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Theory and Conceptual Article

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Human Resource Development Practices and Employee-Focused Voice: A Conceptual Model and Research Agenda

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Abstract

Critical theorists contend HRD has prioritized managerial interests over employee well-being. Some have advocated an ethics of care approach, emphasizing employee needs and well-being. However, there are few models to guide research on integrating care-oriented practices. We adopt a mutual gains perspective, proposing that HRD practices can enhance performance and employee well-being through employee-focused voice. HRD has overlooked voice, which is well-theorized in HRM. To address this gap, we conceptualize how key practices can foster employee-focused voice. We adapt and extend Nishii and Wright's (2008) HR process model, integrate leadership styles, and develop propositions to guide studies on facilitating voice.

Keywords

employee voice, managerial coaching, career mentoring, developmental performance appraisal, job demands-resources (JDR) theory

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Introduction

A critical perspective of Human Resource Development (HRD) suggests that HRD theory and practice have deviated from its humanistic roots by privileging management interests such as performance, productivity, and profit at the expense of employees (Bierema & Callahan, 2014; Ross et al., 2023). As a response to their concerns, critical HRD theorists have made suggestions for reclaiming the original ethos of the field, which involve adopting a more humanistic, employee-centered approach to HRD. For example, McGuire et al. (2021) and Saks (2021) have argued that HRD scholars and practitioners who are interested in building workplaces that are caring, healthy, and sustainable should adopt an Ethics of Care (EoC) approach, which has an awareness of and concern for employee needs and well-being as its foci. As an ethical decision-making framework, the EoC approach, when effectively applied, is instrumental in fostering organizational environments that support caring policies, practices, and the development of caring conduct among members (Armitage, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2026).

Those advocating an EoC approach support the contention that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant shift in values and should be a turning point for HRD research and practice (Bierema, 2020). This is because, in their view, the experience of the pandemic should encourage HRD scholars to pursue research inquiry that helps create more humane organizations (Bierema, 2020) and that expects managers to focus on their duties of care towards employee well-being to a greater extent (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021). However, despite calls for a change in orientation of HRD research and practice, there is a paucity of models in HRD literature to guide research on how HRD practices could be infused with a greater focus on care.

Consistent with the foregoing line of reasoning regarding an EoC approach, in this paper we adopt a mutual gains perspective on HRD, which implies shared benefits for employees and employers, despite their differing interests (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020; Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2019). Specifically, we propose how a mutual gains approach can be integrated into domains of HRD theory and practice by infusion of employee-focused voice. This voice form refers to active expression by employees of their concerns and interests about work-related issues (Shipton et al., 2024). Relatedly, employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practices are practices that actively and methodically incorporate employees' perspectives, concerns, and suggestions to advance their own interests (e.g., job satisfaction, well-being, development) and make them feel heard and valued (Shipton et al., 2024). An overview of the rationale for this paper follows.

There is very limited HRD literature on the topic of employee voice, which is typically defined in task- and organization-focused terms (Shipton et al., 2024) as illustrated by this definition: "proactive expressions of ideas or suggestions by employees to change practices and procedures at work for the better" (Nieberle & Fladerer, 2025, p. 2010). By contrast, within HRM literature scholars have made a compelling case that an organization's HRM system is a potentially important determinant of employee voice (e.g., Hu & Jiang, 2018; Mowbray et al., 2021; Nyfoudi

et al., 2024). Additionally, HRM literature often operationalizes voice as all the types of opportunities for employees to express voice (Bashshur & Oc, 2015). One common way of describing the types of opportunities is to distinguish between direct channels (e.g., attitude surveys) and indirect channels (e.g., trade unions) (Della Torre et al., 2021).

However, it is important to recognize that there are differences in levels of analysis to the phenomenon of voice, which are the societal (macro) level, organizational or departmental (meso) level, and individual (micro) level (Kwon et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2020). HRM literature tends to focus on the meso level and rely on the wider HRM system of practices and direct and indirect opportunities for employee voice. Within HRM and HRD literatures there is a lack of research that explores how managers can leverage HRD practices to elicit voice behavior. Thus, we need to shift our attention from the meso-level to the micro-level to better understand how HRD practices can provide opportunities for employee-focused voice. We also need to understand how these opportunities shape employee attitudes and behavior, which in turn influence employee and organizational outcomes.

Understanding how specific HRD practices can provide opportunities for employee-focused voice is crucial for senior executives, HRD professionals, and line managers in large organizations because these are three key actors in the design and implementation of HRD practices. Therefore, they should develop a nuanced comprehension of how such practices contribute to employee and organizational outcomes that extend beyond knowledge and skill acquisition. Seamlessly integrating opportunities for employee-focused voice can generate additional benefits for employers and employees. In this paper we contend that potential benefits for employers include improved labor productivity and talent attraction and retention, while potential benefits for employees include well-being and positive work-related attitudes. Arguably, it is even more important for leaders in resource constrained organizations to understand how certain HRD practices can yield the dual benefits of enhancing employee learning and facilitating employee-focused voice. These leaders, such as leaders in Small and Medium-size Enterprises (SMEs), must use their time efficiently to achieve outcomes related to both learning and employee-focused voice, given their resource constraints and numerous competing demands (Nolan & Garavan, 2016; Nolan & Harney, 2024). Having established the rationale for the paper, next we specify its aims and scope.

The aims of this paper are (1) to conceptualize how specific HRD practices can be reframed in ways that promote both performance and employee well-being, by bringing out employee-focused voice; and (2) to adapt and build on a model of the

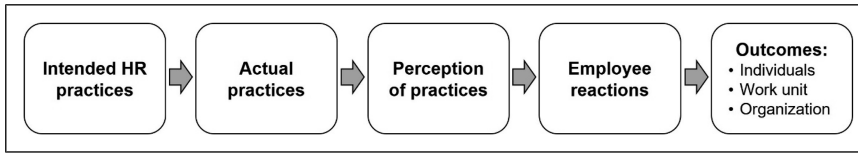

Figure 1. HR process model by Wright and Nishii (2013)

mediating factors between HR and performance (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013). In brief, the HR process model (see Figure 1) outlines the mediating factors between HR practices designed at the organizational level (i.e., intended HR practices) and outcomes for individuals and the organization. The HR process model recognizes that the intended practices may differ from the actual practices implemented by line managers. Furthermore, employees' idiosyncratic and collective perceptions of the practices shape their attitudinal and behavioral reactions to the practices. Finally, employee reactions influence the outcomes for individuals and potentially the work unit and organization, depending on how well all employees integrate, coordinate and align their behaviors.

The scope of the paper is limited to employee-focused voice and three HRD practices, specifically developmental performance appraisal, managerial coaching and career mentoring. Our conceptualization of employee-focused voice draws on the works of Morrison (2023) and Shipton et al. (2024). In this paper, employee-focused voice refers to a specific type of voice behavior that is direct, face-to-face and enacted in the presence of someone who holds a higher position within the organization (e.g., line manager). It is focused on employee concerns and interests and occurs within the context of HRD practice implementation.

The rationale for inclusion of the three HRD practices is as follows. These practices are arguably the most used developmental interventions employed by line managers in work organizations. The practices also share several common features, including goal setting, feedback, and reliance on trust-based relationships. Further, the practices are inter-related and complementary. Although some other HRD practices (e.g., newcomer socialization, job rotation) may also afford opportunities for employee-focused voice, these were not included because we had to set boundaries around the scope of the paper. Clearly, group-based HRD practices (e.g., team training, action learning) do not provide opportunities for employee-focused voice, although some group-based practices (e.g., team coaching, team confrontation meetings, appreciative inquiry) do aim to enable employee voice. In the following paragraphs, we outline the paper's novelty and theoretical contributions.

Regarding novelty, this paper advances discourse on humanistic, employee-centered approaches to HRD by addressing an underexplored area within the extant literature. Specifically, it identifies and responds to a research gap concerning the design and implementation of HRD practices that elicit employee-focused voice and generate mutually beneficial outcomes for employees and organizations. The paper contributes a conceptual advancement by introducing a novel employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model and set of propositions that reconfigure existing understandings and offer a foundation for future research.

This paper makes three main theoretical contributions to both the HRD and voice literatures, the HR process research, and specifically the Nishii and Wright (2008) HR process model. First, this paper advances theoretical understanding of employee-centered HRD by reconceptualizing developmental performance appraisal, managerial coaching, and career mentoring as practices that can be enriched through infusion of employee-focused voice. We theorize that when line managers respond constructively

to employee concerns and interests expressed during HRD practice implementation, they foster enhanced well-being, learning, intrinsic motivation, task performance, and career success. Building on and extending the HR process model (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013), the paper introduces an employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model that delineates key antecedents—such as senior leadership consensus on employee-centered values and consistent implementation by line managers—and theorizes consequential outcomes, including positive work attitudes and employee-initiated job crafting.

Second, although the Nishii and Wright (2008) HR process model incorporated different levels of managers (e.g., senior managers, line managers), it does not explicitly account for the influence of line managers' leadership styles on HR practice implementation (Elias et al., 2023; Nishii & Paluch, 2018). This is a theoretically significant omission. In response, this paper extends the HR process model by integrating facilitative leadership styles into a reconfigured employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model. We theorize that when line managers adopt facilitative leadership approaches, they enhance implementation of employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practices and stimulate job crafting behaviors that reflect and respond to employee concerns and interests articulated during HRD practice implementation.

While there is a substantial body of research that has examined leader-employee voice dynamics (Morrison, 2023), most research has examined these dynamics in relation to organization voice (Barry & Wilkinson, 2022; Shipton et al., 2024). This voice form is aimed at instigating change that is beneficial for the organization or work unit, and it reflects a unitarist perspective because employee needs are conflated with needs of the organization (Shipton et al., 2024). Additionally, much of the research on leader-employee voice dynamics has been in team contexts (e.g., Li & Tangirala, 2022) or in work group settings (e.g., Lin et al., 2019). We are not aware of any previous conceptual or empirical work that has specifically examined leader-employee voice dynamics in the context of HRD practice implementation. The present conceptual paper contributes to this void by presenting theoretical arguments for specific leadership styles that are conducive to positive employee perceptions and attitudinal and behavioral reactions to employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practice implementation.

Third, the proposed preliminary voice-infused HRD process model, and the associated theoretical research propositions, provide a foundation for subsequent empirical research. Theoretical research propositions — novel statements specifying relationships between concepts — play an important role in theory development (Ulaga et al., 2021, p. 2). In this article we sought to analyze, improve and extend a pre-existing theoretical (HR process) model, rather than develop a new one. To achieve this aim, we relied on literature-based evidence, novel conceptual thinking and theoretical argumentation (Hollebeek et al., 2024). The research propositions emanating from this process have been formulated in such a way that they can be tested in an empirical study, once the necessary constructs, measurement items and hypotheses have been developed.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Next, we examine how employee voice has been conceptualized. Thereafter, we provide overviews of a model of caring in organizations and the associated HRD care-enhancing interventions (Saks, 2021), and a model that examines the HRD-voice nexus (Cumberland et al., 2018). This is followed by an analysis of how reframed developmental performance appraisal, managerial coaching, and career mentoring can create opportunities for employee-focused voice. Then we outline the theoretical bases for the contention that employee-focused voicing opportunities, which can be created by reframing HRD practices, enhance employee performance and employee well-being. Next, we present both an employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model that illustrates the process by which the HRD practices are transmitted to outcomes and a set of propositions that can be derived from the model. The discussion section outlines theoretical, research and practical implications of the analysis, before we outline limitations of the proposed conceptual model and conclude the paper.

Conceptualizations of Voice

While we appreciate that there are varying conceptions of voice (e.g., Bashshur & Oc, 2015; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Morrison, 2023), in this paper we focus on employee-focused voice and how it differs from organizational voice (Shipton et al., 2024). For Shipton et al. (2024), organizational voice refers to voice behavior that seeks to contribute to the organization, including behaviors such as suggesting ideas for reducing costs or increasing revenues. This accords with Morrison's (2023) conceptualization of voice behavior, which emphasizes an intent to bring about change or improvement and where an intended beneficiary of the change or improvement is the organization. By contrast, employee-focused voice refers to voice behavior that articulates an employee's concerns and interests, including raising concerns about perceived obstacles to work performance and expressing an interest in participating in a developmental assignment (Shipton et al., 2024). Using a measure of employee-focused voice that captures both scope for self-expression and voice efficacy, Shipton et al. (2024) demonstrated empirically that employee-focused voice and organizational voice are distinct voice forms.

HRD Models: Caring and Employee Voice

Within the EoC framework, the act of caring is conceptualized as a relational dynamic characterized by the caregiver's altruistic focus and attentive engagement with the immediate reality and expressed needs of the care-recipient (Armitage, 2018; Bass, 2009). More specifically, caring encompasses a multidimensional set of relational and caring behaviors (Kroth & Keeler, 2009). These elements include primacy of interpersonal relationships, demonstration of empathy, and a proactive responsiveness to the articulated concerns and interests of the care recipient (Bass, 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2026). Furthermore, effective caring necessitates active promotion of well-being through the validation of the care recipient's lived reality and the committed,

competent execution of interventions tailored to address their unique and specific expressed needs (Armitage, 2018; Fisher & Tronto, 1990).

Saks (2021) proposed a model of caring in organizations and HRD care-enhancing interventions as an alternate to performance-enhancing interventions. The model incorporates three hierarchical levels of caring, which are labelled (1) organizational caring, (2) managerial caring, and (3) co-worker caring. In the model, each of these three levels is considered a source of caring. The Saks model draws on Fisher and Tronto's (1990) four phases of the caring process. That is, each source of caring should: (1) be *attentive* (i.e., aware of employees' needs for caring); (2) assume *responsibility* (i.e., take care of employees' needs); and (3) be *competent* (i.e., in performing caring tasks). In Fisher and Tronto's (1990) phase four, employees *respond* to the care they receive by reciprocating caring to the caregiver. The three levels and sources of caring help create an organizational climate of care, which should positively influence employee well-being and employee work-related attitudes and behaviors. Saks (2021) also proposed HRD interventions that align with each level and source of caring.

We are aware of just one paper that examines the HRD-voice nexus (Cumberland et al., 2018). Unlike the Saks (2021) model, which proposes HRD care-enhancing interventions, the Cumberland et al. (2018) model proposes HRD practices that build internal organizational social capital (OSC), which in turn promotes employee voice. More specifically, Cumberland et al. (2018) developed a conceptual model illustrating relations among HRD practices, three types of internal OSC, employee voice, and the role of the CEO. They contend that when leveraged together as a system of practices, specific HRD practices (e.g., communities of practice, team training) help employees build social capital. In their model, the HRD-OSC linkage positively influences employee voice, although the model lacks specificity about the HRD practices that support different facets of OSC (i.e., structural, cognitive, and relational). Finally, Cumberland et al. (2018) argue that the CEO's social capital moderates the impact of HRD–OSC linkage on employee voice.

Most of the papers that focus on EoC and HRD are theoretical (e.g., Armitage, 2018; McGuire et al., 2021). Notable exceptions are recent case studies that examined alignment of HRD practices with EoC principles in two social enterprises (Rodriguez et al., 2023) and a for-profit organization (Rodriguez et al., 2026). As noted, work that examines the HRD-voice nexus is very sparse. To date, no known theoretical or empirical research has investigated the mechanisms by which employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practices yield dual benefits for both employees and the organization, particularly when enacted within an EoC framework. Thus, a significant research gap exists in this domain. In this paper we maintain that the chain of links in the proposed employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model will be stronger in organizations that have (1) a culture of caring, (2) HRD policies and practices that are aligned with EoC principles, and (3) line managers who have the capability and willingness to develop caring relationships with their employees. Furthermore, we contend that employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practices are mechanisms for operationalizing the EoC approach and generating benefits for both employees and the organization.

Employee Voice Infused HRD Practices

In this section, we outline how the three HRD practices can be infused with opportunities for employee-focused voice.

A *developmental performance appraisal* seeks to evaluate past performance of employees, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and set the agenda for development and support (Aguinis et al., 2011). Performance appraisals should allow both parties to participate in constructive feedback and offer the opportunity to enhance employee growth (Fletcher & Williams, 2016). When appraisals are effective, they promote perceptions of fairness and trust (Levy & Williams, 2004). However, not all managers are open to employee participation, and the HR department must ensure that a participative appraisal process is fully embedded within the organization and continuously monitored to sustain its effectiveness (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011).

Developmental performance appraisals should also afford opportunities for employee-focused voice through the empowering mechanisms of feedback and participation (Fletcher & Williams, 2016). During the development planning phase of performance appraisal (Meinecke et al., 2017), employees may become aware of issues which might impact their future performance and use voice to gain understanding and support from their manager about issues which are potential obstacles to their performance (Xu et al., 2020).

HRD practices such as management training or coaching that help line managers empower their employees by providing a psychologically safe environment are likely to build higher levels of trust, fostering employee-focused voice behavior (Ghani et al., 2024; Newman et al., 2017). High levels of trust should make employees more engaged in developmental planning discussions with their managers, and this will be instrumental in encouraging further employee-focused voice behavior (Meinecke et al., 2017). Such encouragement helps employees improve their performance, while keeping the strategic goals of their employer in mind (Shipton et al., 2024). This reflects a mutual gains approach, with employees being more willing and able to contribute to organizational goals, while also experiencing an improvement in their job quality and well-being (Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2019). Thus, line managers should have access to development opportunities that enhance their ability to actively elicit employee-focused voice during appraisals, thereby heightening prospects of attaining benefits for the employee and organization.

Managerial coaching is a top-down internal approach (Hagen & Peterson, 2014) known as the leader-as-coach model (Pousa et al., 2018) that can help improve performance and achieve system-wide behavioral impact (Ellinger & Kim, 2014). In the practice of managerial coaching, the coach merges employee and organizational goals in a guided learning process (Nyfoudi et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2019) to enhance the skills individuals need to improve personal effectiveness and contribute to organizational outcomes (Hamlin et al., 2006). However, from a critical HRD perspective, the focus on improving employee job performance reflects an organization-centric, narrow view of managerial coaching.

There is emerging evidence of the potential positive influence managerial coaching can have on encouraging employee-focused voice (Farh & Chen, 2018; Wang, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2017; Yuan et al., 2019). This evidence suggests that there is an opportunity for HRD practitioners and managers to develop more effective use of managerial coaching. While coaching encourages employees to think critically, seek constructive feedback, and become more motivated to develop their competence and use autonomy, it can also be employed to elicit employee-focused voice behavior (Coimbra & Proença, 2023; Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Gilley et al., 2010; Zhao & Liu, 2020). Such voice behavior is enabled through a collaborative meaning-making relationship (Yuan et al., 2019), which is imperative to encourage the use of employee-focused voice (Shipton et al., 2024) as it improves closeness (Anderson, 2013), and trust (Hsieh & Huang, 2018). When managerial coaching is perceived as support for employee well-being, rather than just support for attaining organizational outcomes, it also inspires greater employee commitment (Zhao & Liu, 2020).

Managers can create barriers to voicing (e.g., interpersonal, psychological, structural) or behave in ways that facilitate employee-focused voice behavior (Morrison, 2014). Through developmental interventions, HRD professionals can help managers develop the competencies required to create a climate in which employees perceive power differences as less salient and gain the confidence to speak up about their concerns and interests (Farh & Chen, 2018). Managerial coaching can increase the psychological capital (i.e., dimensions of self-efficacy, self-confidence, optimism, and hope) of coachees during the practice of coaching, thereby shaping their psychological state and cognition to engage in employee-focused voice behavior (Pousa & Mathieu, 2015; Wang, Yuan, & Zhu, 2017). Managerial coaching behaviors, such as inspirational-based coaching and facilitative-based coaching (Budhiraja, 2023), can increase employees' self-efficacy and a sense of being able to take charge of self at work (Kim, Park, & Yoon, 2023, Kim, Lam, Oh, & Sohn, 2023; Ngo et al., 2024).

In this paper we focus on *career mentoring* rather than the broader concept of mentoring in general. Mentoring may or may not include a career focus and the term mentoring is often used interchangeably with coaching when discussing the development of an individual (D'Abate et al., 2003). Career mentoring is therefore a more precise concept and involves more experienced and knowledgeable individuals (mentors) helping individuals with less experience and knowledge (the protégés or mentees) to become more effective in their work and advance their development and career (Kram, 1983). HRD professionals play a significant role in designing and implementing mentoring programs which aim to provide mentees with career development (Banerjee-Batist et al., 2019; Ngo et al., 2024). HRD practices aligned with career development goals tend to focus more on transferring essential career-related knowledge and skills from mentors to mentees (Ngo et al., 2024), than building mentees' ability to express constructive voice to maximize their career-related opportunities and support organizational growth. This imbalance reduces the opportunity for employees to reveal their talent and gain visibility and interpersonal influence (Liang & Gong, 2013) which benefits their careers.

Mentors who act in ways that encourage mentees to engage in voice (Frazier & Bowler, 2015) through providing psychological support and safety (Zhuang et al., 2023) are more likely to elicit employee-focused voice. HRD practitioners should assist mentors to develop the competencies that are required to create a psychologically supportive and safe environment that is conducive to mentees articulating their concerns and interests regarding their career (Lee et al., 2023; Mowbray et al., 2021; Wang & Yen, 2023).

Theoretical Bases

Here, we outline the theoretical bases for the contention that employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practices can enhance performance and employee well-being. In accordance with guidelines for developing conceptual proposition-based contributions (Hollebeek et al., 2024; Ulaga et al., 2021), we drew on social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) as the meso-foundational theory to frame the topic and guide the nature of the theoretical associations delineated in our propositions. In SET the central argument is that "if an organization provides, or at least offers, something that employees value, they will reciprocate by offering in return something that the organization values" (Latorre et al., 2016, p. 329). Thus, in SET resources are exchanged through a process of reciprocity (Blau, 1964). Although it is a broad conceptual framework, SET contains at least three elements (Cropanzano et al., 2017): (1) an actor's (e.g., line manager's) initial treatment toward a target individual (e.g., employee), (2) a target's reciprocal responses (both attitudinal and behavioral) to the action, and (3) relationship formation (e.g., trust). SET predicts that, in reaction to positive initiating actions (e.g., employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practice implementation), targets will tend to reply in kind by engaging in more positive reciprocating responses (Cropanzano et al., 2017). SET helps to explain why bundles of HR practices or individual HR practices can lead to positive outcomes for individuals and organizations within the Nishii and Wright (2008) HR process model.

At the micro-theoretical level of the individual (Hollebeek et al., 2024), we drew on job demands-resources (JDR) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Bakker et al., 2023) and particularly the element of job crafting (Bakker et al., 2023; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) to explain potential positive attitudinal and behavioral responses by employees when HRD practice implementation incorporates employee-focused voice opportunities.

JDR theory (Bakker et al., 2023) focuses on the balance between job demands and job resources, two types of physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job. Job demands — such as workload, work pace, or organizational pressures — require effort and can lead to strain and ill health, ultimately reducing performance. In contrast, job resources — like autonomy, social support, and appreciation — foster motivation, growth, and learning, thereby enhancing performance. Job resources can also be used to help buffer the negative effects of job demands, creating a healthier and more sustainable work environment.

JDR theory further highlights that employees themselves can actively shape their jobs through job crafting (Bakker et al., 2023). This concept, developed over the past two decades (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Zhang & Parker, 2019), has been integrated into JDR theory as a way for employees to optimize the balance between job demands and job resources. Common job crafting strategies include reducing hindering demands, increasing challenging demands, and strengthening resources (Lazazzara et al., 2020; Tims et al., 2022; Zhang & Parker, 2019). Research consistently shows that job crafting improves motivation, well-being, and performance by fostering a healthier equilibrium between demands and resources.

In essence, JDR theory suggests that individuals' well-being and performance can be improved by adjusting the balance between job demands and resources. It also emphasizes that employees can proactively reshape their tasks and relationships to better align with their strengths and preferences, thereby achieving a better balance between demands and resources. Consequently, JDR provides a valuable framework for understanding how different practices can lead to positive outcomes for both individuals and organizations.

Conceptual Model and Propositions

The employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model (Figure 2) is adapted from the HR process model (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013), and their model is augmented in two main ways. First, we introduce employee-focused voice as a central mediator through which HRD practices can influence both employee and organizational outcomes. Second, we integrate line managers' facilitative leadership styles as a moderator that shapes the implementation of and the reactions to HRD

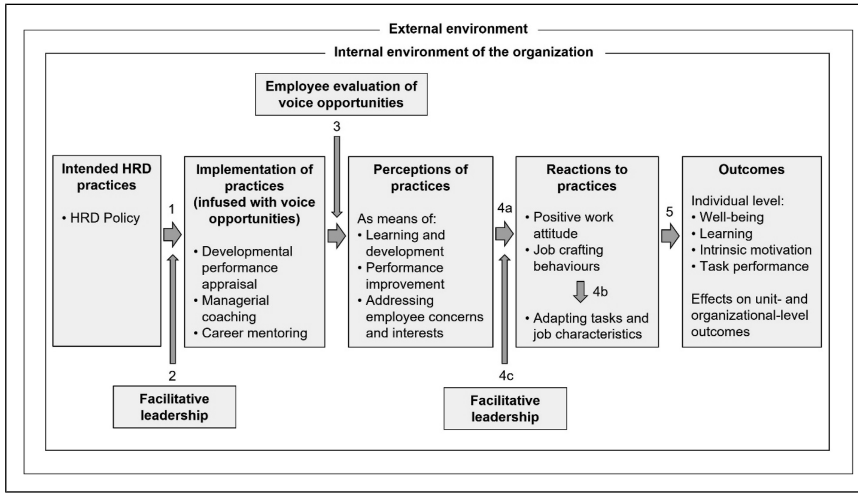

Figure 2. Conceptual model. Adapted from Wright and Nishii (2013)

practices. The model's utility for empirical research is supported by seven testable propositions grounded in established HRD, employee voice, and leadership constructs. The numbers within the model refer to the relevant propositions that are associated with the model. Development of the model and propositions was informed by scholarly literature that discusses these two topics (e.g., Denyer et al., 2008; Hollebeek et al., 2024; Ulaga et al., 2021).

Intended HRD Practices

Intended HRD practices are practices that the organization's key decision-makers believe will elicit employee responses necessary for individual and organizational success and are typically communicated through HRD policy documents (Boxall & Purcell, 2022). Intended practices should ideally be tied to strategy and culture and 'fit in' with other influential internal and external factors and forces (Paauwe & Farndale, 2017). An organization's intended HRD practices are more likely to be aligned with EoC principles when the organization's key decision-makers have committed to building and maintaining a culture of caring.

However, HRD practices designed at the organizational level (i.e., intended HRD practices) may differ from practices used across the organization (i.e., actual HRD practices) (Trullen et al., 2020). Bowen and Ostroff's (2004) seminal work on the construct of HRM system strength makes the case that consistency between intended HRD practices and implemented HRD practices requires high levels of consensus among the CEO, HRD professionals, senior managers and agents of HRD (e.g., line managers) about the intended elements in HRD. Conversely, lack of a shared understanding of the practices and their foci may mean that implemented HRD practices may be substantially different from intended HRD practices (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016).

Proposition 1. Greater clarity and consensus among senior leaders regarding the dual developmental and employee-focused voice purposes of HRD practices will reduce ambiguity in how line managers interpret the intended HRD practices.

Implementation of Practices

Implementing intended HRD practices consistently across an organization is rarely straightforward, particularly when line managers interpret and adapt these practices in diverse ways (Boxall & Purcell, 2022; Wright & Nishii, 2013). This potential problem underscores the importance of high levels of consensus among line managers regarding the organization's intended practices and their strong commitment to developing caring relationships with their employees. As Trullen et al. (2020, p. 155) note, implementation is a dynamic process in which various actors — including HR professionals, line managers, and employees — engage with and shape practices in ways that align with their context and needs. While deviations from the original design may occur, the implementation process can still be considered successful if the core intent

and features of the HRD practice remain intact. In this process, line managers play a critical role as interpreters and enablers of HRD practices.

The effectiveness of employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practice implementation depends greatly on the leadership style of line managers, particularly those that emphasize personal growth, collaboration, and open communication. We refer to this family of styles collectively as *facilitative leadership,* which enables participation and learning through openness, mutual trust, and shared responsibility (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Raelin, 2013).

In contrast to directive or transactional leadership, which relies on control and compliance, facilitative leadership creates conditions that encourage employees to contribute, learn, and take ownership of their development. Its core characteristics include fostering dialogue, reflection, developmental feedback, autonomy, and genuine responsiveness to employee voice.

Several related leadership styles embody these facilitative qualities. Transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006) inspires employees through individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Coaching leadership (Beattie et al., 2014) promotes reflective dialogue and self-awareness, which strengthen employees' confidence to express developmental needs. Participative leadership (Huang et al., 2010) enhances ownership by involving employees in decision-making, while learning-oriented leadership (Wallo et al., 2024) frames feedback as a mutual learning opportunity.

Together, these leadership styles position the leader as an *enabler* rather than a controller of development. Facilitative leaders create psychological safety (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023), model openness to feedback, and actively invite employees to share their concerns and interests during HRD interactions. Through such behaviors, HRD practices become collaborative exchanges in which employee voices are viewed as developmental resources rather than risks.

Facilitative leadership also clarifies how leadership moderates the link between employee-focused, voice-infused HRD practices and employee outcomes. By demonstrating openness, empathy, and dialogue, facilitative leaders strengthen the reciprocity mechanisms central to SET (Blau, 1964), encouraging employees to respond with greater engagement and commitment. Simultaneously, by expanding autonomy and developmental resources, they activate the motivational and well-being processes described in JDR theory (Bakker et al., 2023). Hence, facilitative leadership is a key moderating mechanism in our voice-infused HRD process model, shaping both the implementation of HRD practices and employees' attitudinal and behavioral reactions — particularly employee-focused voice and job crafting behaviors.

Conversely, managers who rely solely on directive behaviors may unintentionally suppress employee voice by focusing on control and compliance rather than engagement and collaboration. In such environments, employees may hesitate to speak up, fearing their contributions will not be valued or that they might face negative consequences for challenging managerial directives. This comparison underscores the crucial role that facilitative leadership plays in developing HRD practices into meaningful exchanges where employees feel supported to share their perspectives,

thereby promoting an organizational culture that values employee voice and engagement.

Proposition 2. Line managers who enact facilitative leadership behaviors during implementation of HRD practices will elicit more employee-focused voice than managers who enact directive and controlling behaviors.

Perceptions of Practices

In Figure 2, the implementation of HRD practices is the target of the employee's perceptions. As shown in Figure 2, employees' perceptions of developmental performance appraisal, managerial coaching, and career mentoring will be influenced by their evaluation of employee-focused voice opportunities that were afforded during implementation of the three practices. The ways practices are implemented deliver certain messages to employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). Thus, employee HRD perceptions encapsulate messages employees (individually or collectively) receive from their employer by experiencing the HRD practices. At the individual level, employee perceptions of practices have been shown to mediate and moderate relationships between practices and employees' attitudes and behaviors (Liao et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2020).

There are three distinct components of employee perceptions of practices: what, how, and why (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Wang et al., 2020). *What* refers to the content of the HRD practices as subjectively experienced by employees (Jiang et al., 2017). *How* refers to the way the HRD practices are implemented (i.e., the process) and *why* refers to employees' perceptions of the motivations that lie behind the organization's introduction of the practices (i.e., the intent) (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). Ideally, employees should perceive that care ethics motivated the organization's introduction of the practices. However, even within the same work group, individuals' perceptions are likely to vary about *what* HRD practices are available to them, *how* the practices are delivered, and *why* such practices were introduced (Wang et al., 2020). Such variation may be attributable to factors such as individual differences (e.g., personality characteristics, experiences in previous jobs) (Wright & Nishii, 2013), or social influences from colleagues (Jiang et al., 2017).

Proposition 3. Employees who perceive HRD practices as both developmental and focused on employee concerns and interests will form positive perceptions of the implemented practices.

Reactions to Practices

Employees' positive perceptions of HRD practices — as means for learning, development, performance improvement, and employee-focused voice — are likely to elicit positive responses in employee attitudes and stimulate job crafting behaviors. In line with SET (Cropanzano et al., 2017), access to developmental experiences and

opportunities for employee-focused voice positively influence employees' work attitudes, in terms of increased job satisfaction, work motivation, engagement, and commitment (Hassett, 2022; Mylona & Mihail, 2022; Weiss & Zacher, 2022). As concerns behaviors, employees' positive perceptions of HRD practices as a means of addressing the employee's concerns and interests may also instigate the enactment of job crafting behaviors (Costantini & Sartori, 2018; Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2021; Kim & Beehr, 2018; Weiss & Zacher, 2022) further eliciting resources to adjust their work tasks and role (Tims et al., 2022). In fact, it has been argued that employee-focused voice is a form of job crafting behavior (Shipton et al., 2024).

As Figure 2 indicates, facilitative leadership styles (e.g., transformational and empowering leadership) play a crucial role in fostering the above-mentioned positive attitudinal and behavioral responses (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Wang, Yuan, & Zhu, 2017). Transformational leaders foster a sense of autonomy and self-efficacy in employees, which drives job crafting by encouraging employees to align personal goals with organizational objectives. Similarly, empowering leaders facilitate job crafting by promoting autonomy and encouraging employees to take ownership of their roles. This type of support allows employees to craft their jobs by adjusting responsibilities, seeking new learning opportunities, and shaping tasks to fit their strengths and interests.

As indicated in Figure 2, a range of job crafting behaviors can be instigated by opportunities for employee-focused voice (Tims et al., 2022), which transformational and empowering leaders help to cultivate (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Wang, Yuan, & Zhu, 2017). By integrating HRD practices with facilitative leadership, organizations can stimulate proactive, adaptive behaviors that improve both individual well-being and organizational resilience.

Proposition 4(a). Employees' positive perceptions of implemented HRD practices will positively influence employee attitudes and foster employee-initiated job crafting behaviors.

Proposition 4(b). The job crafting behaviors will be aimed at adapting tasks and job characteristics to better align with employees' interests and strengths and to address their voiced concerns.

Proposition 4(c). Employees' behavioral reactions will be amplified if line managers enact facilitative (empowering and transformational) leadership.

Outcomes

Outcomes for individuals who experience HRD practices that are infused with opportunities for employee-focused voice are likely to include well-being, learning, intrinsic motivation, task performance, and subjective and objective career success. However, such outcomes are contingent upon these individuals initiating job crafting

behaviors that alter their tasks or job characteristics in ways that address concerns and interests that they had raised during HRD practice implementation.

HRD practices that facilitate employee-focused voice may positively influence well-being – a multidimensional construct encompassing emotions, satisfaction, and function (Warr & Nielsen, 2018). By expressing concerns, employees enable managers to optimize work demands and resources. This fosters a supportive environment that enhances motivation, job satisfaction, and performance, thereby addressing the core components of well-being (Bakker et al., 2023). Furthermore, work environments that address employee concerns and interests enhance perceived role autonomy, thereby promoting job crafting (Costantini & Sartori, 2018; Huyghebaert-Zouaghi et al., 2021; Kim & Beehr, 2018). Notably, crafting behaviors focused on seeking resources and challenges are critical for well-being (Dubbelt et al., 2019; Holman et al., 2024; Tims et al., 2013; Vogt et al., 2016), as these behaviors lead to increased work motivation, job satisfaction, and performance (Bakker et al., 2023).

Integrating employee-focused voice into HRD practices enhances performance by positively influencing ability, motivation, and opportunity (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). Line managers influence this process by aligning skill development with strategic goals (Werner, 2014) and fostering intrinsic motivation through being receptive to employee input (Bashshur & Oc, 2015). Furthermore, by encouraging voice, managers can better address performance obstacles and leverage individual strengths, thereby increasing opportunities to perform (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982).

Further, if the HRD practices are consistently applied across work groups within the organization, supported by a wider HRM system that is conducive to employee voice and a group and organizational climate that is favorable to employee voice (e.g., psychological safety), then results for individuals may translate into positive outcomes at the unit level (e.g., improved labor productivity) and organizational level (e.g., talent attraction and retention) (Morrison, 2023; Wright & Nishii, 2013).

Proposition 5. Employees who enact job crafting behaviors that address their voiced interests and concerns will increase their well-being and performance, and potentially the performance of their work unit and organization.

However, while job crafting tends to stimulate motivation, performance and well-being, it may also have negative consequences. For instance, some studies have found that job crafting aimed at reducing job demands at work may decrease stimulation and motivation, resulting in decreased well-being and increased counterproductive behaviors (Dubbelt et al., 2019; Harju et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024). Job crafting aimed at reducing job demands at work may also increase the workload of colleagues and decrease social support in the work group (Dong et al., 2023; Tims et al., 2015). The facilitative leadership of the line manager is therefore immensely important. The line manager must promote employee job crafting behaviors but simultaneously help shape such behaviors to correspond to the interests of the work unit and organization.

Furthermore, the HRD process may not always yield favorable outcomes for employees who engage in voice when voice is considered through a temporal lens. Voice is a social process that must be viewed in the context of time, rather than as single voice instances (Nieberle & Fladerer, 2025). Voice behavior unfolds over time because of its dyadic and dynamic nature (Kim, Park, & Yoon, 2023, Kim, Lam, Oh, & Sohn, 2023). High relational quality is built over time and requires the development of successful voice exchanges where employees perceive they can speak up and obtain positive responses from managers. However, repeated successful voice exchanges over time do not always occur (Kim, Park, & Yoon, 2023, Kim, Lam, Oh, & Sohn, 2023).

For example, employee engagement relies heavily on the perception that speaking up leads to meaningful change (Holland et al., 2017; Ruck et al., 2017). Thus, when employees perceive that their voice matters because it leads to meaningful changes, they tend to be more engaged (Rees et al., 2013). Conversely, when employees feel ignored, they risk "voice fatigue", and "acquiescent silence" — a state of resignation because they believe change is impossible (Morrison, 2023). Research confirms that this sense of futility predicts emotional exhaustion (Knoll et al., 2019).

Furthermore, voice is challenged by power and risk (Wu et al., 2025). The power dynamics between managers and employees influence the nature and extent of employee voice behavior (Wu et al., 2025). Employees' willingness to speak up is affected by their sense of power (Morrison, 2023). Employees are likely to develop a sense of high power in situations of considerable managerial dependence on employees (Wu et al., 2025). Such situations may occur because employees possess highly specialized knowledge and skills, and they perceive that they are relatively less dependent on their managers. Logically, employees in this context may be more willing to voice their concerns and interests. However, high employee power in the context of low managerial power may contribute to employee ego inflation (i.e., an exaggerated self-view and overestimation of abilities), and employees with ego inflation are prone to destructive voice and less inclined to contribute constructively (Wu et al., 2025). By contrast, in the context of high managerial power and relatively low employee power, employees may be less willing to express voice that may be perceived as self-serving because of the manager's reward and coercive powers (French & Raven, 1959).

In addition, the individual's evaluation of potential risks associated with speaking up may influence outcomes of the HRD process. For example, when employees perceive a high-risk voice situation, they tend to anticipate regret and are more likely to choose to remain silent (Willits & Franco-Watkins, 2021). Alternatively, when employees perceive that they will face fewer risks by engaging in supportive voice, they may speak up. In contrast, when evaluating the expression of unsupportive voice, they may acknowledge there are greater risks that will lead them to being perceived by managers as low performers (Burris, 2012). Further negative consequences emerge when listeners retaliate against the idea provider (Sun et al., 2022) or in high political work environments when the nature of the voicing idea is perceived as self-serving or self-interested (Duan et al., 2021). Thus, when power is used to stifle the use of voice, and the risk of negative consequences are perceived as highly likely, the environment encourages silence (Lam et al., 2024).

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

First, we advance understanding of how developmental performance appraisal, managerial coaching, and career mentoring can be reframed and implemented in ways that are more employee-centered through infusing these practices with opportunities for employee-focused voice. We argued that employee well-being, learning, intrinsic motivation, task performance, and career success may be positively influenced when line managers are responsive to employee concerns and interests that are articulated during HRD practice implementation.

Additionally, we adapt and build on the theoretical HR process model (Nishii & Wright, 2008; Wright & Nishii, 2013) to advance theoretical understanding of how the voice-infused HRD practices might benefit employees and organizations. The model and propositions explicate antecedent conditions for and consequences of effective infusion of employee-focused voice into HRD practices. Antecedent conditions include consensus among senior leaders' beliefs about the value of an employee-centered approach and consistency in practice implementation by line managers, while the consequences include positive work-related attitudes and employee-initiated job crafting and the associated benefits.

Second, our work advances theoretical understanding of leadership styles that are conducive to employee-focused voice behaviors and job crafting behaviors. More specifically, we build on and develop the theoretical HR process model by integrating leadership styles into the voice-infused HRD process model. The Nishii and Wright (2008) HR process model did not include line managers' leadership styles in their analysis (Elias et al., 2023; Nishii & Paluch, 2018). However, line managers' leadership styles are an important consideration. Leadership style will likely influence both employees' perceptions of their manager's implementation of practices and employees' behavioral and attitudinal reactions to practice implementation (Vermeeren et al., 2014). We distinguish an array of leadership styles that would encourage employee-focused voice behavior during HRD practice implementation: transformational, coaching, participative, learning-oriented, and leadership behaviors that foster high-quality relationships with work group members (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Beattie et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2010; Wallo et al., 2024).

Additionally, drawing on Kim and Beehr (2020) and Wang, Demerouti, and Bakker (2017), we argued in favor of transformational and empowering leadership as styles needed to promote employee job crafting behaviors. These styles provide the autonomy and support required for employees to proactively shape their work environment, adjusting tasks and resources to better align with their strengths and interests. Job crafting behaviors are closely linked to employee well-being and performance outcomes, suggesting that leadership styles fostering these behaviors have both immediate and long-term benefits. Furthermore, integrating leadership styles into the voice-infused HRD process model highlights the dynamic interplay between managerial actions and employee agency. Leadership influences the intended and actual

implementation of HRD practices and shapes the interpretive frameworks employees use to evaluate those practices. Our work offers a holistic understanding of how HRD practices, leadership behaviors, and employee outcomes are interconnected. This theoretical extension underscores the critical role of leadership in ensuring that HRD practices are not merely transactional but also transformative, fostering environments where employee-focused voice and job crafting prosper.

Third, the paper has the potential to further advance theoretical understanding because the proposed preliminary employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model, and the associated theoretical research propositions, provide a foundation for subsequent empirical research. The proposed preliminary conceptual model that illustrates the process by which the HRD practices are transmitted to outcomes can be used to focus and bound future research (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Researchers can deepen our understanding of the research topic by converting the propositions that are associated with the conceptual model to hypotheses, which are empirical expressions of the propositions (Ulaga et al., 2021). Through ongoing testing of hypotheses in different contexts and refinement or reconsideration of the underlying propositions, theories and models can be developed (Hollebeek et al., 2024).

Future Research Implications

An interesting and potentially fruitful line of inquiry would involve exploring the perspectives of key practitioner actors in the HRD process. These include senior managers, HRD professionals, and line managers. Obtaining practitioner perspectives would help to reframe the three HRD practices in ways that are more relevant to practitioners. Their perspectives would also help to assess the practical relevance of the research topic. Practitioner perspectives could be explored through largely unstructured methods of inquiry, guided by questions such as: What challenges and opportunities are there in moving HRD toward a more balanced approach? How could multiple goals that include learning and development, performance improvement, strategic alignment, and the elicitation of employee-focused voice be achieved within each of the three practices? What types of line manager leadership behaviors would be conducive to eliciting employee-focused voice? Why might employees be reluctant to voice their concerns and interests during HRD practice implementation?

In addition to HRD content, this paper also focuses on the HRD process. Regarding the *perceptions of practices* stage of the process, a worthwhile line of inquiry would involve assessing employees' beliefs about the extent to which they have opportunities to voice their concerns and interests during delivery of each type of HRD practice. Fortunately, for this purpose, researchers can draw on the work of Shipton et al. (2024) who have shown that employee-focused voice is a distinct form of voice, and they developed a measure of this voice form. Given that this paper proposes a new area of inquiry, descriptive studies of this type could serve as a useful springboard for more rigorous studies. Testing the entire voice-infused HRD process model and all associated propositions in a single study might be too ambitious. Smaller scale studies that test some propositions would be more feasible. An example is studies that examine

relations between line manager leadership behaviors and opportunities for employee-focused voice (Proposition 2). Another example is studies that investigate relations between employees' perceptions of each HRD practice and their reactions to each practice (Propositions 4a, 4b and 4c).

As noted, the voice-infused HRD process model is intended for early-stage empirical testing. However, the existence of established measures to assess several concepts in the model and associated propositions helps to smooth the path toward testing the entire HRD process model. Examples of relevant established measures include the following: employee-focused voice (e.g., Shipton et al., 2024); empowering leadership (e.g., Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014); transformational leadership, including the subdimension of supportive leadership (e.g., Rafferty & Griffin, 2004); and job crafting (e.g., Tims et al., 2012). In sum, the propositions can be operationalized using mostly established measures and tested employing a statistical method such as Structural Equation Modeling.

Practical Implications

The paper's arguments have important implications for HRD professionals regarding development of care and voice-related capabilities among the senior leadership group. This group must have the capabilities required to create a climate of care (Saks, 2021) and specifically a strong climate for voice, which refers to shared beliefs about speaking up (Bashshur & Oc, 2015). To address this development need, HRD professionals could employ an array of development methods. For example, they could provide training for the senior leadership group that enhances their awareness of the mutual gains associated with employee-focused voice and develops the group's capabilities to build and maintain a strong climate for voice. In this regard, creating psychological safety in the workplace would be an important training topic (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023).

The arguments in this paper also have important implications for HRD professionals concerning leadership development in their organizations. We posited that line managers need to enact specific leadership behaviors that emphasize personal growth, collaboration, and open communication (e.g., coaching leadership, participative leadership, or learning-oriented leadership) during development events if they wish to encourage employee-focused voice behaviors. Also, we reasoned that line manager leadership behaviors associated with transformational and empowering leadership are necessary to promote employees' job crafting behaviors. To foster the enactment of such behaviors HRD professionals must propose leadership development initiatives from an array of development options encompassing two broad types. These are formal, structured interventions (e.g., leadership training, formal education) and development through experiences (e.g., 360 feedback, reflective practice) (Day et al., 2021). However, senior managers need to consider the cost of proposed leadership development initiatives in relation to potential benefits associated with reframing the organization's HRD practices. Additionally, owner-managers in SMEs may not be

able to act upon the implications for leadership development due to the resource constraints that SMEs face (Nolan & Garavan, 2016; Nolan & Harney, 2024).

Covid-19 has intensified calls for HRD professionals to capitalize on the opportunities that digital technology presents (Nachmias & Hubschmid-Vierheilig, 2021; Thite, 2022). For example, using digital means leaders can engage with digitized development content to improve their knowledge and skills relating to facilitation of employee-focused voice through online learning. The acquired knowledge and skills could then be reinforced and contextualized through formation of action learning groups or communities of practice. In resource constrained organizations such as SMEs, line managers could use digital technologies to improve their leadership skills relating to the facilitation of employee-focused voice, without incurring a high financial cost, or being absent from the workplace to attend offsite training.

Line managers would also benefit from access to development opportunities that help them reduce perceptions of power distance between managers and employees (Ben-Hador, 2024) as this will help mitigate employees' fear of using employee-focused voice behavior. Line managers can mitigate such fears by authentically coaching subordinates to overcome deficiencies in their performance and to leverage their strengths. However, this will require line managers to be trained to deliver coaching in ways that reduce power distance from the employee perspective (Ben-Hador, 2024).

Finally, through formal training or coaching senior managers should acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to develop an inclusive organizational culture that incorporates caring as part of its values and an organizational structure that facilitates voice behaviors (e.g., flat structure with multiple formal and informal voice channels). Training or coaching should also be employed to help line managers develop the knowledge and skills required to create conditions of team psychological safety and openness to change (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023; Yuan et al., 2019), with a view to promoting employee-focused voice during HRD practice implementation.

In brief, the overall implication of the arguments in this paper is that managers and HRD professionals should think about HRD practices differently by adopting a mutual gains perspective. This is the notion that HRD practices should be conceived of by senior managers and implemented by line managers in ways that produce positive outcomes for both employers and employees (Ho & Kuvaas, 2020; Ogbonnaya & Messersmith, 2019). The conceptual model (Figure 2) outlines the mechanisms that lead to the expected two-fold positive outcomes.

Limitations

Like all models in the social sciences, the proposed employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model comes with a unique set of limitations, which includes the environment in which the HRD process is situated, as depicted in Figure 2. The model does not incorporate an array of organizational characteristics such as organizational size, structure and culture, nor external factors such as national culture. Regarding organization size, the model is more applicable to large organizations and the medium-

size organizations in the SME category because these organizations tend to employ formal HRD practices. By contrast, small organizations typically do not employ formal HRD practices (Nolan & Garavan, 2016). Career mentoring is unlikely to occur in many small businesses because small businesses afford limited opportunities for career advancement (Wallace & Kay, 2009). Similarly, developmental performance appraisal is likely to be rare because of informal HRD (Nolan & Garavan, 2016). Although coaching may be more common than the other two HRD practices, it is likely to be informal and impromptu due to predominance of informal HRD (Nolan & Garavan, 2016).

As noted, the voice-infused HRD process model also does not account for external factors such as the national culture, nor internal factors such as organizational structure and culture. National culture is an important macro-level contextual factor that affects voice (Morrison, 2023). For example, in collectivistic cultures employee-focused voice might have negative consequences for the employee because such behavior may be viewed as self-centered and harmful to interpersonal relationships and group cohesiveness (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). By contrast, in societies with high assertiveness, employees may engage more actively in employee-focused voice behaviors because they are socialized to communicate about their concerns and interests directly and openly (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). Regarding organizational structure, highly hierarchical and centralized structures can constrain a manager's latitude to promote voice as such structures can limit opportunities for employees to participate in decision making (Jiang et al., 2022). Organizational culture also has an important role in shaping employees' voice behavior. For example, the chain of links in the proposed voice-infused HRD process model are likely to be stronger in organizational cultures that embody caring values (Rodriguez et al., 2026). Organizational culture can also determine how employees' voicing motives can shift between pro-organization, justice-based, or self-interest (Huang et al., 2024).

The voice-infused HRD process model does not include considerations of how an employee's personal characteristics might influence voice behavior. For example, diversity can influence the use and acceptance of voice behavior. It is particularly important to employees when evaluating the opportunity to voice that they can ascertain an organization's authentically communicated commitment to diversity (Men et al., 2024). When a workforce is culturally and linguistically diverse, language issues make it difficult for some workers to use voice to articulate or have the confidence to raise their concerns in their second language (Wilkinson et al., 2023). The literature also points to voice being affected by generational differences (Hatipoglu & Inelmen, 2018; Kim et al., 2016). Voice opportunities are also displayed differently between genders (Hatipoglu & Inelmen, 2018; McClean et al., 2022) when working as managers or employees. For example, some literature suggests that female employees may voice less than male employees (Adisa et al., 2024), especially in some contexts (i.e., male dominated, Eibl et al., 2020). However, voice equity could be enhanced (Sherf et al., 2017) and the benefits of women's novel perspectives achieved (Yan et al., 2022) in contexts where supportive and fair leadership behaviors are present (Eibl et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2022), there are female leaders who speak up (Yan et al.,

2022) and where an inclusive culturally aware workplace exists (Adisa et al., 2024; Wilkinson et al., 2023). Consideration of employees' identities is related to the concept of EoC and the five-phase caring cycle proposed by Tronto (2013): caring about, caring for, caregiving, care receiving, and caring with. Employee identity is especially related to caregiving (i.e., concrete actions taken to attend to prioritized needs) and care receiving which accentuates care as a relational practice and includes assessing the effectiveness of caring actions through the care-receivers' responses (Rodriguez et al., 2026).

In this paper, we assume that the three HRD practices are implemented in face-to-face situations. Therefore, our model does not consider that these practices could also be implemented through digitally mediated mechanisms. This is a limitation of the model because digitally mediated and hybrid settings that blend physical and virtual spaces are increasingly common (Kalfa et al., 2026). Implementation of the three HRD practices through digitally mediated mechanisms may pose distinctive voice-related challenges for line managers and employees and could affect employee voice behavior (Ellmer & Reichel, 2021). For example, in digitally mediated and hybrid settings, employees may be concerned about the confidentiality of their voiced inputs, if the inputs are recorded, stored and potentially used in ways that would have an adverse effect on them in the future (e.g., retaliation). This raises issues of data ethics and safeguards. Basic aspects of data ethics include maintaining confidentiality of voiced concerns and ensuring the protection of individuals from retaliation for voicing their concerns (Khan et al., 2025). Safeguards involve establishing guidelines and governance structures for the use of digital voice data to manage the risks and responsibilities associated with its use (Tiffin et al., 2019).

In sum, although the employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model has several limitations, it is important to note that the model was developed to be parsimonious with clear boundaries and of limited scope, and it is intended for early-stage empirical testing.

Conclusion

There is very limited HRD literature on how individual practices might help foster employee-focused voice behavior. Further, HRD literature has been criticized for privileging management interests (e.g., performance). Accordingly, motivated by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been calls to reclaim the original ethos of the field, by adopting a more humanistic, employee-centered approach to HRD. The present paper sought to address these two limitations of the literature with the aim of stimulating research along the trajectory set by the paper. Drawing on the EoC approach and the mutual gains perspective, we developed theoretical arguments relating to (1) how three widely used HRD practices can be implemented in ways that provide opportunities for employee-focused voice and (2) the processes by which employees having a say about their concerns and interests is translated through employee attitudes and behavior into positive outcomes for employees and organizations. Overall, this paper contributes a conceptual advancement by presenting a

novel employee-focused, voice-infused HRD process model and propositions that reconfigure existing understandings and propose a foundation for future research.

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