XX why did you involve them?
    c. What were their contributions?
    d. What are the memorable moments that you remember from the discussion?
        i. Why are they memorable?
5. I want you to think about the first time that you verbalized these ideas to your manager or supervisor.
    a. Describe how you went about the conversation with the manager/supervisor? /Describe how the discussion unfolded
    b. In your view, what are the memorable events the discussion?
        i. Why are they memorable?
6. I want you to think about the period after you shared the ideas with the manager. Describe what happened (Ask if not already answered under question 5 above)
7. What was the outcome of the idea? (Ask if not already answered under question 5/6 above)
    a. How did you feel about the outcome?
        i. Based on the outcome and how you felt, would you engage in the same behavior again?
        ii. How long ago did you first bring up the idea. And how long did the entire process take?

b. If someone you work with wanted to share ideas like you did, how would you advise them to go about it?

c. What would you want the other person to know about making these kinds of suggestions?

8. What communication techniques did you use from the time the idea started developing to the final stage?

    a. Why did you use these techniques?

Demographic Questions

1 What is your age?

2 What is your gender?

3 What is your position within the organization?

    a. How many employees report to you?

4 How many years have you worked in this organization?

5 Where is the location of the organizations?

6 How many employees does the organization have, approximately?

7 What is your level of education?

8 What's your preferred Pseudonym?

APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Heewon Kim

CLAS-SS: Human Communication, Hugh Downs School of
480/965-6901

Heewon.Kim@asu.edu

Dear Heewon Kim:

On 11/8/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Understanding and cultivating constructive employee voice
Investigator:	Heewon Kim
IRB ID:	STUDY00014877
Funding:	Name: (Unspecified), Grant Office ID: Hugh Downs School of Human Communication
Grant Title:	Hugh Downs School of Human Communication;
Grant ID:	Hugh Downs School of Human Communication;
Documents Reviewed:	• Informed Consent _Survey.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Informed Consent_interviews.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Interview Guide.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Interview Recruitment Message.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • IRB Protocol_Kiura.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Survey Instruments.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • Survey Recruitment Message-2.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 11/8/2021.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at research.integrity@asu.edu to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

REMINDER - All in-person interactions with human subjects require the completion of the ASU Daily Health Check by the ASU members prior to the interaction and the use of face coverings by researchers, research teams and research participants during the interaction. These requirements will minimize risk, protect health and support a safe research environment. These requirements apply both on- and off-campus.

The above change is effective as of July 29th 2021 until further notice and replaces all previously published guidance. Thank you for your continued commitment to ensuring a healthy and productive ASU community.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Mary Kiura
Mary Kiura