Interactive Leadership as antecedent of Employee voice: An integrative model of attribution

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While the relationship between interactive leadership (IL) and employee voice (EV) has gained little interests, the underlying process of how IL and EV relationships are developed remains unknown. The current study addresses this gap in the literature by exploring the linkages between IL and EV. Drawing on leadership theories, the paper reviews the current literature on IL practice, and examines how it is contingent on EV. This study also investigated the mediating effects of participation, gender and personality factors on the relationship between IL and EV. Further a theoretical model is evaluated in light of the IL and EV constructs and a number of propositions are also outlined which present directions for future research.

Key words: Interactive Leadership, Employee voice, personality factors

INTRODUCTION
Burns (1978) argued that leadership was one of most researched concepts, and it remains a difficult and complex activity to define (Singh, Nadim and Ezzedeen, 2012; Wren, 1995). Over time views on leadership and what individual characteristics make successful leaders has changed in response to an increased understanding of the nature of leadership and the environment in which leaders operate. The fundamental principles underlying the different approaches are still pertinent to today's leaders, but are viewed, interpreted and integrated differently and in conjunction with new ideas. According to Daft, and Pirola-Merlo (2009:21) “Rather than directing and controlling others, leaders work with others to create a shared vision and shape the cultural values needed to attain it. Rather than relying on hierarchical control, leaders build whole organisations as communities of shared purpose and direction.” This view, together with arguments for the value of more authentic leadership where “leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads” (Dubrin, 2010:38), presents a very different view of leadership to that developed by the trait, behavioural, and contingency schools of thought (Robbins, Bergman, Stagg and Coulter, 2012). More contemporary theories, such as transactional, transformational and charismatic attempted to examine leadership practice in response to the changing business environment (Robbins, Bergman, Stagg and Coulter, 2012), but still seem to be deficient in some way. Aspects of the business environment that do not appear to be adequately addressed by these earlier theories include the importance of cultural differences, workforce diversity, increased women in the workforce and the increased use of team based work structures. The nature of the current global business environment suggests that these characteristics will become increasingly important for global and international organisations.

The importance of culture to management and leadership has been clearly demonstrated through the findings of the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness project (GLOBE) conducted by House and colleagues during the 1990s. These studies have shown that “Culture colours nearly every aspect of human behaviour” (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, and House, 2006:67). Leadership in different cultures was found to have some common dimensions or characteristics, but also significant differences in how individuals assessed the success or quality of leaders (Javidan,
Dorfman, de Luque, and House, 2006). In particular, it was found that “national culture directly influences leadership behaviours through the leadership expectations of societies” (Dorfman, Javidan, Hanges, Dastmalchian and House, 2012:504). A leader’s behaviour, values, risk taking, interaction, communication and decision making are therefore in accord with societies expectations, and those that behave according to expectation are considered effective (Javidan, et al, 2006; Dorfman, et al, 2012; Waldman, de Luque, Washburn, and House, 2006; House, Quigley and de Luque, 2011).

In concert with the growing international nature of business organisations is the increase in workforce diversity. The focus on diversity, in its broadest sense, has seen a recognition of the different and varied nature of today’s workforce. Many arguments have proposed the need for effective management of diversity for organisational survival and success (Kreitz, 2007 as cited in Visagie and Linde, 2010; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta, 2004). More specifically, research has argued for managers and leaders to adopt an approach to leadership that acknowledges that not all individuals share the same experience and perceptions in the workplace (Fine, Johnson and Ryan, 1990) and is ‘sensitive’ to heterogeneous differences that exist within the workforce (Visagie and Linde, 2010).

One of the principal diversity aspects to receive attention has been the increase of women in the workforce and how gender differences affect leadership styles. Since the early 1990s researchers have explored how women provide leadership, what skills and attributes they demonstrate and how these differ from the leadership approaches of male leaders/managers (Rosener, 1990; Stanford, Oates and Flores, 1995; McEldowney, Bobrowski, and Gramberg, 2009; Singh, Nadim, and Ezzeddeen, 2012; Eisner, 2013; Cook and Glass, 2014). Early research into gender and leadership indicated that men and women used different approaches to leadership, that were a result of personal characteristics, experiences, emotion, environment and social expectation (Rosener, 1990; Stanford, et al. 1995; McEldowney et al. 2009; Singh, et al, 2012). The findings suggested that in general women were more social, friendly, open to communication, interested in people, had strong interpersonal skills and displayed a more participative form of engagement with subordinates, whereas men were more task
focused, directive, competitive and reliant on power and authority (McEldowney et al. 2009; Singh et al. 2012; Eisner, 2013). However, the findings of such studies have not been unanimous. Eagly and Johnson (1990) and Powell (1990) argued that men and women have a similar orientation to both social and task aspects of leadership, and that the apparent “effect of gender on leadership style vary based on the context within which they are studied” (Powell, 1990, as cited in Eisner, 2013:26). Despite this debate there is general agreement that women display a more non-traditional style of leadership that enhances communication, increases participation and team work, and shares information and power (Rosener, 1990; Stanford, et al. 1995; McEldowney et al. 2009), which is conducive to the current demands of the workforce for increased participation, in a supportive, understanding and challenging environment.

A significant and enduring change to the work environment which requires many of the leadership skills and characteristics exhibited by women, although not exclusively, is the growth in team based work structures. Leadership within teams has been found to impact upon team effectiveness, task focus, communication and conflict, learning, innovation and organisational effectiveness (McGarth, 1964; Cohen and Bailey, 1997; Edmonson and Moingeon, 1998; Bhat, Verma, Rangnekar, and Barua; 2012). Bhat, Verma, Rangnekar, and Barua (2012:362) found that leaders and their leadership style significantly impact upon team processes and “an effective leader can motivate and increase cohesion, support collaboration and trust in the team/organisation ... [and] open discussion on issues to solve problems”. Daft and Pirola-Merlo (2009:346) summarise the debate over leadership in teams rather succinctly when they state that “Today’s flatter, team-based organisations are no longer looking for top-down authority figures but for more collaborative and inclusive approaches to leadership”. To adequately respond to the changing business environment and the issues raised by the growing impact of the four factors discussed here (cultural differences, workforce diversity, increased women in the workforce and the increased use of team based work structures) leadership styles need to evolve in a way that makes them more fluid and organic. A contingency approach is still relevant, but it includes a great many more ‘contingent’ factors. A leadership concept that has already been raised, but
received little attention, might prove to be the next recognised form of leadership: interactive leadership.

This paper explores the nature and significance of two concepts considered to be interrelated: interactive leadership and employee voice. For effective interactive leadership it is essential that employees have a high level of participation within teams and organisations and thus opportunities for employee voice. Likewise for effective channels and opportunities for employee voice an acceptance of an increasing amount and range of employee participation in traditional manager/leader activities is required. To address these issues the paper will first present a review of the concepts of interactive leadership and employee voice, as presented in the literature. Second, the significance of interactive leadership and employee voice within the changing workplace is discussed, and to conclude a model for exploring the relationship between these factors is presented.

**INTERACTIVE LEADERSHIP**

Interactive leadership is a concept that emphasises an employee-oriented distinctiveness, and refers to fostering participation, the sharing of information, enhancing teamwork; mutual goal setting; listening more and talking less. Indeed from the perspectives of subordinates, this leadership style is one that supports and sustains stronger and more in-depth leader/subordinate relationships (Dion, 2012; Ouimet, 2010; Atik, 1994), collaborative teamwork and the reflective participation of staff (Alexander, 2002), the support and development of staff in decision making (Wunderer, 2001) and the enhancement of the knowledge worker and the emancipation of staff from more traditional paternalistic/masculine leadership styles (Jogulu, 2010; Magliocca and Christakis, 2001; White, McMillan and Baker, 2001). Leaders employing this so called emerging style would provide encouragement and support to individual staff and teams to participate. They would share information and power. 'Interactive leadership’ derives its label from it support and encouragement of individuals interacting; not only, or simply, in the context of their own tasks and ego drives, but also with those of teams, the broader organisation and the organisational community in the achievement of mutual goals. It is a leadership style that connects individuals to others’ goals, using a broad spectrum of
behavioural strategies such as staff involvement in decision making, the enhancement of leader/subordinate relations, collaborative teamwork and reflective participation. It is a leadership style that ‘proceed(s) from a premise of connection’ (Rhodes, 1993:13) and a recognition that networks of relationships bind a group in a web of mutual responsibilities. The style shares responsibility, takes unthreatened pride in the accomplishments of colleagues and protégés and experiences success without the compulsion to outdo others.

Interactive leaders encourage participation, share power and information, enhance other people’s self-worth, stimulate excitement about work inclusion, relationship building and caring – all attributes associated with ‘female values’ of leadership (Daft and Pirola-Merlo, 2009). This is seen as an important approach as it builds employee satisfaction and trust in supervisors (Rosener, 1990), and makes leaders interaction with subordinates positive for all. The characteristics of interactive leadership are more in concert with behaviours displayed by female leaders. Greater levels of communication, consultation, participative engagement, shared decision making, and acceptance of employee input is required with this form of leadership – all of which seem to be more in keeping with female styles of interaction and socialisation (Rosener, 1990; Daft and Pirola-Merlo, 2009). Therefore the following is postulated:

Proposition 1 The characteristics of interactive leadership are reflected in female approaches to leadership which is exhibited through trust, motivation, job satisfaction, commitment and teamwork.

‘Interactive leadership’ reaches out beyond its own traditional constituencies to presumed adversaries, using mutual goals, rather than mutual enemies, to create group cohesion and community membership (Kazemek, 1991). It is a leadership style that appears able to resolve the tension between agency and communion (Rhodes, 1993), is comfortable with the interaction of others’ diverse needs, and managers displaying this style seem able to take pride in others’ success that may even surpass their own. This interactive form of leadership not only encompasses both transactional and
transformational behaviours, but also stretches its practitioners beyond individualism and charisma (Jokinen, 2005; Burns, 1978; Tichy and Devanna, 1986).

‘Interactive leadership’ has its lineage in participative management approaches, in transformational leadership theories and in situation contingent models of leadership. ‘Interactive leadership’ has its links to participative management approaches that are evident from Zoglio’s (2001) definition of participative management and Rosener’s (1990) definition of interactive leadership. For example, Zoglio (2001) describes participative leadership in the following terms: 1) able to communicate company priorities, performance results, work unit’s connection to the large organisation; 2) involves employees in developing realistic goals, undertakes sensible performance measures, and gives appropriate reward; 3) delegates appropriately and develops employee talent; 4) supports employees with clear direction and necessary resources; 5) facilitates teamwork by focusing on processes as well as tasks. This definition links to Rosener’s (1990) description of ‘Interactive leadership’ quite well, which notes that ‘Interactive leadership’ has the following characteristics: 1) encouragement of participation in all aspects of work; 2) wide-spread sharing of information and power; 3) efforts to enhance self-worth of employees, and 4) energising employees for the task.

‘Interactive leadership’ is very important in today’s changing world of economic competitiveness and workforce diversity, where the role of leaders is evolving and there is an increasing need to gain commitment from employees (Visagie and Linde, 2010). Managers are required to be good leaders in order to build employee support and instil in them the drive and motivation to perform to the best of their abilities (Daft and Pirola-Merlo, 2009). This will build up the teamwork within their organisations, which is now becoming more important in organisations that are concerned with quality products and services. Cooperation among the workers as well as their supervisors is an important factor that most of the organisations today strive to achieve (Rowold, 2011: Daft, 1994). Developing the most effective approach to leadership takes time, and as the majority of leaders are male many of characteristic and behaviours required for an inclusive style of leadership do not come naturally. Male leaders, while embracing some degree of participation, still have a tendency to be
more directive; often negating the benefits of employee engagement and consultation. Therefore the following is postulated:

Proposition 2  The extent to which male leaders demonstrate the characteristics of interactive leadership is influenced by their natural style of leadership, which is limited by the extent to which they fully embrace the characteristics of participation, information sharing, and employee support.

Identifying the characteristics of effective leadership has received much attention in management literature and in corporate training programs. However, in contrast to the ideas advocated by interactive leadership, management literature continues to caution administrators on opening their decision-making activities to their subordinates (Tseng, Tung and Duan, 1990; Pendleton et. al 1996; Carter, 1990; Hobbs, 1989; and Hobbs and Jefferis, 1990). This caution is unlikely to change as there is scant empirical research available in the field of 'Interactive leadership’. Despite the concept of interactive leadership being raised in the 1990s and the growing need for a more effective form of leadership there has been only one empirical study undertaken. Li, Koh and Hia (1997) identified two key components of interactive leadership: interaction skills and team building, which had significant impacts on employee trust, motivation and commitment. The most essential element of interactive leadership is participation; without it the goals of this style of leadership could not be achieved. To encourage the full engagement and participation of employees, leaders and managers need to examine the processes through which they engage with them. One of the most effective ways is through employee voice.

**EMPLOYEE VOICE**

Voice is a broad and complex concept that incorporates both formal and informal interactions within organisations and refers to both the process of “how employees are able to have a say regarding work activities and decision making issues within the organisation in which they work” (Wilkinson and
Fay, 2011: 65) and “the discretionary provision of information intended to improve organisational functioning to someone inside an organisation with the perceived authority to act, even though such information may challenge and upset the status quo of the organisation and its power holders, is critical to organisational well being yet insufficiently provided by employees, who see the risk of speaking up as outweighing the benefits” (Detert and Burris, 2007:869).

The changing expectations of employees in the workplace have resulted in a reconsideration of common workplace practices. One aspect of the employer-employee relationship that has evolved is the involvement of and participation of employees in all aspects of the organisation. Closely linked with this is the recognition of the importance of employee voice. Whilst at one time employee voice was simply associated with Labour Unions and the only legitimate channel through which employees could express grievances (Budd, Gollan and Wilkinson, 2010) this has shifted considerably. With the increased focus on broadening employee participation employee voice is now seen to refer to the ability and willingness of employees to speak up about issues and problems, bring up ideas and solutions and express concerns, and can be done via formal or informal channels.

Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington and Ackers (2004) identified four different forms that employee voice can take: individual dissatisfaction, collective organisation, management decision making and mutual interest. If appropriate avenues are in place for employees to express ‘voice’ in all these areas a wide range of benefits will be gained by the organisation. Research has shown that having good ‘employee voice’ at all levels within the organisation contributes positively to communication, upward problem solving, participation, commitment and loyalty, improved attitude and behaviours, job satisfaction, innovation and creativity, organisational change, and a willingness to speak up (Holland, Pyman, Cooper and Teicher, 2011; Farndale, Van Ruiten, Kelliher and Hope-Hailey, 2011; Hsiung, 2012; Van Ruiten, 2007; Bae, Chuma, Kato, Kim and Ohashi, 2011). Embracing employee voice is a positive move for both the organisation and the employee and as argued by Strauss (2006:778) “provides a win-win solution ... [and serves] to satisfy workers’ needs while simultaneously achieving organisational objectives”. Despite the acknowledged benefits, differing
levels of acceptance and engagement in employee voice are still found; particularly with regard to the extent of participation (Holland, et al, 2011; Farndale, et al, 2011; Saunders, Sheppard, Knight and Roth, 1992). Therefore it is proposed that:

Proposition 3 The adoption of employee voice is closely associated with the willingness of employees and supervisors to engage in participative opportunities.

In contrast to improved employee voice is concern about the tendency for ‘employee silence’. Employee silence is associated with the employees’ failure or unwillingness to speak up. This can be linked to both an intentional failure to share information or a feeling of being unable to voice; which can be equally damaging for an organisation. Employee failure, or reluctance, to speak up has been found to be associated with a number of factors such as satisfaction, belief that they will be heard, the relationship with supervisors and the perceived risk involved (Burris, 2012; Saunders, et al, 1992; Liang, Farh and Farh, 2012). The relationship with supervisors is particularly important. A good, established relationship with a supervisor contributes to willingness to voice because of the positive supervisor-subordinate relationship; adding to motivation, commitment and satisfaction (Saunders, et al 1992). Burris (2012) argued that how managers respond to employees speaking up will serve to encourage or discourage speaking up within the work team or organisation. If employees perceive that managers are open to their contributions and can see their ideas receiving consideration or endorsement they are more likely to speak out. Likewise if employees believe that voicing concerns and ideas will not adversely affect their image, credibility, reputation or future performance ratings they will be more open to actively speaking out (Burris, 2012). Given that employee input is well recognised as an essential element of any effective organisation supervisors, managers and leaders need to work to ensure that the likelihood of employees expressing their ‘voice’ is increased. The channels that are in place (formal and informal), perceived openness of managers, low levels of risk, feedback and rewards, and leadership style can all be used to encourage the development of an ‘open voice culture’, where employees feel comfortable with voicing ideas and concerns (Liang, et al. 2012;
Therefore it is posited that

**Proposition 4**  The extent to which employees are willing to ‘voice’ is largely dependent upon the acceptance of participation by the supervisor.

**Proposition 5**  The effectiveness of interactive leadership and employee voice is contingent on the participatory or non-participatory role of both employers and employees as influenced by gender and personality factors.

The effective development and utilisation of channels for open, risk free ‘employee voice’ contributes positively to the employer-employee relationship, encouraging participation, motivation, satisfaction, commitment and loyalty. The integration of an interactive leadership approach and employee voice will serve to build an organisation that is efficient, competitive, innovative and recognised as an employer of choice; the goals of all organisations.

**PROPOSED THEORETICAL MODEL**

Organisations are subject to various changes from inception to demise in response to economic, technical, societal and organisational changes (Bauer, and Gruber 2007; Ferreira, 2009). The extent and nature of these changes varies dependant on the type of organisation, its goals and the context in which it operates. Some changes stand out as more significant than others. Automated production, Taylorism, just-in-time, total quality management, job enlargement, team work, autonomy and flexibility are widely recognise to have brought about significant changes to how organisations operate and how work is organised (Cagliano, Caniato, Longoni, and Spina, 2013). The idea that organisations are ‘organisms’, continually adapting to their environment is indisputable, and how they adapt and respond is closely tied to their success (Morgan, 1986; Cagliano, Caniato, Longoni, and Spina, 2013). Figure 1 represents a model developed from previous studies that suggests major underlying relationships between interactive leadership practice and its impact on Employee voice which is mediated by employees’ acceptance and willingness to participate, gender and personality.
factors. Figure 1 presents the dimensions of interactive leadership practices and employee voice and shows all possible mediators. These interrelations need to be delineated as outcomes and they offer potential avenues for future research.

In today’s organisations teamwork, participative engagement, flexibility, autonomy and leadership have emerged as key elements of current work practices. Alone these add an element of complexity to job roles and workplace interactions, but the current global work environment adds further complexities associated with diversity and cultural differences in the workplace (Ferreira, 2009). For these approaches to management and work organisation to be effective there is a need to provide appropriate leadership and channels for employees to actively and positively engage and communicate at all levels within the organisation. Hence the focus here on interactive leadership and employee voice; both forms of interaction which give avenues for enhanced communication, engagement, job satisfaction, and support.

REFERENCES


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Figure 1 Theoretical Model