A CHANGING WORLD OF WORKPLACE CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND EMPLOYEE VOICE: AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The authors contribute to dispute resolution theory and provide new insights on such important issues as employee voice, workplace disputes and employees' intentions to quit. They conducted and analyzed a survey of managers in Australian workplaces. They apply Budd and Colvin's (2008) path-finding dispute resolution framework to examine two research questions: first, is there a relationship between the resolution of disputes and employee voice as measured by employee perceptions of influence over decision-making? Second, is there a relationship between the resolution of workplace disputes and employees' intentions to quit? These are important questions in view of the high costs of workplace conflict and employee turnover. The authors find that employee voice facilitates successful dispute resolution. Further, employee voice has the additional benefit of directly reducing employee turnover intentions, above and beyond its indirect effect by helping to resolve conflicts at work.

Keywords workplace conflict, exit, voice, labor turnover, justice, equity

Much of the literature on workplace conflict resolution is from the US; there have been relatively few international and comparative contributions. We offer an Australian perspective to complement much insightful and path-finding research that has been led in the US by David Lipsky, others at his alma maters (Cornell and MIT), and elsewhere. As Lipsky, Avgar, and Lamare remind us "The handling of workplace conflict in the US has changed dramatically over

the last four decades" (2014:405). The changing world of work includes a transformation from a prevalence of collective forms of workplace conflict to individualized manifestations becoming the norm. Such changes parallel a reduction in the density of unionization and a growth of employment in the service sector along with continuing declines in the manufacturing and primary sectors. Similarly, the resolution of disputes, characteristics of workplace conflict, union density and the structure of employment have changed dramatically in comparable developed countries, including Australia.

In this paper, we examine two research questions: first, is there a relationship between the resolution of disputes and employee voice as measured by employee perceptions of consultation and influence over decision-making? Second, is there a relationship between the resolution of workplace disputes and employees' intentions to quit? These are important questions in view of the high economic and human costs of workplace conflict and employee turnover and more so in light of the changing approaches to workplace dispute resolution in Australia. We consider the importance of employee voice as a precondition to effective conflict resolution and, in turn, to employee intentions to quit or stay. Most employee quits are costly for employers since they lose their investment in recruiting and developing such "human capital" (Siebert and Zubanov 2009). Employers usually suffer at least a temporary disruption once an employee decides to quit and before their replacement is recruited and learns the specifics of the job. To find and train replacements, employers may have to spend the equivalent of six to nine months of an employee's salary in terms of direct costs, in addition to many indirect costs (Kantor 2017). It has long been known that high quit rates in employing organizations raise labor costs and lower productivity (Oi 1962).

After adapting theoretical approaches developed by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg (1988), and Budd and Colvin (2008), we analyze a survey of employees in Australia. By considering such approaches and our research questions, we advance understanding of how theories of justice and exit-voice inform the management of workplace conflict. Improving workplace dispute resolution may have significant practical benefits for employing organizations, the people in them, other stakeholders, and the wider society.

Literature Review

Conflict is an inherent part of workplace and organizational life (Fox 1974; Currie, Gormley, Roche, and Teague 2017). The negative ramifications of workplace conflict are well

documented. It presents enormous challenges to employers and can strain individual employees, their families, unions and the wider society (Kieseker and Marchant 1999). While the overt manifestations of workplace conflict such as strikes, bans and lockouts have generally declined to historically low levels in most developed nations, other forms of conflict remain endemic, but less visible, as workplaces confront multitudes of smaller, often individual disputes (or grievances) which may strain workplace resources and impact on society more generally. In the US (and elsewhere) there has been a shift from large-scale collective to individual and small group conflict (Bingham 2003). Individual conflict includes: bullying, interpersonal and individual grievances submitted (in Australia) to industrial or equal opportunity tribunals, workers' compensation claims (including stress-related claims), absenteeism, and labor turnover (Shulruf et al. 2009).

We know from the literature that while strikes and many other overt forms of collective conflict have declined, there are still various manifestations of workplace conflict (Goddard 2011). The forms of conflict may reflect the context that can vary in terms of the type of national regulation (Bamber, Lansbury, Wailes and Wright 2016). For example, where collective "voice" and strikes are prohibited or tightly regulated, workers may express discontent in various individual ways (e.g. by exiting or "working without enthusiasm"). The context also varies greatly between, on the one hand, large enterprises that may be unionized in the public, manufacturing, transport or mining sectors, and on the other hand, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in services or the primary sector that are rarely unionized. Typically, the former category of enterprises has formal dispute resolution procedures for dealing with grievances, while most SMEs may have less formalized approaches to dealing with grievances.

Grievances can be described as aggrievable events, inclusive of anything that constitutes a violation of a collective agreement (Bemmels and Foley 1996). Others such as Kuhn (1961) see grievances as "any problem, complaint or gripe". The international literature tends to view grievances as being individual rather than collective disputes, as does the International Labour Office (1965:7-9) which defines a grievance as:

> a matter submitted by a worker in respect of any measure or situation
> which directly affects, or may affect the conditions of employment
> …when that measure or situation appears contrary to the provisions
> of an applicable collective agreement or a contract of employment, to

work rules or law or regulations, or to the custom usage of the
occupation

Dispute resolution procedures are formal written policies for settling conflict in workplaces (Lewin and Peterson 1988). Generally, they involve managers, employees and, less often in the twenty-first century, their union representatives at an enterprise level. In the US, dispute procedures have a well-documented history in unionized contexts where they were aimed at stemming workplace litigation by keeping dispute resolution in-house (McDermott and Berkeley 1996). For example, in New York State public school districts teachers with the two "strongest" types of grievance procedures in their contracts had a lower probability of quitting than those working under "weaker" grievance procedures. That finding has been seen as evidence that unionization can reduce employee quits through a "voice" effect (Rees 1991). There has also been a history of expansion of and reliance on "alternative dispute resolution procedures" to cover the growing non-unionized sector (Lewin 1987; Lipsky et al. 2016). In addition to formal dispute resolution procedures, a range of informal measures in workplaces have been identified including: open door policies and "management by walking around" both of which have been regarded as encouraging direct and often proactive communication of disputes to managers (McCabe and Lewin 1992). Formal and informal mechanisms for dispute resolution generally provide an opportunity for employee voice and participation in the resolution of disputes and grievances.

In Australia, one of the most notable aspects of individualized conflict has been the rise of employment-related anti-discrimination and workplace-bullying claims (Australian Human Rights Commission 2010). Workplace bullying leads to productivity loss, a rise in accidents, diminished corporate reputations, employee turnover, absenteeism, strained loyalty, distrust, sabotage, resentment, an uncivil climate, decreased communication, potential escalation to aggression or violence as well as the direct costs of legal liability and higher workers compensation (Fox and Stallworth 2008).

Another source of workplace conflict is management decisions that workers regard as unfair (Ury et al. 1988; Ambrose, Seabright and Schminkec 2002). Much of the damage at workplaces is caused by adverse behaviors of those who feel aggrieved (Goldman et al. 2008). The Australian Productivity Commission (2010:287) reports that the annual costs to the economy of this type of conflict could be as high as US$28 billion. In addition to such

economic costs are the less easily quantifiable costs to the emotional wellbeing and health of employees, their families and society at large. Increasingly it is recognized that illnesses may be induced or exacerbated by workplace conflict (Bowles and Cooper 2010).

Improved management of workplace conflict, then, can precipitate economic and social benefits (Turnbull and Sapsford 2001). Reducing the effects of conflict and the resources used to manage it benefits individuals and employers as well as the wider society; this can also enhance economic performance (Kochan, Katz and McKersie 1994). We investigate this argument in terms of the effect voice has on workplace conflict resolution and employee turnover intentions. We argue that when employees have voice opportunities, they will be more inclined to reach an acceptable outcome for their dispute and consequently, they will be less inclined to exit the employing organization. Let us turn to earlier research on efficiency, justice, voice, and turnover intentions.

Employee Voice

Research on effective dispute resolution (Van Gramberg 2006a, 2006b) has found that when workplace dispute procedures provide for employees to voice their concerns and to participate in the dispute settlement process, there is greater satisfaction with the outcome and greater trust in managers. Other research on informal and formal employee voice mechanisms (Pyman, Holland, Teicher and Cooper 2010) finds that direct voice (two-way communication channels between employees and management) is positively associated with job satisfaction and more favorable employee perceptions of the workplace climate. Key elements of employee voice identified in the conflict resolution literature include: that disputants are able to voice their concerns directly; that disputants are directly involved in the dispute resolution process; and that disputants have access to indirect voice mechanisms (Ury et al. 1988). Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington and Ackers (2004) suggest that voice is the extent to which workers are able to articulate their dissatisfaction to their line manager, contribute to decision making, and act as a source of mutuality and cooperation in the firm. In such ways, we argue that voice is a vital aspect of positive employer-employee relations.

Voice can also be linked to procedural justice and to employee participation in decision making. Procedural justice is a requirement not only of formal legal processes, but also of good practice in workplace conflict resolution. There are several "rules" of procedural justice which are considered to be essential rights, particularly in situations where an employee is charged

with having transgressed a workplace directive or policy. In assessing whether an employee has been afforded those rights by an organization, courts and tribunals in Anglophone countries usually look at several factors.

We consider two factors here that are most relevant to voice and participation. The first is that a person receives the charges in writing and in sufficient detail as well as the proposed penalty (McDermott and Berkeley 1996). The second is the right to present a defense. Generally, this requires a hearing to be arranged and the employee concerned should be consulted about a suitable time to attend and be provided with the option to involve a representative. This is an important feature of procedural fairness because a representative may be someone who helps the employee to prepare his or her defense (e.g. a union steward), an interpreter or someone trusted to act as witness and support. In many cases the ameliorative effect of a representative ensures that employee voice is achieved.

Much research on procedural justice points to the importance of disputant participation in the resolution of the conflict as the basis for their perception of fairness (Thiabut and Walker 1975; Folger 1977; Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler 1991). Folger (1977) for instance, found that when employees had "voice" in the workplace grievance procedure, they were more likely to find the procedure fair and accept the outcome of the dispute. Thus, we argue that voice encompasses elements of procedural justice and participation and is essential to good dispute resolution practice.

Outcomes of the dispute resolution processes

We draw on the elements of efficiency and justice outlined in the international conflict resolution literature to identify how a just outcome from a dispute resolution process can be achieved as we describe below.

Efficiency and dispute outcomes

There is efficiency when disputes are settled close to their source, have lower transaction costs, display higher settlement rates, are resolved quickly, and with ways to ensure both consistency of outcome and non-recurrence (Ury et al. 1988). Efficiency is also enhanced in formal procedures which: are in writing and with clear steps (Mesch and Dalton 1992), contain a ban on strikes (Trudeau 2002), provide opportunities for negotiation and feedback (Ury et al. 1988), and when enterprises provide training to managers and employees (Fells 2016).

Good dispute resolution processes need to be conducted efficiently in the sense that the outcomes are timely for the employer and the employee(s) (Ury et al. 1988) – this is a requirement of procedural justice. The well-known maxim: "justice delayed is justice denied" has become a benchmark for measures such as speedy trials and efficient dispute resolution processing (McCabe and Rabil 2002). In a practical sense, a timely resolution avoids creating the impression that managers are not interested in addressing the matter, thus risking the possibility that the disputants will turn elsewhere for resolution. This is echoed in debates about balancing fairness and efficiency in workplaces (Budd 2004; Isaac 2007; McCallum 2007). When employees experience a timely settlement to their dispute, they are more likely to reciprocate with a higher degree of commitment, greater job satisfaction and engage in extra-role behavior (Colquitt 2001). Thus, efficient dispute processes are linked to better dispute resolution outcomes. It is because of the effect that efficiency has on delivering settlements that we use it to denote that a resolution outcome has been achieved.

Justice and dispute outcomes

As mentioned, justice consists of procedural, interactional and distributive aspects. Procedural justice and interactional justice refer to the dispute resolution process and the treatment of the disputants in the course of this process, respectively. Procedural justice incorporates elements of voice, participation and efficiency whereas distributive justice refers to the fairness of the outcome of the dispute.

There are three important criteria within distributive justice which are based on Rawls' (1971) pioneering work: equity, equality and need (Deutsch 1985). Briefly, decisions based on *equity* mean that rewards would be distributed proportionally to the input of each contributor. More recent research on this has identified equity measures including that the outcome needs to be proportional to the offence (Colquitt 2001). Decisions based on *equality* mean that all workers will receive the same set of rewards (regardless of their efforts). Conversely, decisions based on *need* are made to supplement a deficiency in some groups but not in others. In other words, need-based decisions mean that workers receive unequal rewards (again regardless of their efforts). For an outcome of a dispute resolution process to be seen as fair by disputants, the rationale for settlement via equity, equality or need would need to be clearly explained. It has long been established that distributive justice provides a stronger prediction of the acceptance of the outcome of the dispute than do the procedural or interactional justice

components (Tyler 1984). Because of its prominence in achieving settlement, we include all three measures of distributive justice in our assessment of dispute resolution outcomes.

Turnover Intentions

Exit-voice theorists (e.g. Hirschman 1970) argue that when employees are dissatisfied at work they may either voice a concern or quit (exit). Employee quits can be costly for employers, as mentioned earlier. Freeman and Medoff (1984) established that providing employee voice mechanisms can stem the effect of costly employee exits. Offering employees dispute processes which allow for voice can also redress negative behaviors in response to perceived unfairness at work (Kim and Mauborgne 2003).

Formal and informal workplace dispute procedures are important avenues for employee voice as they allow employees to participate in a decision-making process leading to resolution of a problem (Lewin 1987). The greater the perceived effectiveness of the disputes procedure, the more likely that people will use the voice option, rather than quitting or taking other action (Boroff and Lewin 1997). Further, voice is essential to democratic pluralism in workplaces and is an "intrinsic standard of participation" (Budd 2004: 13). However, the quality of voice in a workplace is reliant on genuine opportunities for employees to participate and be heard in decision-making processes and this raises a range of concerns (Lind and Kulik 2009). For instance, unions offer voice options for employees, which may then reduce the likelihood that they will quit (Estreicher and Eiger 2010), but the efficacy of this channel is undermined by the long term and continuing decline in unionization in many developed economies. Voice, and the channels through which it can be achieved in unionized as well as non-unionized environments, is thus an important measure of successful dispute resolution.

In bringing together these elements of efficiency, justice and voice as an integrated way of examining dispute resolution, we develop an innovative approach to addressing an important issue for the industrial relations parties and society at large. The specific research questions we address here are:

(1) Is there a relationship between the resolution of disputes and employee voice, as measured by employee perceptions of consultation and influence over decision-making?

(2) Is there a relationship between resolution of workplace disputes and employees' intention to quit?

Methods

Our employee survey was based on Budd and Colvin's (2008) model of efficiency, equity and voice. Six employing organizations agreed to participate and invited their employees to participate in an online survey. We assured all respondents of anonymity and the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. We received 773 responses; this was a response rate of 24%.

The six organizations involved in the research are relatively large, with an average size of just over 500 employees (n = 538). Half of the six are in the private-sector and half in the public sector (including two in local government). Although generalizability at the organizational level is limited, the sample of 773 employees enables us to capture a diverse range of employee experiences. Moreover, the use of a small number of organizational settings allows us to hold constant the myriad of potentially confounding variables (such as organizational climate) influencing individual employee behavior and attitudes.

Table 1 presents a profile of the respondents. Respondents are predominantly female (75%), aged 36 to 55 years, with approximately equal numbers working full-time and part-time. Respondents have had varied tenure with their organization and generally work in professional (e.g. technician, accountant, teacher, nurse), management or clerical roles. Union membership is just over 20% and similar to that of union density in Australia.

Table 1. Profile of respondent characteristics

Gender:	Male: 25%
	Female: 75%
Age group:	18-25 years: 5%
	26-35 years: 15%
	36-45 years: 26%
	46-55 years: 32%
	56-65 years: 20%
	66+ years: 2%
Hours of work (per week):	Full-time (35+ hours): 51%
	Part-time (<35 hours): 49%
Tenure with organization:	Less than 1 year: 23%
	1 to less than 2 years: 13%
	2 to less than 5 years: 27%
	5 to less than 10 years: 21%
	10 years or more: 16%
Occupation:	Manager/Administrator: 19%
	Professional: 21%
	Tradesperson: 2%
	Clerical, sales or service work: 12%
	Production or transport work: 0%
	Laborer or related work: 2% Other:
	11%
Union member	Yes: 22%
	No: 78%

Note: N = 773.

Measures

Employee voice is measured by a 3-item method from the United Kingdom's Workplace Employee Relations Survey (Kersley, Alpin, Forth, Bryson, Bewley, Dix and Oxenbridge. 2006) that asked respondents to rate on a 5-point scale from 1 = very poor to 5 = very good, how good managers at this workplace are at: "seeking the views of employees or employee representatives"; "responding to suggestions from employees or employee representatives"; and

"allowing employees or employee representatives to influence final decisions". (The Cronbach alpha for this scale is .94).

Respondents were asked "have you been involved in a dispute in the last 12 months"; "what was the subject matter of that dispute"; and "was it resolved and by what mechanism". The variable *resolution* is measured by a single item, indicating if the conflict was fully resolved, partly resolved, or not resolved. For the purposes of analysis, this variable is coded on a 3-point scale: 1 = not resolved, 2= partly resolved and 3= fully resolved.
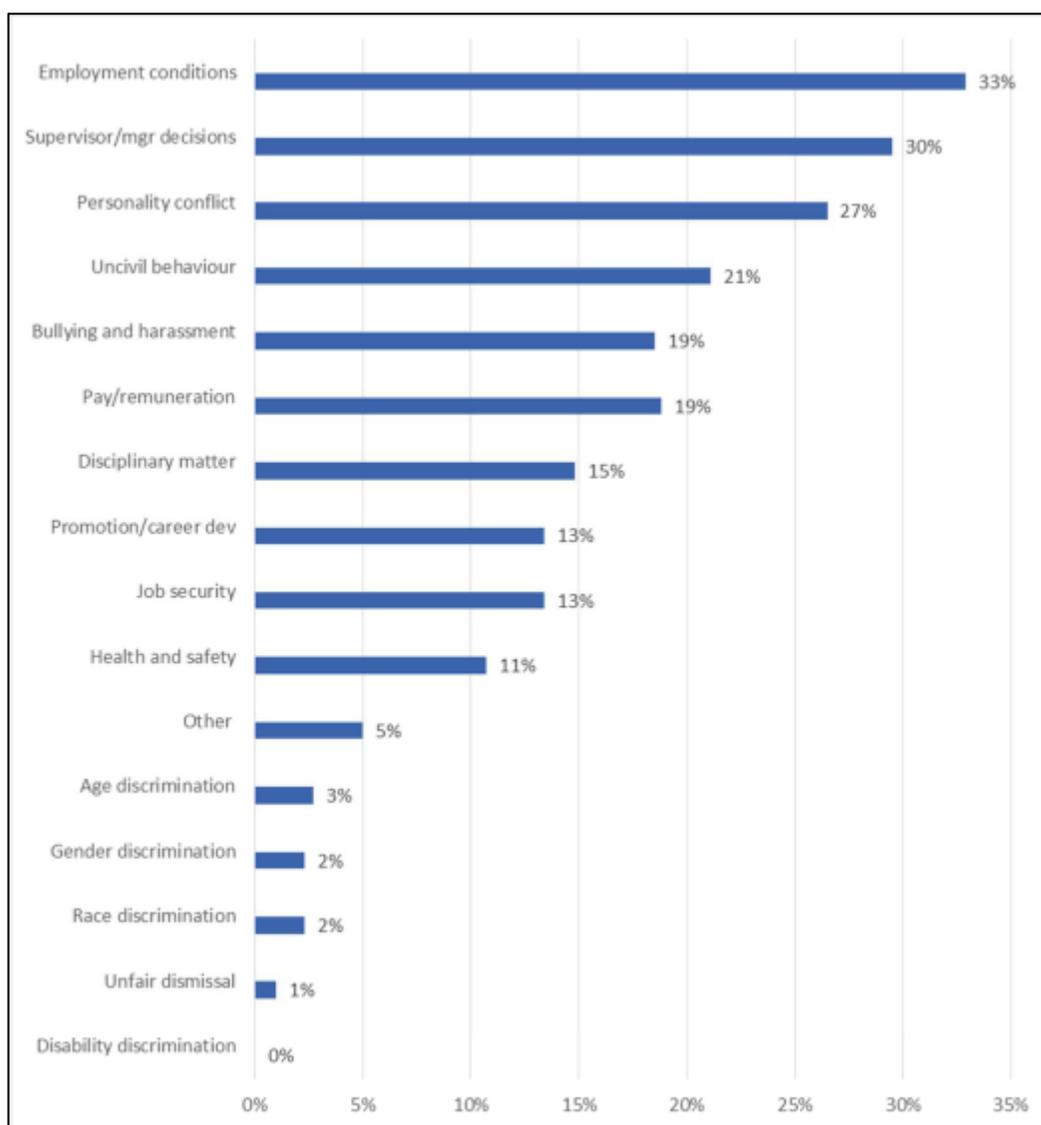
Turnover intention is measured in terms of 3 elements using a method developed by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins and Klesh (1983) that asks respondents to rate their intentions to leave the organization on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). An example is: "I often think about quitting my job". (The Cronbach alpha for this scale is .90.)

Controls. Following work of Holland et al. (2011) and others we control for a range of personal characteristics: age, gender, hours worked per week, organizational tenure, and union membership. We report a fixed effects (dummy variable) specification to control for organizational membership.

Results

Employee experience of conflict in the workplace: Although only a minority of respondents (n = 298 or 40%) report experiencing conflict in the past year, this percentage is considerable and is consistent with evidenced cited above, which indicates that workplace conflict is widespread. Drawing on the respondents reporting conflict at work in the last year, we investigate the types of conflicts that respondents had experienced through a range of multiple choice response options. As shown in Figure 1, the frequently experienced conflict types encompassed: employment conditions, supervisor/line manager decisions, personality conflicts and uncivil behavior.

Figure 1. Types of conflict experienced at work

Type of conflict	Percentage
Employment conditions	33%
Supervisor/mgr decisions	30%
Personality conflict	27%
Uncivil behaviour	21%
Bullying and harassment	19%
Pay/remuneration	19%
Disciplinary matter	15%
Promotion/career dev	13%
Job security	13%
Health and safety	11%
Other	5%
Age discrimination	3%
Gender discrimination	2%
Race discrimination	2%
Unfair dismissal	1%
Disability discrimination	0%

Notes: n = 298; respondents could select multiple response options

Mechanisms used by employees to resolve conflict at work: Those respondents who stated that they had experienced conflict at work in the past year were also asked how they went about resolving the conflict. Respondents were offered a range of multiple choice response options. As shown in Figure 2, while most respondents report using direct discussion with the parties or with the supervisor/line manager to resolve the conflict at work, many used a variety of informal and formal mechanisms. To a lesser extent employees raised their dispute with the Human Resources Department or its equivalent.

Figure 2. Mechanisms used by employees to resolve conflict at work
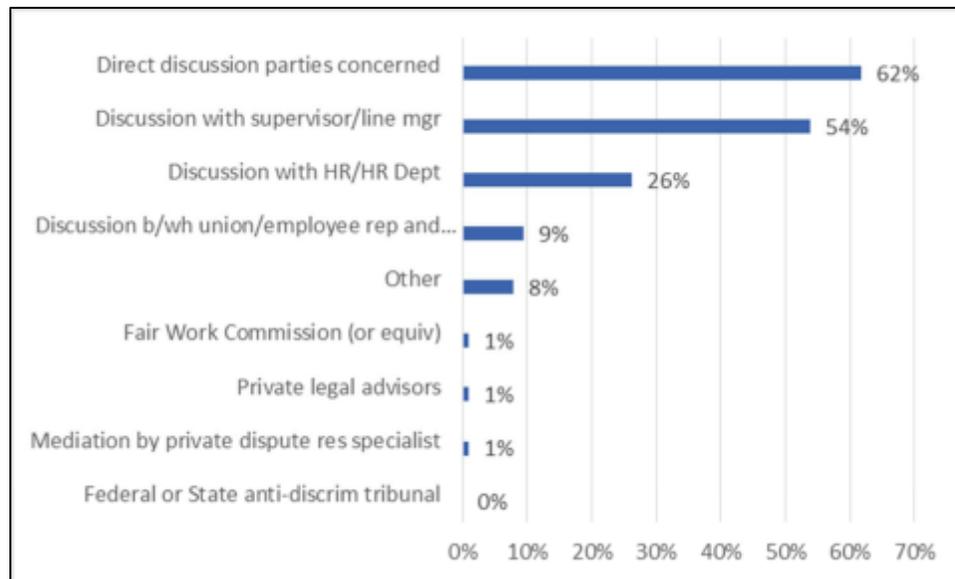
Notes: n = 298; respondents could select multiple response options

Extent to which conflict at work is resolved: Again, drawing on respondents who indicated that they had experienced conflict at work in the past year, we examine the extent to which the conflict was resolved. Only 21% reported the conflict was fully resolved, and just under a half (45%) reported it was partly resolved. About 1 in 3 reported the conflict was not resolved to any extent (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Extent to which conflict at work was resolved
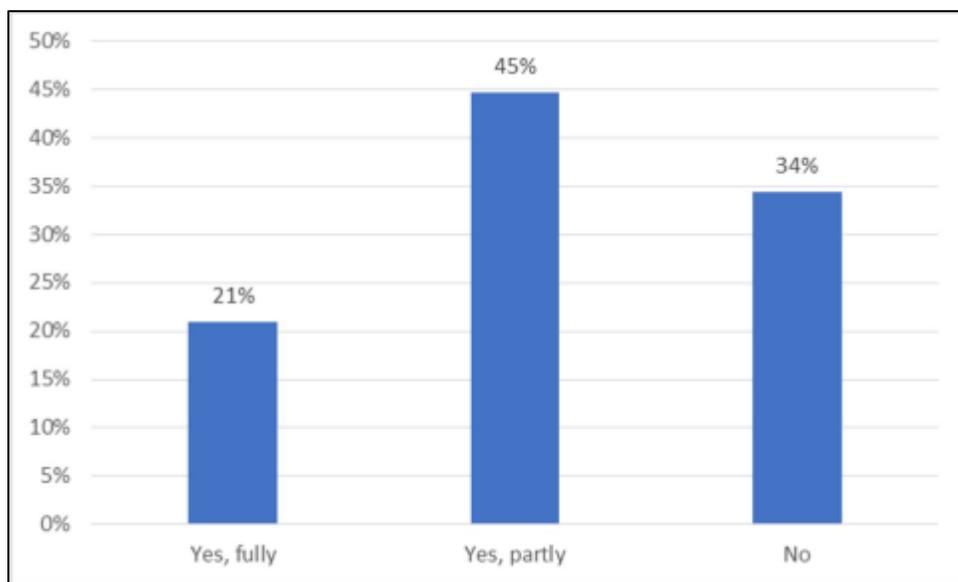

Note: n = 298.

Respondents who reported conflict in the last year were less likely to report employee voice in the workplace than those reporting no conflict [mean = 2.90 (SD = 1.04) versus 3.54 (SD =0.90), $p < .05$]. Respondents who reported conflict were also more likely to intend to quit than those reporting no conflict [mean = 2.75 (SD = 1.18) versus 2.08 (SD =0.94), $p < .05$]. It is notable that respondents who reported full resolution of conflict had on average the same level of intention to quit as those reporting no conflict [mean = 2.05 (SD = 0.96) versus 2.08 (SD =0.94), $p > .05$], whereas if the conflict was not resolved at all, intention to quit was highest (M = 3.2, SD = 1.23).

Results of Mediation Model

We test our hypotheses using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with the conditional process modelling (PROCESS) program for SPSS (Hayes 2013). These analyses are limited to the 298 respondents reporting conflict in the past year. Our theoretical model is one of mediation

in which employee voice acts both directly and indirectly on employees' intention to quit. As shown in Figure 4, employee voice is positively and strongly related to the conflict resolution outcome (β = .49, p < .05), which in turn, is negatively related to intention to quit (β = -.24, p < .05). Independently of conflict resolution, employee voice has a negative relationship with intention to quit (β = -.33, p < .05). A bias-corrected bootstrap using 1,000 resamples finds that the indirect effect of employee voice on intention to quit through resolution outcome is -.12 (95 % CI- .19 to -.05). As zero is not contained in the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect this is evidence of a statistically significant indirect or mediated effect. Taken together, these results demonstrate that greater employee voice increases the likelihood of resolution among those experiencing conflict at work, and operates in both direct and indirect ways to reduce an employee's intention to quit.

Figure 4. Results of Mediation Model
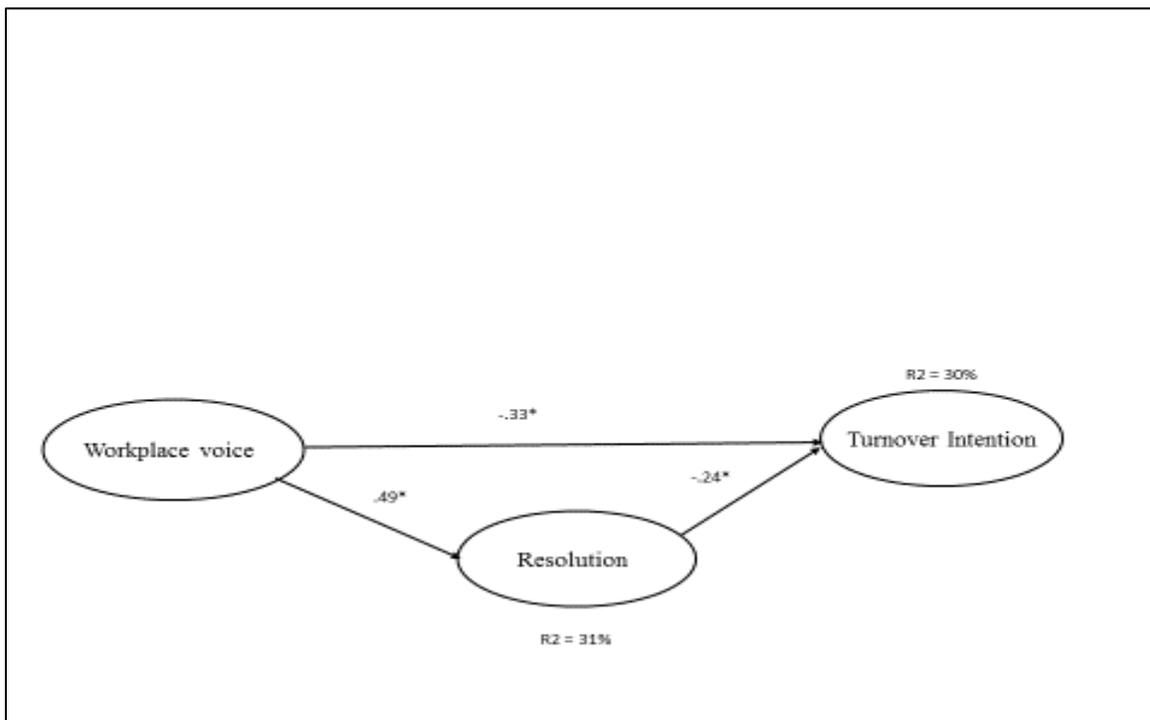
Notes: p * < .05. Standardized coefficients reported. Controls not shown to simplify the presentation, but are available on request.

Discussion

To investigate the factors which deliver effective dispute resolution, we build on Budd and Colvin's (2008) model of efficiency, equity and voice by adding the three justice theory

dimensions (procedural, interactional, and distributive justice), to give a holistic understanding of *fairness* at work in place of the single concept of equity). Another novel aspect of our approach is the inclusion of the evaluation criteria on effective dispute processes from Ury et al. (1988). In extending these measures to formal and informal procedures we find that employee voice is a vital component of an effective dispute resolution system. Voice not only predicts that a resolution of the conflict will be achieved, but also that employees will be less likely to exit their employing organization.

Our findings indicate that there is still widespread conflict in Australian enterprises, but it is less visible than hitherto and mainly takes the form of individual and small group disputes. Generally, such conflict is associated with a range of negative behaviors and consequences. Aggrieved employees may contribute to a negative workplace culture and generally do not work to their full potential in a variety of ways. Conflict also leads to complaints being submitted to industrial or equal opportunity tribunals, courts or workers compensation claims (including injury and stress-related claims), absenteeism or labor turnover (e.g. Shulruf et al. 2009).

US research on dispute resolution focusing on equity and voice presages innovative ways to understand how disputes are settled most effectively (Budd and Colvin 2008; Befort and Budd 2009). We build on these insights to include findings on employee voice (Pyman et al. 2010) and Ury et al.'s (1988) work on efficient dispute resolution design. To this we add the elements of distributive justice (Greenberg 1990; Van Gramberg 2006a) which are not included in Budd and Colvin's (2008) framework. In doing so, we contribute to the literature on effective dispute resolution with our model of employee voice, resolution outcomes, and turnover intentions.

In answering our initial research question, how is employee voice related to the dispute resolution process, we find two important roles for voice. First, our evidence suggests that when afforded voice opportunities, employees will be significantly less likely to want to exit the organization. Second, these voice opportunities also mean that when a dispute occurs it is more likely that a resolution will be achieved and this will drive reduced turnover intentions. In other words, the dispute resolution outcome mediates, in part, the relationship between voice and turnover intentions.

With regard to the first finding, we find that voice is vital to countering employees' intention to quit. Our findings confirm other studies in the conflict resolution literature that voice tends to reduces employees' intentions to quit (e.g. Batt, Colvin and Keefe 2002). We also confirm similar findings from related research fields. For instance, the change-management literature suggest that employees provided with voice opportunities in consultations about proposed changes are more likely to accept the change decision and feel "ownership" of the change than those who were not consulted. This is illustrated by employee acceptance of firm mergers (Kavanagh and Ashkanasy 2006) and acceptance of firm downsizing (Paterson and Cary 2002). Our research suggests that workplace conflict does not need to be accompanied by the litany of negative consequences cited in the research literature. When employees are less likely to act on a turnover intention, they may be more likely to stay and participate in contributing to organizational productivity. Nevertheless, it is important that managers understand that the extent to which their organizations experience such benefits will depend largely on the quality and effectiveness of that employee voice. For employees to have a meaningful input into their dispute resolution process, managers may also need training and support. Also, independent mediators may be useful in ensuring all parties involved have an opportunity for voice.

The second key finding for employee voice in conflict resolution is that it leads to a higher probability of dispute settlement. In this way, we shed new light on the importance of allowing employees to have their say and to participate in conflict resolution decisions. Early research on procedural justice also argues that disputant participation in formulating the resolution of the conflict boosts their perception of fairness with the outcome (Thiabut and Walker 1975; Folger 1977; Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler 1991).

We also investigate whether there was a relationship between the resolution of a dispute and employees' turnover intentions. We find that the dispute resolution outcome is a mediator between voice and turnover intention. In other words, when conflict is resolved in a workplace through the use of voice there is a significant likelihood that employees will remain with the organization rather than exit. Our finding builds on earlier research that has shown conflict settlement is an important event, not only because employees are more likely to find the outcome fairer because of their own contribution (Folger 1977; Lind and Tyler 1988), but also that these employees are then more likely to remain with the organization. Further, the negative

consequences of unresolved conflict are avoided. As Olson-Buchanan and Boswell (2002:1167) write, "minimizing the negative consequences of conflicts is arguably in the best interests of the organizations". Together, these findings suggest a way forward in ensuring effective management of conflict together with positive outcomes both for organizations and employees. Importantly, there is much more to dispute resolution than simply the quality of the dispute resolution procedure itself. Achieving positive outcomes which reduce employees' intentions to quit and allowing workplaces to avoid the other costs of conflict requires a commitment from managers to adopt procedures that reflect justice and that allow employees real and meaningful voice in the formulation of the dispute outcome.

Conclusion

We innovate in this paper, first, by adapting and operationalizing Budd and Colvin's dispute resolution framework to include the three measures of justice theory (rather than just equity). Second, by drawing on Ury et al.'s (1988) groundbreaking work on effective dispute procedures (particularly efficiency), we contribute further to dispute resolution theory. This enables us to better understand and explain the conditions under which dispute processes are most likely to deliver a resolution. We find that the presence of employee voice is a key condition to facilitate conflict resolution and also to reduce intention to quit. By incorporating exit-voice into our model we provide a platform for further research on workplace dispute settlement to be conducted in a more holistic way than earlier research in this field. In addition, we infer from this research that employee voice facilitates successful dispute resolution. Moreover, employee voice has the additional benefit of directly reducing employee turnover intentions, above and beyond its indirect effect by helping to resolve conflicts at work.

Of course, any such research has limitations. For example, our survey was cross-sectional and conducted in only six employing organizations that are all based in Australia. It would be appropriate for more research to be conducted on a longer-term basis and in a wider range of contexts. We particularly call for international and comparative studies that can shed light on the transferability of these findings and on the impact of national laws and institutions.

The practical significance of this paper is that better management of employee voice in the resolution of workplace disputes is important in terms of the management of workplace conflict and to avoid costly negative effects of conflict such as employees intending to quit and

generally disengaging from workplaces. Employers might wish to consider the implications of these findings when they design the selection and training strategies for their line managers who manage conflict resolution at the front line of employing organizations. In view of the benefits associated with providing voice issues in workplaces, such organizations might wish to foster mechanisms for employees to express their voices. From our research on efficiency, justice, and voice, we infer that dispute processes which offer these features will lead to more effective settlement, which will have other benefits for employing organizations, the people in them and other stakeholders. Improving workplace dispute resolution, then, may have significant practical benefits for employing organizations, the people in them, other stakeholders, and the wider society.

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