



Individual or collective voice

The influence of individual and situational differences on the preferred voice mechanism in different areas of workplace decision making

Master thesis Human Resource Studies

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Abstract

This paper investigated the effect of both individual and situational factors on the preferred voice mechanism (individual or collective voice) for a sample of 304 respondents across a range of organizations in the Netherlands. The individual factors include gender and level of education and the situational factors include the size of the organization and level of autonomy. It is also investigated if the preference for a voice mechanism depends on the area of decision making. Quantitative data were used to examine the expected relations. This study was performed to provide a better understanding in the factors influencing the preferred voice mechanism. Previous studies showed a relation between individual voice and job satisfaction (Holland, Pyman, Cooper, Teicher, 2011) and a relation between collective voice and productivity (Kim, MacDuffie, Pil, 2010). Therefore it seems interesting to investigate which factors affect the preference for one voice mechanism or another. The results showed a rejection of the effect of gender on the preferred voice mechanism. The effect of level of education was partially confirmed with the use of dummy variables. The size of the organization and level of autonomy proved to have a significant direct effect on the preferred voice mechanism. There also showed to be differences in the preferred voice mechanism between different areas of decision making. Finally, the additional analysis showed a direct effect of trust in supervisor on the preferred voice mechanism.

Key words: employee voice, individual voice, collective voice, gender, level of education, organizational size, autonomy, union, work council, trust in supervisor.

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Introduction

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, there has been a decline in union membership in the Netherlands in the last decennia. 35 Percent of the employees with a job of at least 12 hours a week were member of a union in the period 1950 till 1980. After that period, there has been a decline in union membership till 21 percent in 2008. The numbers of 2010 again showed a decline in union membership (CBS). Above mentioned numbers make clear that fewer employees in the Netherlands want to be represented by a union, the position of the unions is deteriorated. But according to Wilkinson, Dundon, Marchington and Ackers (2004), this does not mean that employees have a reduced need for voice. According to these authors, there is becoming more interest in the voice of employees in the last decade. Voice is about having a say in the organization regarding to work-related activities and decision-making issues (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011).

Voice can be distinguished in individual and collective voice. Individual voice means that employees are directly involved with management (through any mechanism) in decisions about their jobs and work environment (Lavelle, Gunnigle, McDonnell, 2010). Collective voice, also referred to as indirect voice, involves the articulation of worker views and input via some form of collective employee representation such as unions or non-union structures of collective representation (Lavelle, Gunnigle, McDonnell, 2010, p.396). According to Budd, Gollan, and Wilkinson (2010) the decline of union membership in the world has given room to alternative mechanisms of voice and besides that, the need for a union is under discussion. This is in line with research of Bryson (2004) who found a switch away from collective voice toward individual voice. The same pattern has been found in Germany by Brewster, Croucher, Wood and Brookes (2007). These authors also found evidence that there was some individualization of voice. They found an increase in direct forms of communication, such as general meetings. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, union membership is also decreasing in the Netherlands, and one may wonder whether this trend also occurs in the Netherlands. Taking the above mentioned evidence into account, it seems the preferred voice mechanism is shifting from collective voice (including union and work council) to more individual voice, but it is not clear which factors affect the preferred voice mechanism.

This paper will examine if individual and situational differences influence the preferred voice mechanism and measure which of these factors has the biggest effect on this variable. One of the individual differences which will be taken into account is level of education. The level of education in the Dutch population increased in the last decennia. Almost ten percent of the Dutch population between 15 and 65 years old achieved a university degree in 2009 compared to only three percent of the population thirty years ago (CBS). Since this number increased obviously, it seems interesting to measure if this has

any effect on the preference for a specific voice mechanism. According to LePine and Van Dyne (1998), employees with high levels of education are more able to find solutions for existing problems in the organization by themselves compared to employees with low levels of education. It is expected that employees with high levels of education will speak up through individual voice instead of collective voice, because they have the abilities to speak up on their own. Employees with lower levels of education will prefer collective voice over individual voice, because they are not able to find solutions by themselves. The next individual variable which is measured in this study is gender. The relation between gender and the preferred voice mechanism is based on the finding by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule and Metha (1997). Those authors found that women often feel unheard in organizations when they act on their own, because of the problems they face with showing their authority. Therefore, it is expected that women have a preference for collective voice instead of individual voice.

Level of autonomy is an example of a situational factor affecting the preferred voice mechanism. This is based on a study by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) who found that employees with a high level of autonomy have the feeling that they can resolve problems at the workplace with their personal actions and those employees showed to seek more pro active to opportunities to participate in work related issues than other employees. Therefore, it is expected that employees with a high level of autonomy have a preference for individual voice. Size of the organization is the second situational factor which is taken into account in this study. Brewster, Croucher, Wood, and Brookes (2007) found that larger organizations choose for more formal voice mechanisms like a collective voice mechanism and smaller organizations choose for less formal voice mechanisms like an individual voice mechanism. Employees in larger organizations are also expected to choose for collective voice mechanisms because of the bureaucratic rules in large organizations and because close interactions between employee and employer are difficult to achieve in large organizations.

Rogers and Freeman (1999) distinguished eight areas of influence in decision-making in the organization and examined the differences in the influence gap (the influence employees want and the influence they really get) in those areas. The eight areas include organizational benefits, pay raise, training, new equipment or software, setting goals for workgroup or department, safety standards, deciding how to do the job and organize the work, setting work schedules including breaks, overtime and time off. Rogers and Freeman (1999) actually found differences in the influence gap between the areas and therefore it is expected that the preference for individual or collective voice is also different in these eight areas. Until this moment, there is no evidence yet that individual voice is preferred in some areas and collective voice is preferred in other areas. This research will be an extension of the existing literature, because it will show in which areas employees prefer individual voice and in which areas employees prefer collective voice and thus, how these voice mechanisms can complement each other. Besides that,

voice is seen as a factor influencing for example job satisfaction (Holland, Pyman, Cooper, Teicher, 2011). These authors also made a distinction between individual and collective voice and found a positive relation between individual voice and job satisfaction. Job satisfaction leads to higher productivity and higher profitability and it will also lead to lower absenteeism and less intentions to leave (Gruneberg, 1979). Additionally, Kim, MacDuffie, and Pil (2010) found a positive effect of collective voice on productivity in the organization, with a mediating effect of individual voice. Since voice is found to have an effect on outcomes such as job satisfaction and productivity, it seems interesting to extend the literature about this topic for a better understanding and provide insight in the factors affecting the preference for different voice mechanisms.

This leads to the following research question:

To what extent do individual and situational differences influence which voice mechanism (individual or collective) is preferred and do the areas of workplace decision-making make a difference on the preference for individual or collective voice?

This paper will proceed with the theoretical framework in which the different variables and the relations between these variables are explained. After that, the method and results are described, and this paper ends with a conclusion and discussion.

Theoretical framework

“In general, the term “voice” refers to how employees are able to have a say regarding work activities and decision making issues within the organization in which they work” (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011, p.65). Several authors (e.g. Landau, 2009; Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004) refer to the classic work of Hirschman (1970) to describe employee voice. His first definition of voice was “any attempt at all to change rather than to escape from an objectionable state of affairs” (p.30) and stood in the context of how organizations respond to decline. According to this author, employees could use voice to express their feelings of dissatisfaction. The alternative action for dissatisfaction in the organization was exit (Hirschman, 1970). Employee voice is also described as “any type of mechanism, structure or practice, which provides an employee with an opportunity to express an opinion or participate in decision-making within their organization” (Lavelle, Gunnigle, McDonnell, 2010, p. 396). Central to most definitions of employee voice is that it is seen as an opportunity to have “a say” in the organization (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). This corresponds with the definition of Marchington (2007)

who defined employee voice as ‘a term which describes employment practices designed to allow workers some say in how their organizations are run’ (p. 231). According to Marchington (2007) employee voice includes the following forms ‘HR practices of both a direct and indirect form, in unionized and non-union settings, and in task-related and off-line teams’ (p. 231). According to McCabe and Lewin (1992) voice consists of two elements; the expressions of complaints to management in the work context and the participation of employees in the process of decision-making in the organization. This study will focus on both, complaints and decision making.

Voice provides advantages for both employee and employer. Strauss (2006) called this a ‘win-win-solution’; on the one side the needs of the employees will be satisfied and on the other hand the objectives of the organization will be achieved. This corresponds to the work of Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington and Ackers (2004) who see employee voice as a mutual gains process. Freeman and Medoff (1984) also noted that having a voice mechanism in an organization is valuable for both employer and employee. According to them, employee voice has both a consensual and a conflictual image: on the one hand, participation could lead to a beneficial impact on quality and productivity, while, on the other, it could deflect problems which otherwise might explode. In this way, solutions will be found for problems experienced by employees. For Freeman and Medoff (1984), unions were seen as the best agents to provide such voice, as they remain independent of the employer, which adds a degree of voice legitimacy (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004). Voice is a way to bring errors under attention of the people who can make corrections for these errors. The lack of voice in an organization can have a big impact on the feelings of employees; they can feel for example humiliation, anger or resentment. When those feelings are not expressed, it can result in lower creativity and a decrease in productivity (Perlow & Williams, 2003). According to Wilkinson and Fay (2011), different terms are used by practitioners and academics for employee voice, for example involvement, participation, or empowerment.

Two different voice mechanisms can be distinguished; individual voice and collective voice. Individual voice, also referred to as direct voice, can be described as “encompassing any mechanisms that provide for direct employee involvement with management in decisions affecting their jobs and immediate work environment” (Lavelle, Gunnigle, McDonnell, 2010, p.396). Individual voice can be carried out in different forms, namely through briefing groups, problem-solving teams, regular meetings between management and the workforce at large, written forms of communication including newsletters and via notice boards, electronic communication including intranet and emails (including e-mail-administered employee surveys) and suggestion schemes (Bryson, 2004). Collective voice, also referred to as indirect voice, involves the articulation of worker views and input via some form of collective employee representation such as unions or work councils (Lavelle, Gunnigle, McDonnell, 2010, p.396). Collective voice includes all mechanisms based on employee collectives, but is more than a synonym for

unions and works councils. It is a broad term that goes well beyond unionism and encompasses different representational forms, processes and outcomes (Brewster, Croucher, Wood, & Brookes, 2007). Unions are representatives of the employees and are bargaining on their behalf. Work councils are responsible for the employees in that organization who elected them. There are certain regulations relating to work councils, for example in the Netherlands, a work council is required when more than 50 employees work in the organization. The powers of a work council are the right of consent, advisory, initiative and the right to information (Rijksoverheid). Work councils are argued to be more effective compared to unions, because the representatives of the work councils are more directly accountable to the employees of that organization (Brewster, Croucher, Wood, & Brookes, 2007). There are two reasons to mention why individual voice is better than union voice, for example because the barriers between employers and employees will decrease when they are dealing with each other in a direct way instead of through an intermediary. The second reason is that managers are able to respond better to the heterogeneous interests of employees when workers are treated as individuals instead of collective (Storey, 1992). In contrast, union voice can be preferred above individual voice because of its independence (Pyman, Cooper, Teicher, & Holland, 2006). Additionally, some problems in organizations are too big to take care of by individual employees, for example a reorganization which includes multiple departments. Then a collective voice mechanism is preferred.

Individual voice and collective voice can be used separately, but they can also be used simultaneously. Pyman, Cooper, Teicher, and Holland (2006) found evidence that from the employee's perspective, the interaction and coexistence of multiple channels of voice is seen as most effective in achieving organizational goals. Therefore, employees prefer a range of channels of voice instead of a single channel. This finding confirms that individual and collective voice can be used complementary; they complement each other and therefore it is likely that employees who are member of a collective voice mechanism will use an individual voice mechanism as well. In this study, respondents were only able to select one voice mechanism (individual or collective voice) which they prefer most instead of a combination of both voice mechanisms, but there can be found differences in each area; respondents can prefer individual voice in one area of decision making and collective voice in another area of decision making. Holland, Pyman, Cooper, and Teicher (2011) also found evidence that there is a relation between the presence of individual voice in the organization and job satisfaction. The results in their study show an increase in the probability of an employee being satisfied with his job when individual voice was present in the workplace. They also found a positive relation between regular meetings with management and staff and job satisfaction. This is in line with research of Gruneberg (1979) who mentioned voice as an essential aspect of job satisfaction. According to this author, job satisfaction leads to an increase in productivity and the profitability of the organization. Additional, job satisfaction also proved to result in a

decrease in absenteeism and the intention to leave. Kim, MacDuffie, and Pil (2010) also found a positive effect of voice on productivity.

There are several variables to mention which are expected to influence the preference for a specific voice mechanism. The first variable which will be taken into account is level of education. According to LePine and Van Dyne (1998), employees with higher levels of education are more likely to speak up than employees with less education. According to those authors, there is empirical support for the relation between demographics such as level of education and voice behavior. They found evidence that higher levels of education are accompanied with more general knowledge and with that higher level of general knowledge employees are more able to recognize problems and come with a greater number of appropriate solutions compared to employees with lower levels of education (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Taking this into account, it is expected that employees with a higher level of education will prefer individual voice over collective voice, because they are more able to find a solution for an existing problem and that employees with lower levels of education will prefer collective voice over individual voice, because they are not able to find solutions by themselves. A higher level of education can also make an employee more confident about his/her skills and knowledge needed to provide solutions to problems at work (Farr & Ford, In LePine, Van Dyne, 1998). Employees with a higher level of education are likely to prefer individual voice over collective voice, because they are more confident about their own capabilities. Employees with a lower level of education are expected to prefer collective voice over individual voice, because they are less confident about their own capabilities.

Hypothesis 1: Employees with a higher level of education will have a higher preference for individual voice.

Besides level of education, gender is also expected to influence the preference for a collective or an individual voice mechanism. This expectation is based on a study by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, and Metha (1997) who found that women experience difficulties of being heard in an organization. According to these authors, women face problems in asserting their authority and they often feel unheard, even when they believe they have something important to say (Belenky et al., 1997). There is evidence found that there has been a shift in the last decades which moved away from a male focus to the inclusion of women in organizations (Carter, 2002 cited in Simpson, & Lewis, 2005), but it seems that women are still subordinated in Dutch organizations. For example, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the salary of women is 20 percent lower compared to men's salary in the Netherlands in 2008 (CBS). Based on the evidence presented above, it seems clear that there are still differences between men and women at the workplace. It is expected that women will prefer a collective voice mechanism above an individual voice mechanism, because they often have the feeling not to be heard in organizations when they act on their own. Besides, according to a study by Malach-Pines and Kaspi-Baruch (2008) men are more tended

to place themselves in a hierarchy, in comparison with women who tend to be more interested in cooperation and networks. This assumes a preference for a collective voice mechanism for women since there exists more cooperation than with the use of individual voice. Additionally, LePine and Van Dyne (1998) found evidence that men are more engaged in voice compared to women. This is in line with the numbers of the Central Bureau of Statistics, which showed higher numbers of union membership for men compared to women in the Netherlands (CBS). Union membership of men decreased in the last couple of years. This raises the question if men prefer individual voice above collective voice nowadays. The union membership of women increased fast in the last couple of years; in 2010 one at three members as female, compared to one at eleven in 1973 (CBS). One may wonder if this increase indicates that women prefer collective voice over individual voice. Additionally, Miller (2011) examined if there were differences in participation between men and women. She found no difference in the overall participation levels between men and women, but she did find differences between men and women in specific decision making areas, for example women showed to participate less than men in decisions relating to production. Hypothesis 2: Women will have a higher preference for collective voice compared to men.

Above, two individual factors are described which are expected to influence which voice mechanism is preferred by employees in an organization, namely level of education and gender. Besides those individual factors, there are also two situational factors included in this research, which are expected to influence the variable voice mechanism, namely the size of the organization and the level of autonomy. To start with the size of the organization, which is likely to be a predictor of the chosen voice mechanism according to Brewster, Croucher, Wood, and Brookes (2007). These authors found that larger organizations are tend to choose for more formal forms of voice (e.g. collective bargaining, works councils) than informal voice mechanisms (e.g., general meetings). Smaller organizations are assumed to choose more likely for less formal voice mechanisms. Collective voice mechanisms are likely to be relatively formal, because of the complexity of discussions, and because representatives are accountable to the other employees in the organization. Therefore, collective voice mechanisms are more likely to be used in larger firms (Brewster, Croucher, Wood, Brookes, 2007). This is in line with the findings of Blanden, Machin, and Van Reenen (2006) who also found that large firms are more likely to recognize union voice than small firms and the findings of Roche (2001) who did their research in Ireland and found that larger organizations are less likely to be non-union. The same trend is expected to occur at an individual level. Employees are expected to feel that they are treated impersonal, because of bureaucratic rules in large organizations which prevent close interactions between employees and employers and besides, the need for representation and protection will be greater because of these bureaucratic rules (Schnabel & Wagner, 2007; Windolf & Haas, 1989).

Hypothesis 3: The larger the organization employees work in, the higher the preference for collective voice will be.

The second situational factor which will be described is level of autonomy. According to Hackman and Oldham (1976), autonomy can be defined as “The degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out” (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, p.258). According to Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), employees with a high level of autonomy not only feel independent at the workplace, those employees also see a clear connection between personal taken actions and the impact on important organizational outcomes. Besides, a high level of autonomy increases the expectancy of employees that they can resolve problems at the workplace effectively through their personal actions. Because employees with a high level of autonomy have the feeling that they can successfully influence their work environment by themselves, they are expected to prefer individual voice above collective voice. Research by Tangirala and Ramanuam (2008) showed that employees with a high level of autonomy seek to opportunities to participate in work related issues more pro active compared to employees with a medium level of autonomy. Kassing and Avgitis (1999) found that employees with a manager position in the organization are more likely to speak up compared to non-managers. They also found that employees in non-manager positions use more latent dissent than employees in manager positions. This means that employees in non-manager positions have a desire to voice, but lack the right abilities to express themselves effectively. As a consequence of the disability to express their voice, they become frustrated and express themselves in an aggressive way to ineffectual audiences or in concert with other employees who are frustrated (Kassing & Avgitis, 1999). It is expected that there is a close link with the position employees serve in the organization and the level of autonomy they have. Employees in manager positions are supposed to have more autonomy in their jobs, compared to employees in non-manager positions. According to the evidence mentioned above, employees with a high level of autonomy (employees in manager positions) often speak up by themselves, therefore it is expected they will prefer individual voice above collective voice. Employees with a low level of autonomy (employees in non-manager positions) often lack the right abilities to express themselves. Therefore, one can expect those employees will prefer collective voice above individual voice.

Hypothesis 4: The more autonomy employees perceive, the higher the preference for individual voice.

Since the two individual (level of education and gender) and situational (size of the organization and level of autonomy) expected predictors of the preferred voice mechanism are described, now the areas of workplace decision making are taken into account, because they are expected to influence the dependent variable preferred voice mechanism too. Rogers and Freeman (1999) examined the influence gap (the difference between the influence employees want and the influence they really get) in eight

different areas of influence in workplace decision-making in the US. They distinguished the following areas: organizational benefits, pay raise, training, new equipment or software, setting goals for workgroup or department, safety standards, deciding how to do the job and organize the work, setting work schedules including breaks, overtime and time off. The influence gap varies between the eight different areas mentioned above. For example, the influence gap is small in the US in the areas of how people do their job and organize their work and the area of setting work schedules. The influence gap is big in the US in the areas of organizational benefits and pay raise (Rogers & Freeman, 1999). Considering there is a difference in the influence gap in the above mentioned eight areas, it is expected there will also be a difference in the preferred voice mechanism for those eight areas. Employees will prefer individual voice over collective voice in some specific areas and the other way around in other areas. For example, according to Haynes, Boxall and Macky (2005) the influence gap is big in those areas where the interest of employers and employees are most obviously in conflict with each other, namely the area of pay rises and benefits. The traditional role of unions as conflict-mediator remains highly relevant in these areas (Haynes, Boxall & Macky, 2005). Therefore it is expected that employees will prefer collective voice over individual voice in the areas benefits and pay raise and employees will prefer individual voice in the other six areas where the influence gap is smaller. Those eight areas, like benefits, pay raise, training, new equipment or software, setting goals, safety standards, deciding how to do the job and organize the work and setting work schedules are taken into account in this hypothesis, because they encompass the most important areas in which employees can have a voice. Hypothesis 5: The preference for an individual or collective voice mechanism depends on the area of workplace decision making.

5a. Employees will prefer collective voice above individual voice in the areas of benefits and pay raise.

5b. Employees will prefer individual voice above collective voice in the areas of training, new equipment or software, setting goals, safety standards, deciding how to do the job and organize the work, setting work schedules.

The hypotheses mentioned in the theoretical framework are depicted in the graphical summary of hypotheses in figure 1.

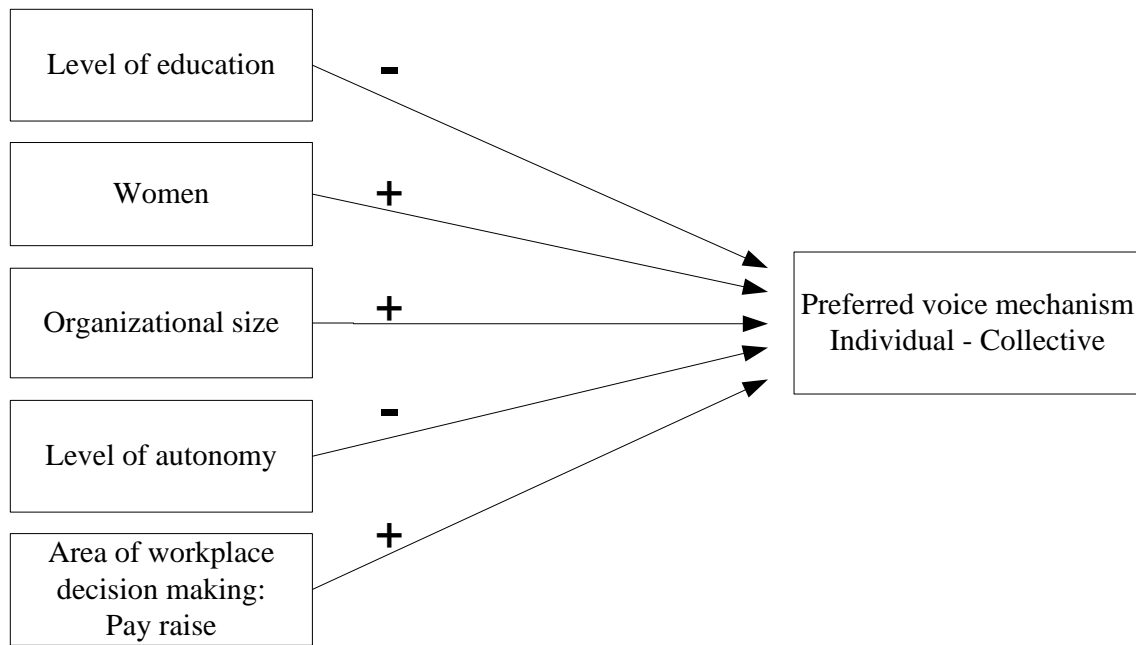


Figure 1 – Graphical summary of hypotheses

Method

Research design and procedure

In this quantitative study, the hypotheses presented in the graphical summary were measured. First, it is examined how the individual and situational differences influence the preferred voice mechanism. After that, the overall preference for individual voice, team meetings or collective voice is measured. The data was gathered with the use of a questionnaire. In order to obtain a large amount of respondents, a partnership was established between two other researchers in the same research field; the voice of employees. A cross-sectional design has been used to collect the data. The HR managers of the organizations were approached whether they were interested to participate in this study. The questionnaires were handed over to the respondents by the HR manager or by one of the researchers participating in this study. A cover letter was included in which the aim of this study was explained. Respondents returned the questionnaires in envelopes to ensure anonymity. The respondents were selected random and the data consists of a wide variety of employees and organizational characteristics.

Population and sample

The sample comprised 304 respondents in different organizations in the Netherlands. 59.5 % of these respondents are male and 40.5 % is female. Their ages ranged from 19 to 75 years with an average of

39.19 year. Job tenure varied from one month to 38 years, with an average of 9.73 year. 31.4 % completed a higher or academic level of education, 38.5 % secondary, 28.8 % base, and 1.3 % had an elementary level of education. 27.7 % were representing the manufacturing industry, 21.8 % service (including financial service), 2.6 % retail, wholesale, distribution, hotels and catering, 12.9 % health care, 5 % education, 14.5 % government, and 15.8 % was working in another industry. The average organization size was 458 employees, ranging from 6 to 6000 employees. The complete characteristics of the data are presented in table 1a and 1b in the appendix.

Measurement

The following variables were measured with the use of a questionnaire:

Preferred voice mechanism. This dependent variable is measured with the use of a scale consisting of 14 items, based on the 'influence wanted in workplace decisions' scale from the Representation and participation Survey (WRPS) from Freeman and Rogers (1999). They distinguished eight areas of workplace decision making. An example question is: "What do you prefer in decisions about what training is required for people in your unit or department?". Four more items were added which are related to more organizational broad decisions such as decisions about major investments. The remaining two items are not based on an existing scale. The possible answers include four options (1 = individual in consultation with your supervisor, 2 = team meetings, 3 = work council, 4 = union). The answering opportunities are not based on any existing scale. These answering opportunities are reduced to two instead of four with the use of recode. Option 1 and 2 represent individual voice and are recoded as 0, option 3 and 4 represent collective voice and are recoded as 1. These 14 items are summarized and represent the preferred voice mechanism over all the items. The higher the score on this variable, the more collective voice is preferred, since the respondents then selected collective voice more often over individual voice.

Level of education. This variable is measured using a single item. The related question is "What is your highest completed level of education?". The response options include four possibilities (1 = elementary, which means none or a little education, 2 = base, which means education on the Dutch MAVO, VMBO, MBO1, MBO2 level, 3 = secondary, which means education on the Dutch HAVO, VWO, HBO3 or HBO4 level, 4 = higher or academic level, which means education on the Dutch HBO or university level). To measure the differences between the four levels of education, dummy variables were made. Secondary level of education was codes as the reference category (N = 115). Outcomes of the dummies for this variable can only be interpreted compared to this group.

Gender. This variable is measured with a single item question. The question corresponding to this

scale is “What is your gender?”. This variable can be characterized as a dummy variable; the answer consists of two possibilities (0 = man, 1 = woman).

Size of the organization. This variable is measured with a scale of one item. The corresponding open question is “How many employees work in this organization (including yourself)?”.

Level of autonomy. This variable is measured with the use of the Dutch VBBA scale ‘autonomy’ (Van Veldhoven & Meijman, 2008). This scale consists of four items. An example question is “Do you have freedom in carrying out your job?”. The answer possibilities provide a unipolar scale of one to four (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = always). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of this scale was .821.

Sector: This variable is tested with a single item scale. The question related to this variable is “In which sector is your organization operating?”. There are six answers possible (1 = manufacturing, 2 = service (including financial service), 3 = retail, wholesale, distribution, hotels and catering, 4 = health care, 5 = education, 6 = government, 7 = other, namely...).

Areas of workplace decision-making. This scale consists of the same 14 items measured in the preferred voice mechanism, but each item is representing a different area and is measured as a separate item instead of a scale like the preferred voice mechanism. The preferred voice mechanism will be measured for each workplace decision-making area to indicate if there are differences between the areas of workplace decision-making. The answering possibilities are (individual in consultation with your supervisor, 2 = team meetings, 3 = work council, 4 = union). To measure which voice mechanism is preferred in each workplace decision making area, the answering possibilities were reduced to three instead of four which results in the following coding: 1 = individual in consultation with your supervisor, 2 = team meetings, 3 = works council and trade union which both represent collective voice. Points were assigned to the most preferred voice mechanism in each workplace decision making area, to find out which voice mechanism received an overall preference and to find out if there is a pattern in the preference for a specific voice mechanism. In each area, two points were assigned to the voice mechanism with the highest percentage, and one point was assigned to the voice mechanism with the second highest percentage. The points were taken together in the end and this resulted in an overall preference for one voice mechanism.

Union membership. This scale is measured with the use of one single item. The corresponding question is “Are you member of a union?”. The answering possibilities consist of two options (0 = Yes, 1 = No).

Works council membership. This scale consists of one question, namely “Are you member of a works council?” This question could be answered with two possibilities (0 = Yes, 1 = No).

Control variables. These variables were used to control the data for the influence of other variables affecting the preferred voice mechanism. These specific control variables are selected, because previous research already found that these are related to the voice of employees and they were already used as control variables in other research about the voice as well, for example Landau (2009) and Holland, Pyman, Cooper, and Teicher (2011).

Age. Age was measured with a single open question ‘What is your age?’.

Job tenure. This variable was measured with a one open item question ‘How long do you work for this organization?’.

The results from the hypotheses mentioned in the graphical summary of hypotheses did not show what was expected for all the hypotheses, therefore, an explorative additional analysis was performed to find out if another variable, which was not mentioned in the theoretical framework, has an effect on the preferred voice mechanisms. This variable, trust in supervisor, was measured by the other two researchers with who a partnership was established in order to obtain a large amount of respondents.

Trust in supervisor. This scale consists of six items and is based on a scale of Schoorman and Ballinger (2006). An example question is ‘My supervisor treats me fair when a made a mistake’. The answer possibilities consist of five points, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The Cronbach alpha coefficient of this scale is .808.

Preliminary data analysis

Before starting the analysis, the data was checked for errors and these were corrected where needed. The data was also checked for missing data and the option exclude cases pairwise was ticked to exclude the respondents only if they are missing the data required for that specific analysis. They are included in analyses where the missing data are not required. The data was also checked for outliers. Items which were formulated negatively were reversed to prevent response bias. Next, factor analysis in the form of Principal Component Analysis was used for the variables level of autonomy and trust in supervisor to see if these variables could be transformed into a smaller set of linear combinations. The Kaiser’s criterion technique and scree test technique were used to make a decision concerning the number of factors to retain. The factors are rotated with the use of Varimax and Oblimin to make it easier to interpret the results. The results of the factor analysis can be found in table 2a and 2b in the appendix. All scales were measured for reliability with the use of Cronbach’s alpha at a significance level of .05. With the Cronbach’s alpha, the internal consistency of a scale was measured, which means that it shows if the items are all measuring the same construct. In an ideal situation, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above .7 (Pallant, 2007). The results of the reliability of the scales are already mentioned in the measurement section.

Statistical analysis

The effects of the first four hypotheses are measured with the use of hierarchical regression analysis. First, the control variables age and job tenure are entered in the first model, followed by the level of education, gender, size of the organization and level of autonomy in the second model. The categorical variable level of education was transformed to dummy variables in order to measure the separate effects of the different categories. The differences of preferred voice mechanism in the different decision making areas were tested with the use of frequencies.

In the additional analysis, hierarchical regression was used to measure the influence of trust in supervisor on the preferred voice mechanism. Age and job tenure were entered in the first model, the four variables from the conceptual model are added in the second model and trust in supervisor was in the third model. Additionally, a logistic regression was used to measure if some variables of the conceptual model influence if employees become member of a union. This logistic regression was not mentioned in the hypotheses, because it was performed additional after the finding that the preference for a union as collective voice mechanism was very low. Since then, it became interesting to find out if the variables mentioned in the graphical summary of hypotheses had an effect on union membership.

Results

Descriptive statistics

A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to describe the direction and the strength of the relations between the variables. According to Pallant (2007), a correlation can be mentioned as being small with $r = .10$ to $.29$, medium with $r = .30$ to $.49$, and large with $r = .50$ to 1.0 . The means, standard deviations and correlations are presented in table 2. Mainly small correlations were found. Only the main correlations are discussed here. The dependent variable preferred voice mechanism shows a significant negative correlation with the level of autonomy ($r = -.204$, $p < .01$), which means that the lower the level of autonomy, the more collective voice is preferred and the higher the level of autonomy, the more individual voice is preferred. A positive correlation is found between the preferred voice mechanism and the size of the organization ($r = .150$, $p < .05$), which means that the bigger the organization, the more collective voice is preferred, and the smaller the organization, the more individual voice is preferred. The correlation matrix also shows several small correlations between union membership and other variables, for example with age ($r = -.224$, $p < .01$) and age and membership of a work council ($r = -.219$, $p < .01$). These results indicate that younger people are more likely to be member of a union. The same applies to membership of a work council; younger people are more likely to be a member of a work council. A

small correlation between size of the organization and union membership ($r = -.164, p < .01$) was also found, which means the smaller the organization, the less employees are member of a union. The variables union membership and membership of a work council also show a small correlation ($r = .150, p < .01$), which means that the more employees are member of a union, the more employees are member of a works council.

Table 2 – Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Scale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Preferred voice mechanism			1									
2 Age	39.19	11.84	-.020	1								
3 Job tenure	9.73	9.50	.021	.657**	1							
4 Level of education	2.00	.81	-.003	-.149*	-.255**	1						
5 Gender	0.40	.49	.024	-.196*	-.175**	.185**	1					
6 Organizational size	457.79	753.4	.150*	.001	.014	.025	.101	1				
7 Level of autonomy	2.93	.62	-.204**	.004	-.106	.233**	-.054	-.191**	1			
8 Union membership	.79	.41	-.107	-.224**	-.298**	.059	.131*	-.164**	.048	1		
9 Works council membership	.91	.29	-.214**	-.219**	-.196**	-.045	.117*	.097	.035	.150**	1	
10 Trust in supervisor	3.79	.55	-.121**	-.083	-.114	.052	.006	.069	.252**	.045	.059	1

Notes * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Regression analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of four independent variables, level of education, gender, size of the organization and level of autonomy, to predict preferred voice mechanism, after controlling for job tenure and age. The higher the score on preferred voice mechanism, the more collective voice is preferred and the lower the score on the preferred voice mechanism, the more individual voice is preferred.

The control variables job tenure and age were entered in step 1, explaining 0,4 % of the variance in preferred voice mechanism, but this model is not statistically significant. After adding the four independent variables in step 2, the total variance explained by the model as a whole was 13,8 %, $F(8, 152) = 3,051, p < .01$. The four independent variables explained an additional 13,4 % of the variance in preferred voice mechanism, after controlling for job tenure and age, R^2 change = .134, F change $(6,152) = 3,954, p < .01$. Based on model 2 presented in table 3, one can conclude that employees with a basic level of education ($\beta = .202, p = .05$) and employees with a higher or academic level of education ($\beta = .222, p = .05$) explain more variance in preferred voice mechanism versus employees with a secondary level of education. The size of the organization also proved to be significant ($\beta = .207, p < .01$). Because the data of this variable were not distributed equally, only organizations with less than 500 employees were included in the regression analysis. Level of autonomy also shows to be statistically significant ($\beta = -.231, p < .01$). The other independent variable, gender ($\beta = -.011$) was not statistically significant. Both control variables were also not statistically significant.

The first hypothesis, level of education has a direct effect on preferred voice mechanism, with higher levels of education relating to a preference for more individual voice mechanisms and with low levels of education relating to a preference for more collective voice mechanisms is partially confirmed. The results show that employees with a basic level of education do prefer more collective voice mechanisms compared to employees with a secondary level of education which is in line with the hypothesis, but it also shows that employees with a higher or academic level of education prefer more collective voice mechanisms compared to employees with a secondary level of education which is not in line with the hypothesis.

The second hypothesis, gender has a direct effect on preferred voice mechanism, with women preferring more collective voice mechanisms and men preferring more individual voice mechanisms can be rejected because of non significant results. The results show that there is no direct effect of gender on the preferred voice mechanism.

The third hypothesis, size of the organization has a direct effect on the preferred voice mechanism, with the larger the organization, the more employees prefer collective voice mechanisms and the smaller

the organization, the more employees prefer individual voice mechanisms can be confirmed based on the results in the regression analysis.

The fourth hypothesis, level of autonomy has a direct effect on the preferred voice mechanism, with employees with higher levels of autonomy relating to a preference for individual voice mechanisms and employees with lower levels of autonomy relating to a preference for collective voice mechanisms can be confirmed.

Table 3 - Hierarchical multiple regression predicting preferred voice mechanism

Scale	Step 1		Step 2	
	β	Std. Error	β	Std. Error
Job tenure	.074	.037	.029	.036
Age	-.061	.026	-.018	.025
Dummy elementary level of education			-.038	1.662
Dummy basic level of education			.202*	.608
Dummy higher level of education			.222*	.556
Gender			-.011	.496
Organizational size			.207**	.003
Level of autonomy			-.231**	.430
R ²		.004		.138
ΔR^2				.134**
F		0.309		3.051**

* Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Preferred voice mechanism in the different areas of workplace decision making

Some remarks can be made based on the frequencies for the areas of workplace decision-making. For example, it appears from table 4 that the majority of the employees prefer individual voice in consultation with their supervisor in the area decisions about how much salary increase employees in their unit or department receive (57,5 %). The same applies to the area dealing with your own problems regarding work, 76,3 % of the respondents answered this question with individual in consultation with my supervisor. A clear majority chose the option team meetings in the areas setting goals for your unit or department (75,3 %), decisions about how to work with new technology or software when needed (74,7 %) and dealing with general problems at work (76,7 %). Work council was preferred in the area decisions which need to be taken in a merger (52,3 %). It is remarkable that the option union was less preferred compared to the other options. The highest preference for union was only 21,2 % in the area

decisions about which secondary working conditions are offered to employees.

In hypothesis 5a is mentioned that it is expected that employees will prefer collective voice over individual voice in the areas of benefits and pay raise, but this hypothesis can be rejected based on the frequencies in table 4. Employees prefer individual voice in the area decisions about how much salary increase employees in their unit or department receive and they prefer team meetings in the area decisions about the benefits offered to employees. According to hypothesis 5b, it is expected that employees will prefer individual voice above collective voice in the areas of training, new equipment or software, setting goals, safety standards, deciding how to do the job and organize the work, setting work schedules. This hypothesis can also be rejected based on the frequencies table. One can conclude that hypothesis 5 can be rejected, since there are differences in the preference for individual or collective voice mechanisms in the different areas of workplace decision making, but the preferences showed to be different compared to the expectations in hypothesis 5a and 5b.

Table 4 – frequencies of the preferred voice mechanism in each area of workplace decision making

Area of workplace decision making	Individual, in concert with your supervisor	Team meetings	Work council	Union
Decisions about how your work is done and organized?	45.2 %	50.5 %	4 %	0.3 %
Decisions about which training is required for the people in your unit or department?	31.3 %	61.7 %	6.3 %	0.7 %
Determine work schedules, including breaks, overtime and leisure?	32.6 %	55.4 %	9.7 %	2.3 %
Deciding on the amount of salary increase the employees in your unit or department receive?	57.5 %	8.9 %	19.9 %	13.7 %
Setting goals for your unit or department?	16.4 %	75.3 %	8 %	0.3 %
Decisions about how to work with new equipment or software?	15.2 %	74.7 %	9.1 %	1 %
The determination of safety standards and safety performance?	9 %	60.2 %	25.3 %	5.5 %
Decisions about the benefits offered to the employees?	20.1 %	16.7 %	42 %	21.2 %
Decisions about big investments?	19.6 %	31.1 %	47 %	2.4 %
Decisions on the purchase and/or introduction of new technology?	17.4 %	46.6 %	34.9 %	1 %
Decisions to be taken in case of mergers?	13 %	17.9 %	52.3 %	16.8 %
Decisions to be taken in case of reorganization?	12 %	18 %	50.4 %	19.7 %
Addressing issues related to work?	76.3 %	17.3 %	3.7 %	2.7 %
Addressing common problems in the workplace?	14.4 %	76.7 %	7.2 %	1.7 %

To measure which voice mechanism is preferred over all the decision making areas together, points were assigned to the voice mechanisms and a total is calculated. The percentages of work council and union are taken together, because they both clearly represent collective voice. The voice mechanism with the highest percentage, received two points, the second highest received one point and the voice mechanism with the lowest score on the area received zero points. The results are presented in table 5 in the appendix. The results show that team meetings received most points (20) and therefore, team meetings can be mentioned as the most popular voice mechanism. The total of individual and collective voice are equal, they received the same amount of points (11), which means that no clear majority prefers individual above collective voice or the other way around in all the areas taken together. In table 5 can be seen that collective voice mechanisms received four times the two points indicating that that voice mechanism is preferred most in that area. Individual voice only received these two points twice, but ended on a second place in several areas. Looking at this table, some patterns can be noted. Employees prefer collective voice mechanisms most in the four items relating to more organizational broad decisions like

decisions about big investments, decisions on the purchase and/or introduction of new technology, decisions to be taken in case of mergers or reorganization. Only few employees prefer individual voice in these areas. This seems to be a logic results since these decisions are not on an individual level, these decisions are too big to be influenced by single employees. The preference for team meetings is obviously dominating in the first seven areas followed by a preference for individual voice. These areas are decisions about how your work is done and organized, which training is required, determining work schedules, setting goals, determination of safety standards and decisions about the amount of salary increase employees receive and new equipment or software. Collective voice mechanisms are only scarcely preferred in these areas.

Additional analysis

Hierarchical regression analysis

In this additional analysis, the effect of the additional variable trust in supervisor is measured with the use of hierarchical regression analysis. The variables presented in the graphical summary of hypotheses, explain only 13,8 percent of the variance in preferred voice mechanism. Because this percentage is low, an additional variable is added, to find out if this variable contribute more to the model than the current variables. The results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis with the extra variable trust in supervisor is presented in table 6. Step 1 and step 2 of this regression analysis are the same as in table 3. In step 3, the additional variable trust in supervisor is added. After adding this variable, the model explains an additional 2,6 % of the variance in preferred voice mechanism. The total variance explained by the model as a whole was, after controlling for the variables in model 2, increased to 16,4 %, $F(9,151) = 3.303, p < .01$. R squared change = .026, $F \text{ change}(1,151) = 4,718, p < .05$. The added variable trust in supervisor shows a significant coefficient ($\beta = -.167, p < .05$). This means that the more trust employees have in their supervisor, the more individual voice mechanisms they prefer and the less trust employees have in their supervisor, the more collective voice mechanisms they prefer.

Table 6 – Hierarchical multiple regression prediction preferred voice mechanism

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	β	S.E	β	S.E	β	S.E
Job tenure	-.074	.037	.092	.003	.025	.035
Age	-.061	.026	-.018	.002	-.015	.025
Dummy elementary level of education			-.038	.197	-.032	1.643
Dummy basic level of education			.202*	.060	.218*	.602
Dummy higher level of education			.222*	.061	.226**	.550
Gender			-.011	.060	-.010	.490
Organizational size			.207**	.000	.209**	.003
Level of autonomy			-.231**	.043	-.190*	.437
Trust in supervisor					-.167*	.431
R ²		.004		.138		.164
ΔR^2				.134**		.026*
F		.309		3.051**		3.303**

After measuring the direct effects of the additional variables, explorative measurements are performed to find moderating effects of the independent variables, but there are no significant interaction effects found.

Logistic regression analysis

In this additional analysis, direct logistic regression was performed to assess the impact of the four independent variables mentioned in the graphical summary of hypotheses (gender, level of education, size of the organization, and level of autonomy) on union membership after controlling for job tenure and age. The preference for union as a voice mechanism showed to be low, therefore, this additional logistic regression was performed to find out which variables mentioned in the theoretical framework influence if employees become member of a union or not. The full model containing these six predictors was statistically significant, $X^2(6, N = 274) = 38.195, p < .001$, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between respondents who are member of a union and respondents who are no member of a union. The model as a whole explained between 1.3 % (Cox and Snell R square) and 2.1 % (Nagelkerke R squared) of the variance in union membership, and correctly classified 82.1 % of cases. Table 7 shows that only three of the six independent variables made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model, namely job tenure, gender and size of the organization. Gender shows to be the strongest predictor of being a union member, recording an odds ratio of 2.19. This indicated that women were over two times more likely to be a member of a union than men. Organizational size is the second

strongest predictor of being a union member, recording an odds ratio of .999. This variable shows a negative B value, which means that an increase in the number of employees working in an organization will result in a decrease in the probability of being a union member. In other words, the bigger the organization, the fewer employees are member of a union. The same applies to job tenure. This variable recorded an odds ratio of .938 and a negative B value, which means that an increase in the number of years an employee works for the organization results in a decrease in the probability of being a union member.

Table 7 – Logistic regression predicting union membership

	B	S.E	Wald	df	p	Odds ratio	95,0 % C.I. for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Job tenure	-.064	.022	8.330	1	.004	.938	.898	.980
Age	-.016	.019	.716	1	.397	.984	.948	1.021
Gender	.782	.366	4.559	1	.033	2.186	1.066	4.482
Elementary level of education			.691	3	.875			
Basic level of education	.178	1,324	.018	1	.893	1.195	.089	16.017
Secondary level of education	.345	.468	.545	1	.461	1.412	.565	3.531
Higher level of education	.045	.414	.012	1	.913	1.046	.464	2.358
Organizational size	-.001	.000	9.009	1	.003	.999	.999	1.000
Level of autonomy	-.008	.299	.001	1	.979	.992	.552	1.782
Constant	2.659	1.233	4.651	1	.031	14.284		

Conclusion and discussion

This study is based on the book ‘What workers want’ by Freeman and Rogers (1999). They examined the influence gap in eight areas of workplace decision making. The influence gap is the difference between the influence employees want and the influence they really get. They found differences in the United States in the gap between the different areas of workplace decision making. The eight areas mentioned by Freeman and Rogers (1999) form the basis of this study. The eight areas of workplace decision making are benefits, pay raise, training, equipment or software, goals, safety standards, how to organize the work and work schedules. These eight areas are supplemented with four regular areas, namely big investments, technology, merger and reorganization. The aim of this study was to develop insight in the factors affecting the preference for an individual voice mechanism like direct

individual contact with a supervisor or a collective voice mechanism like a union or work council in different areas of workplace decision making. This study can be seen as a continuation of the research by Rogers and Freeman (1999) and as a deepening of the literature, because it was hardly explored which factors influence the preference for an individual or a collective voice mechanism to express their voice. Since voice influences for example job satisfaction (Holland, Pyman, Cooper, & Teicher, 2011) and productivity (Kim, MacDuffie, & Pil, 2010), it seems useful to deeper research about this topic. This study also shows which voice mechanism is preferred in each area of workplace decision making. This resulted in the following research question:

To what extent do individual and situational differences influence which voice mechanism is preferred and do the areas of workplace decision-making make a difference on the preference for individual or collective voice?

Data were collected cross sectional with the use of a questionnaire and resulted in a sample of 304 employees. Two of the five hypotheses are confirmed, one hypothesis is partially confirmed, and two hypotheses are rejected. Additional analyses were performed to complement the findings. The results are discussed below.

The direct effect of the level of education of employees on the preferred voice mechanism, with higher levels of education leading to a preference for individual voice and lower levels of education leading to a preference for collective voice (hypothesis 1) can be partially confirmed. This hypothesis was based on an article by LePine and Van Dyne (1998) on American employees. They found evidence that employees with higher levels of education are more able to recognize problems in the organization and come with a greater number of appropriate solutions, because those employees have more general knowledge compared to employees with lower levels of education. In this study was expected that those employees with a higher level of education are more able to find solutions for existing problems by themselves and therefore will prefer individual voice over collective voice and employees with a lower level of education are not able to come up with solutions by themselves and therefore, they will need a collective voice mechanism like a union or work council to support them. Employees with a basic level of education showed to prefer more collective voice mechanisms compared to employees with a secondary level of education and employees with a higher or academic level of education showed to prefer more collective voice mechanisms compared to employees with a secondary level of education. The first part of this finding is in line with the hypothesis, but this does not apply to the second part. A linear relationship was expected to show up, with employees with a secondary level of education scoring higher on this variable compared to employees with a higher or academic level of education. Therefore, this hypothesis can only be confirmed partially. Apparently, the relation between level of education and the preferred voice mechanism is more complex than previously thought (or non-linear).

The direct effect of gender on the preferred voice mechanism, with women preferring more collective voice mechanisms and men preferring more individual voice mechanisms (hypothesis 2) can be rejected because of non significant results in the hierarchical regression analysis. The assumption that women would prefer more collective voice mechanisms and men would prefer more individual voice mechanisms is not only based on the fact that union membership of women is increasing and union membership of men is decreasing. It is also based on a study by Belenky et al. (1997) who found that women have the feeling that they are often unheard in organizations when they act on their own, even when they have something important to say. The results of the logistic regression in the additional analysis showed that women were more likely to be a union member compared to men. The finding that more women are union member compared to men does not mean that they prefer more collective voice mechanisms, because only the collective voice mechanism union is measured (work council is not included) and this is not compared with individual voice mechanisms. The results of the logistic regression analysis with union member as the dependent variable is in line with hypothesis two, but it is not in line with the findings earlier in this study with preferred voice mechanism as the dependent variable.

The direct effect of organizational size on the preferred voice mechanism (hypothesis 3) can be confirmed by the data. According to this third hypothesis, it was expected that the size of the organization has a direct effect on the preferred voice mechanism, with larger organizations relating to a higher preference for collective voice and smaller organizations relating to a higher preference for individual voice. This expectation was based on findings by Brewster, Croucher, Wood, and Brookes (2007) who found that larger organizations prefer more formal forms of voice, like collective voice, and that smaller organizations prefer less formal voice mechanisms, like individual voice. Besides, according to Schnabel and Wagner (2007) and Windolf and Haas (1989) employees feel a higher need for protection and representation in larger organizations because of the bureaucratic rules in these organizations which prevent close interactions between the employee and the employer. The confirmation of the hypothesis is in line with research by Blanden, Machin, and Van Reenen (2006), and Roche (2001), who found that larger organizations are more likely to use collective voice mechanisms compared to small organizations.

The fourth hypothesis, which states that there is a direct effect of level of autonomy on the preferred voice mechanism, with higher levels of autonomy relating to more individual voice mechanisms and lower levels of autonomy relating to more collective voice mechanism can be confirmed. This hypothesis was based on a study by Tangirala and Ramanuam (2008) who found that a high level of autonomy increase the feeling that employees can resolve problems at the workplace by themselves, because of the clear connection they see between their personal actions and organizational outcomes. They also have the feeling that they can influence their work environment successfully by themselves

because of their high level of autonomy and therefore, it was assumed that those employees with a high level of autonomy would prefer an individual voice mechanism over a collective voice mechanism. For the further support of this hypothesis, a link was assumed to exist between level of autonomy and the position of the employee in the organization. Kassing and Avgtis (1999) found that employees in non-manager positions in the organization have a desire to speak, but those employees do not have the right abilities to express themselves effectively. It is expected that employees in non-manager positions have less autonomy compared to employees in manager positions. If employees lack the ability to express their voice, they are expected to use a collective voice mechanism to help them. The same applies the other way around, if employees are able to use their voice effectively, they are not expected to need a collective voice mechanism to support them, but they are expected to use an individual voice mechanism to express themselves. Additionally, when employees have a lot of autonomy, they have room to manage their own business and they can make individual decisions concerning their job. When one encounters certain limits, this will often be on an individual level instead of on a collective level. Therefore, the preference for individual voice is assumed to occur more often when an employee has a high level of autonomy. These suggestions are confirmed by the data.

In the fifth hypothesis it is expected to find differences in the preferred voice mechanism between the different areas of workplace decision making. Employees are expected to prefer collective voice in the areas of benefits and pay raise, and they will prefer individual voice in the areas of training, new equipment or software, setting goals, safety standards, deciding how to do the job and organize the work, setting work schedules. One can conclude that there are absolutely differences in the preference for a voice mechanism between the different areas, but not in the expected way. Therefore, this hypothesis can be rejected. One can wonder if these results have something to do with the interpretation since for example technology can be separated in large and small technology decisions which influences the response. The same applies to safety standards, these are determined at an individual level. It is remarkable that only few employees selected union as the preferred voice mechanism and the option team meetings showed to be very popular as voice mechanism. This also appears from the overall total of preference for a voice mechanism. Team meetings appear to be much more preferred compared to individual or collective voice mechanisms. Therefore it is recommended to continue the use of team meetings in the workplace. These meetings should be kept structurally, whereby employees can insert their comments or concerns. The option work council is also much more preferred than union. When employees have a preference for a collective voice mechanism, they mostly prefer the work council above the union. This is in line with numbers of the Central Bureau of Statistics, which show a decline in union membership in the last couple of years. Fewer employees want to be represented by a union. Only 21 percent of the employees with a job of at least twelve hours a week were member of a union in 2008, this

is a decrease compared to the period 1950 - 1980 in which 35 percent were union member. The numbers of 2010 also showed a further decline in union membership. The finding that a work council is preferred over a union can have several reasons. For example because the work council is close to the workplace, because it is represented by employees from the organization they work in. The work council is easily approachable for the same reason mentioned before; it is represented by employees of their own organization. This is in contrast with the union, which is represented by external employees. Besides, employees do not need to become member of the work council before making use of it; everyone in the organization can call on them. This is in contrast with the union, one needs to be a member of the union before using it. There are also costs involved with union membership; this can be a threshold to become a member. Another explanation for the weakened position of the union compared to the work council can be the visibility. Work councils are more visible in organizations in The Netherlands. Each organization with at least 50 employees is required to have its own work council. They are more involved in the organizations compared to the union which operates at a more national level and is more oriented at the employment policy. The union usually becomes visible when an organization performs poorly or in the case of reorganization.

The results mentioned above indicate that the independent variables in this study (level of education, gender, size of the organization, level of autonomy) explain little variance in the preferred voice mechanism. Therefore, an explorative additional analysis was performed to find out if other variables influence which voice mechanism is preferred. The variable used in this additional analysis is trust by supervisor and this variable was measured by colleagues from the partnership in which this study was performed. Trust in supervisor is exactly what it seems, it is about the trust employees have in their supervisor. An example question is if the supervisor treats employees with justice when they made a mistake or if the supervisor wants the best for the employees' future. An example of how a supervisor can gain trust is by sharing control with its employees (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998), which is related to giving employees a voice. Therefore a relation between trust in supervisor and the preference for a voice mechanism is expected. Trust in supervisor showed to be significant in the additional analysis. This means that the more trust employees have in their supervisor, the more individual voice mechanisms they prefer and employees will prefer more collective voice mechanisms when they have little trust in their supervisor.

This study found a remarkable limited position for the union. An additional analysis in the form of a logistic regression analysis was performed to measure which employees do want to be represented by a union. Job tenure, gender and the size of the organization appeared to have an effect on union membership. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, union membership of women increased fast in the last couple of years, but still two third of the union membership is men. This is not in line with the

results in this study, since the logistic regression showed that women were over two times more likely to become a union member compared to men. The same applies to size of the organization. The results indicate that the bigger the organization, the fewer employees are union member, which is the opposite of what was expected. For job tenure, the results show that an increase in the number of years an employee works for the organization results in a decrease in the probability of being a union member.

In this study, the dependent variable is measured with the use of four answering possibilities, namely individual in consultation with your supervisor, team meetings, work council or union. The option team meetings can be seen as an intermediate position, since it does not obvious represent individual voice or collective voice, but it represents an in between position.

Two of the five hypotheses in this study are confirmed and the other three hypotheses are partially confirmed or rejected. An explanation for these results can be found in the measuring of the dependent variable preferred voice mechanism. Twelve of the fourteen questions of the scale are based on the Representation and participation Survey (WRPS) in Freeman and Rogers (1999), but the remaining two questions are not based on an existing scale; these are added in this study. In addition, the response categories are also invented in this research, because the response categories of the existing scale are not able to measure the preferred voice mechanism. The influence wanted and the influence perceived could be measured with the existing categories, but not which voice mechanism is preferred. Since the preferred voice mechanism is the dependent variable, this can be an explanation for the rejection of four of the five hypotheses. Additionally, as mentioned before, this study is based on the study by Freeman and Rogers (1999), and their research in the United States. Freeman and Rogers (1999) responded to the situation in the United States with their questions, but since this study is conducted in The Netherlands, the differences in the context can be another explanation for the lack of results in this study. The situation in The Netherlands can be different compared to the United States and this may have led to the rejection of some hypothesis in this study. For example, it is possible that employees in the United States want a lot of voice in some specific areas of workplace decision making and employees in The Netherlands do not think having a voice in these areas is important.

The control variables used in this study were age and job tenure. Previous research showed a relation between these variables and the voice of employees (Landau, 2009), and therefore these variables were selected, but they showed to have no significant effect on the preferred voice mechanism in this study.

Limitations and implications for future research

In this research, team meetings serve as a in between option. It does not obvious represent individual or collective voice. This made it impossible to make a clear distinction between individual or

collective voice mechanisms. Wilkinson, Dundon, Marchinton and Ackers (2004) mentioned in their article that the new generation of employees seem to prefer a set of voice practices (both individual and collective) instead of exclusive voice practices (individual versus collective). The option to select both individual and collective voice was not allowed in this research. Therefore, it is recommended for future research to take the option 'both collective and individual voice' into account. Team meetings showed to be a very popular voice mechanism. It is also recommended for future research to expand the research about this voice mechanism and investigate how the effectiveness of this voice mechanism can be optimized.

This research only includes direct effects, but in all likelihood, there will also be indirect effects like moderators or mediators which influence the relation between the dependent and independent variables. Future research should take these other effects into account to deepen the understanding of the relation between these variables.

Only quantitative data were used in this study. For future research, it is recommended to include qualitative data to understand why employees prefer one voice mechanisms over another voice mechanism. This study only shows which factors influence which voice mechanism is preferred, it does not show why.

This research was intended to find which individual or situational factors influence if employees prefer individual or collective voice, but the variables in this study showed to have a small impact on the preferred voice mechanism. Future research should include much more variables to explore their influence on the preferred voice mechanism, for example employee personality. This study also did not measure why some people prefer individual or collective voice. Future research could investigate for which reason some employees prefer a collective voice mechanism and for which reason other employees prefer an individual voice mechanism. Besides, data should also be gathered in a longitudinal way instead of cross sectional to discover trends over the years.

Union membership showed to be less popular compared to the other voice mechanisms. It is recommended for future research to find reasons for the decrease in union membership. Once the reasons are explored, unions can anticipate to that to let the union membership rise again.

Practical implications

As previously mentioned, a relation has been found between the voice of employees and organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction (Holland, Pyman, Cooper, Teicher, 2011) and productivity (Kim, MacDuffie, Pil, 2010). This research examined some individual and situational factors which were expected to influence the preference for an individual or collective voice mechanism. Employers can benefit from the knowledge gained in this study, because now they know that employees

have a preference for an individual voice mechanism in certain areas of decision making and they prefer collective voice in other areas of decision making and they can respond to that by giving them the opportunity to participate in the preferred voice mechanism. If employees can use their voice in the way they prefer to, this will cause job satisfaction and an increase in productivity. According to Gruneberg (2010), job satisfaction will lead to higher productivity, higher profitability, less absenteeism and a decrease in turnover. All these outcomes can be positively affected by giving employees a voice in the way they prefer.

It is proved in this study that the use of team meetings is a very popular voice mechanism. Therefore, employers have to make sure that this form of voice is frequently available in the organization. The presence of team meetings in an organization will result in higher job satisfaction and productivity and in the end a higher profitability which will result in competitive advantage. Employees can share their different perspectives in an easy way during these team meetings. Sharing the perspectives of employees will have benefits for the organization, because the employees have different experiences with policies compared to management who develop the policies. This advantage can be achieved by all different voice mechanisms, not only by team meetings. Employees will feel appreciated and commitment will increase when their input is heard and actions are taken after their input.

Unions and works councils can also have advantage from this study since it showed in which areas those mechanisms are preferred and which employees want to be represented by a union. Work councils can react by giving additional attention to those specific areas in which employees prefer this voice mechanism, for example benefits offered to employees or decisions about big investments. The weakened position of the union can be improved by bringing the existence under attention to the employees and by showing the added value above a work council.

Besides the advantages for employers, unions and works councils mentioned above, this study is also an extension of the literature, since only scarce research was available about how employees prefer to express their voice. Additional, this study can serve as a starting point for future research about the voice of employees.

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Appendix

Table 1a – Factor loadings Autonomy

Scale	Component 1
1. Kunt u zelf bepalen hoe u uw werk uitvoert?	.830
2. Kunt u uw werk zelf indelen?	.827
3. Kunt u zelf bepalen hoeveel tijd u aan een bepaalde activiteit besteedt?	.797
4. Heeft u vrijheid bij het uitvoeren van uw werkzaamheden?	.782
Eigenvalue	2.618

Table 1b – Factor loadings Trust in supervisor

Scale	Component 1
1. Mijn leidinggevende heeft oog voor mijn belangen	.820
2. Mijn leidinggevende heeft het beste met mijn toekomst voor	.809
3. Mijn leidinggevende kan ik vrijelijk en zonder zorgen voor eventuele gevolgen benaderen over een voor mij lastig onderwerp	.769
4. Mijn leidinggevende behandelt me rechtvaardig als ik een fout heb gemaakt	.722
5. Mijn leidinggevende is realistisch genoeg om in te zien dat creatieve oplossingen verkeerd kunnen uitpakken	.658
6. Mijn leidinggevende merkt altijd aan mij wat ik echt van iets vind	.541
Eigenvalue	3.164

Table 5 – Points assigned to each voice mechanism

Area of workplace decision making	Individual, in concert with your supervisor	Team meetings	Work council or Union
Decisions about how your work is done and organized?	1	2	0
Decisions about which training is required for the people in your unit or department?	1	2	0
Determine work schedules, including breaks, overtime and leisure?	1	2	0
Deciding on the amount of salary increase the employees in your unit or department receive?	2	0	1
Setting goals for your unit or department?	1	2	0
Decisions about how to work with new equipment or software?	1	2	0
The determination of safety standards and safety performance?	0	2	1
Decisions about the benefits offered to the employees?	1	0	2
Decisions about big investments?	0	1	2
Decisions on the purchase and/or introduction of new technology?	0	2	1
Decisions to be taken in case of mergers?	0	1	2
Decisions to be taken in case of reorganization?	0	1	2
Addressing issues related to work?	2	1	0
Addressing common problems in the workplace?	1	2	0
Total	11	20	11