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The Agency to Implement Voice: How Target Hierarchical Position and Competence Changes the Relationship Between Voice and Individual Performance

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Abstract. Although voice is communication that is intended to benefit the performance of collectives, little is known about the benefits or costs to individual task performance and what mechanisms drive these effects. Our research offers new theory to articulate and illustrate the conditions under which voice has positive versus negative effects on individual task performance by directly acknowledging that employees have many options for where to direct their ideas. We introduce an agency perspective on voice by theorizing that one fundamental reason why employees speak up is to generate the implementation of corrective action for issues affecting themselves and to the extent targets of voice have agency to facilitate action through implementation of voice, voicing employees should be more likely to realize performance benefits from speaking up. In a first field study, we present evidence that two characteristics—the hierarchical position of the voice target (boss versus peer) and the competence of the voice target—alter the relationship between voice and the voicing employee's task performance. In a second field study, using an event-contingent design, we provide evidence of the unique mechanisms underlying how competent managers (via their resources) and competent peers (via their efficacy to act) affect how upward and sideways voices lead to idea implementation. We discuss the theoretical implications of these ideas and findings by highlighting how voice target characteristics influence not just the incidence of voice but also, its outcomes.

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Scholars have repeatedly argued that the performance of collectives (e.g., teams, divisions, or entire organizations) can improve if individual employees engage in voice—that is, if they speak up with improvement-oriented ideas to implement change (Hirschman 1970, Morrison and Milliken 2000, Morrison 2011, Detert et al. 2013). Indeed, in the period between 2008 and 2021, 49 of 57 scholarly voice articles explicitly cited the collective benefits stemming from employees exhibiting voice as a primary reason for studying the phenomenon.[1] This focus on collective performance benefits is logical for a behavior considered to be fundamentally prosocial (Van Dyne and LePine 1998, Organ et al. 2006, Grant and Mayer 2009). Voice involves making suggestions for change, which can surface innovative ideas that can help leaders reevaluate the status quo, integrate unique insights, and implement new routines to improve functioning (Detert et al. 2013). Such benefits can be seen in collective performance outcomes, like team creativity and making and implementing better quality decisions (De Dreu and West 2001), in addition to firm financial performance (MacKenzie et al. 2011). When employees speak up more often and contribute novel ideas that challenge existing practices, organizations can capture value that might otherwise go unrecognized (Pfeffer 1998). As a result, organizations that implement ideas generated from below can improve the performance of their core tasks, leading to the delivery of better services or the production of higher-quality products than is possible when issues go unresolved (Morrison 2011, 2014). Yet, although scholars point to the performance benefits of voice for the collective, far less attention has been devoted to understanding whether

and under what conditions voice leads to implementation of the suggested ideas and to changes in objective performance for the individual who speaks up.

In this paper, we explore the conditions under which voice leads to implementation of ideas and changes in objective performance specifically for those speaking up—a theoretically and practically critical question for two reasons. First, past theory on the individual outcomes of voice does not explain why speaking up may be more likely to impact the task performance of the specific individuals who do so more often. Most existing research on the individual performance outcomes of voice relies on theories of reciprocity to argue why managers respond to voice positively or negatively (Ng and Feldman 2012). Some studies have argued that supervisors reciprocate by rewarding prosocial, extrarole behaviors, like voice (Whiting et al. 2008, 2012). Hence, this stream of research has shown a positive relationship between voice and subjective ratings of performance (Van Dyne and LePine 1998). In contrast, other scholars have argued that because voice challenges the status quo, managers may retaliate through their influence on performance evaluations and career outcomes (Dutton et al. 1997, Seibert et al. 1999). The logic here is that because voice is potentially threatening to managers (Fast et al. 2014), supervisors may react negatively by questioning the loyalty of employees and consequently, rate their performance lower, even though the ideas suggested might improve objective metrics of performance (Burris 2012). Whether predicting positive or negative individual effects, this underlying mechanism of reciprocity does not help explain whether or why implementation occurs and if the individual speaking up benefits (or not) in terms of objective task performance. Indeed, a meta-analysis showing a corrected correlation of 0.59 for the relationship between voice and subjective performance also reported a nonsignificant correlation of 0.09 between voice and individual objective performance from the very few studies with these measures (Thomas et al. 2010). Presumably, employees who voice may be seen (un-)favorably, yet this is separate from whether their input actually leads to the implementation of changes that would affect performance. Thus, our understanding of the individual outcomes of voice remains limited, highlighting a need to extend current theory.

Second, the lack of findings for the direct effect of voice on individual task performance (Thomas et al. 2010) may also indicate that there are undetected moderators of this relationship that could provide insight into the conditions under which and the mechanisms through which voice predicts individual employees' performance. We argue that voice should impact individual performance, but the extent to which this impact is positive or negative likely depends on the targets' agency to affect change (Farh et al. 2020). In order to bring about change, voice requires assistance from others in the firm; if not, individuals would likely address the issue on their own rather than risk speaking up (Dutton et al. 1997, Detert and Burris 2007). We draw upon the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (Bandura 2006) to explain how the agency of voice targets affects whether implementation occurs, which in turn, can impact the task performance of the speaker. We argue that one form of agency stems from the voice target's position in the organizational hierarchy. Some voice targets (i.e., managers) hold formal positions of power that give them access to resources that afford greater agency over the environment than others not in formal positions of power (i.e., peers) (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978, Schunk and Zimmerman 1994, Bandura 1997). Other sources of agency are derived from individual characteristics, like competence, which can affect the efficacy to act and the quality of advice related to enacting change in the environment (Bandura 1998). We argue that a primary function of voice is to initiate change, and thus, the extent to which the targets of voice possess agency in the form of hierarchical position and/or competence, they will be better positioned to implement the ideas they receive through voice, thereby leading to improvement in the performance of the employee speaking up.

In sum, our research extends understanding of the individual outcomes of voice by offering theory to articulate why individuals engaging in voice may see varying levels of implementation and performance improvements or decrements. Additionally, by directly acknowledging that employees have many options for where to direct their ideas, we offer insights into the conditions under which voice leads to beneficial outcomes for the speaker, including idea implementation and improved individual task performance. We explain why two characteristics related to the agency of the specific targets—the hierarchical position of the target (boss versus peer) and the competence of the target—can alter the relationships between voice and objective outcomes for the speaker. Finally, we explain the unique mechanisms through which competent managers (resources) and competent peers (advice giving and efficacy to act) affect the implementation of employee voice.

To test our predictions about how the agency of voice targets influences the outcomes of voice for speakers, we employ a comprehensive approach by studying naturally occurring phenomena in the field and then, conducting a focused study offering insights into the proposed mechanisms driving these observed relationships (Chatman and Flynn 2005). First, using field data from sales employees of a United States-based insurance company—a setting where the task performance of sales teams can be precisely measured and attributed to individual associates—we examine the effect of target position and competence on the relationship between voice and individual task performance.

Second, using field data from a multiindustry sample of employees and their voice targets, we use an event-contingent design to track how the theorized characteristics of targets impact the implementation of voice. In doing so, we provide further evidence of the unique mechanisms underlying how target competence affects how upward versus sideways voice leads to implementation. Combined, our results support a more refined theory of the individual outcomes of voice as a function of targets' agency to implement change.

Theory and Hypotheses

Voice and Individual Task Performance

Employee voice, also called promotive (Liang et al. 2012) or constructive voice (Maynes and Podsakoff 2014), is similar in some ways to many other prosocial and extrarole behaviors. First, as with helping or altruism (George and Bettenhausen 1990), it has been described as a behavior intended to benefit the organization. Second, it is seen as a proactive, extrarole behavior in that it is voluntary rather than a requirement of a job (Van Dyne and LePine 1998). This is similar to other citizenship behaviors, including working late or volunteering for new assignments (Podsakoff et al. 2000). Much like these other proactive and extrarole behaviors (Seibert et al. 1999), voice should also impact the speaker's own objective performance. For voice to occur, issues must be identified in the first place, and people tend to proactively notice and attend to things in their environment to the extent that they affect their own well-being and interests (Kunda 1990). Part of this motivation to attend to information that personally affects oneself stems from incentives to achieve personal success and status (Davis et al. 1976) or to receive credit for proactively contributing ideas that spur group success (Stroebe et al. 1992). In a classic study, for example, managers solving a generic case study routinely identified problems that were related to their area of expertise—marketing professionals tended to use a marketing lens to solve problems, finance professionals employed a finance lens to solve the same issues, etc. (Dearborn and Simon 1958). Similarly for voice, employees first notice and then, speak up about issues that are personally meaningful (Ashford and Barton 2007), including ideas that relate to aspects of the job with which they identify strongly (Burris et al. 2017). Thus, the very impetus for voice—noticing opportunities for improvements—is more likely to be centered on issues that influence the speaker's own work tasks.

Yet, in other ways, voice is a unique behavior that is different from other prosocial and proactive actions because it is challenging and risky (Burris 2012). Employees are calculative in determining whether they should speak up at all or remain silent (Detert and Burris 2007), as they weigh whether the environment is psychologically safe (Ryan and Oestreich 1998, Edmondson 1999, Dutton et al. 2002). Employees also weigh the probability of successfully enacting change that would lead to performance improvements (Ashford et al. 1998). If employees feel that the likelihood of successful implementation of the issue they intend to raise is sufficiently low, they will likely remain silent (Detert and Treviño 2010). Thus, employees are more likely to bear the risks and begin to see the act of speaking up as a worthwhile endeavor to the degree that the issues raised, if implemented, will influence that employee's own performance (Ashford and Barton 2007).

More central to our theory, voice is also different from other prosocial and proactive behaviors as it arises because employees generally cannot resolve the issues they raise by themselves (Dutton et al. 1997, Detert and Burris 2007). To successfully address the idea(s) for change, the person speaking up usually requires some type of support from others. Because of this dependency, simply voicing an idea for change is not sufficient in generating successful implementation and associated performance improvements. Thus, the consequences of voice are not solely determined by the individual speaking up. Instead, individuals stand to benefit (or lose) by speaking up to the extent that others in the organization initiate action (or do not) to address the issue raised. This dependency on others to help initiate implementation means that characteristics of voice targets should also be critical in determining whether voice translates into action yielding performance benefits. Improvements may come to fruition to the extent that targets can initiate change within the organization based on the suggestions made by employees.

Voice Target Agency

The agentic perspective of social cognitive theory argues that people do not only influence their environment through their own means but seek valued outcomes through the exercise of proxy agency (Bandura 2001). Central to this perspective is the idea that no single individual has the power and resources to unilaterally enact influence in complex social systems. Instead, individuals work to enlist others who are more competent or who have access to greater resources to wield agency and power to act at their behest. Bandura (2001), for example, argued that people turn to proxies in areas where they desire influence, but "they have not developed the means to do so, they believe others can do it better, or they do not want to saddle themselves with the burdensome aspects that direct control entails" (Bandura 2001, p. 13). In short, successful functioning for most employees necessarily involves a reliance on the agency of proxies (i.e.,

others' influence) (Brandtstädter 1992). Consistent with this theory, we argue that voice targets serve as proxies whose agency influences whether others' ideas get implemented and whether performance improvements are generated for the speaker.

The agency of proxies—that is, their ability to impact their work environments, sway others to their points of view, and garner additional resources (Bandura 2001, Anderson and Kilduff 2009, Venkataramani and Tangirala 2010)—comes from two different sources (Bandura 1997, Schunk and Zimmerman 1994). The first source is formal authority within an organization's hierarchy (Giddens 1984). Persons in these roles control resources, such as equipment and organizational budgets; wield formal influence over groups of employees; and have control to impact work structures and routines. Second, agency stems from individual characteristics, like personal competence and efficacy (Bandura 2001). As Wood and Bandura (1989, p. 364) noted, "There is a difference between possessing skills and being able to use them well and consistently under difficult circumstances … People with the same skills may, therefore, perform poorly, adequately, or extraordinarily, depending on whether their self-beliefs of efficacy enhance or impair their motivation and problem-solving efforts."

Applying this theory to the context of employee voice, we argue that employees can generate change in the organization to benefit their own performance through the proxy agency of the targets. To the extent that the targets of voice possess or control resources and have capabilities to help facilitate desired action, voicing employees should be more likely to see their ideas implemented and realize distinct personal benefit (i.e., performance gains) from speaking up. If in contrast, speakers choose voice targets with limited agency to influence others and therefore, less capacity to address the ideas raised, their performance should be unchanged or may even decline because the problems (or latent opportunities) they have identified are likely to persist (remain untapped) (McClean et al. 2013). Thus, because voice requires assistance from others, the agency of targets is a critical factor in determining whether substantive action will be taken and if it is, how that action will ultimately affect the performance of the speaker.

In support of this line of argument, Detert et al. (2013) theorized that the power of the target of voice should impact how voice translates into business unit performance. They argued and found that as voice flowed to leaders—the people who have greater potential to take action—business unit performance benefited. In particular, they noted that leaders have access to resources and formal power to address the issues raised; they can realign these resources to facilitate improvements to the unit's functioning (Detert et al. 2013). "Thus, to the extent that formal decision makers within the unit have access to more information, insights, and suggestions from their employees, they should be better able to diagnose, plan, and execute actions to improve their unit's performance" (Detert et al. 2013, p. 639). In contrast, voicing to coworkers worsened unit performance because of peers' lack of power to address the issues. In addition to the lack of change, speaking to coworkers who are not empowered to address the issues may result in feelings of disillusionment and powerlessness.

We build on this theory in two ways. First, we extend the logic to explain why voice would impact individual performance, apart from explanations derived from improvements in the spillover of unit performance. Second and more importantly, we examine how and why an additional source of agency beyond the target's formal structural position within a hierarchy can further influence the critical outcomes for the employee engaging in voice. Specifically, we argue that among ideas voiced to targets of similar power (i.e., to different leaders or to different coworkers), there is likely wide variation in the extent to which ideas are ultimately enacted because other characteristics likely also determine how effective that target can be in deploying formal resources to enact change or in engaging in action to directly address the issue. As Detert et al. (2013) noted, "there are likely instances in which a higher-status peer is more able to take action directly," despite being at the same formal level of power (Detert et al. 2013, p. 657). We, therefore, examine how both (1) the target's positional power in the organizational hierarchy and (2) the competence of the target shape the relationship between voice and the individual performance outcomes for the speaker.

Target Hierarchical Position. Direct supervisors are a natural target for voice as they often represent the primary linking pin between an employee and the resources and decision-making power that are controlled at higher levels of the organization (Graen et al. 1977, Detert and Burris 2007). Speaking up to leaders, by definition, involves transmitting ideas to people in the organization who have more positional power and thus, provides employees with greater access to resources to address the issues raised; there is an increased probability that appropriate changes will ensue (Dutton and Ashford 1993, Detert et al. 2013, McClean et al. 2013). Armed with more resources afforded by their position, formal leaders have greater agency to enact change. Further, the changes that leaders can enact likely have greater scope and depth because of this hierarchical position.

This enhanced agency is critical as employees' acute awareness of the potential costs and benefits of speaking up to people in positions of formal power (Detert and Burris 2007) makes it more likely that the issues raised are of significant importance for the speaker

and the broader work group. That is, when a decision is made about speaking up, the potential performance gains must be both significant and sufficiently likely to occur in order to overcome the interpersonal risks inherent in speaking candidly to someone with more power (Morrison 2014). This is similar to the underlying logic in the help and information-seeking literatures, where scholars have found that individuals weigh the costs and benefits associated with seeking help and feedback on their individual problems (Lee 1997, Morrison and Vancouver 2000), especially when help is sought from experts, managers, and other high-power individuals (Hofmann et al. 2009). Thus, if employees seek help solving problems through voice to those with more power to address the issues raised, they are more likely to do so about issues that are highly relevant to their own performance rather than only or primarily of general benefit to the collectives of which they are members. As a result, the individual performance of the employees speaking up should be positively impacted when they speak up to formal leaders and action is taken by those leaders.

In contrast to speaking up to formal leaders, speaking sideways to coworkers will be less beneficial to performance. Peers often do not have any more access to resources or formal power than the speaker does, meaning they are unlikely able to take action by making policy changes or marshalling support in ways that would aid the speaker and others in their task performance (Magee and Galinsky 2008). Additionally, given their similarity in background and experience, peers are also often in no better position than the person who engages in voice to offer insights into how to navigate the problem within the status quo (Burt 2004). Continued discussions of ideas or problems without any resolution likely result in time wasted (Kowalski 1996) and reduce the likelihood that the original ideas get implemented (Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017). Because comparatively, peers lack enhanced agency in the form of additional resources or expertise to address the issue raised in relation to supervisors, we expect that speaking sideways to peers will, on average, result in lower implementation and associated performance compared with speaking up to supervisors.

Hypothesis 1. *The relationship between employee voice and task performance is contingent on the target. When the target is a manager, the relationship between employee voice and task performance is more positive than when the target is a peer.*

Target Competence. In addition to the positive influence afforded by formal authority, individual sources of agency, such as the competence of the target, can significantly alter the relationship between voice (both upward and sideways) and individual performance. Research across psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior has long identified competence as a fundamental person perception that describes why some people are more agentic, are more influential, and can enact greater change (Berger et al. 1977, Bandura 2001, Anderson and Kilduff 2009, Cuddy et al. 2011). One reason that competent individuals are better equipped to influence others is because they hold knowledge that other members of an organization value. That is, competent employees "possess resources of knowledge and skill that are of value to other team members, not only because those resources can help in the accomplishment of team tasks … but also because those resources—exchanged in the form of assistance and advice—can help individuals to accomplish their personal tasks" (van der Vegt et al. 2006, p. 879). Another reason why competent individuals are more influential is because they feel more efficacious to apply their expertise (Spreitzer 1995, Bandura 2001) and seek out opportunities to display their competence (Elliott and Dweck 1995). Thus, competent individuals generally possess a greater *ability* and *motivation* to influence their work environments (Wood and Bandura 1989). As a result, competence constitutes a source of influence within a group and tends to be associated with greater action (Berger et al. 1977, Littlepage et al. 1995). In regard to voice, competent targets may leverage this agency by more effectively applying their unique resources and capabilities to address ideas shared with them or by giving better advice on how others can craft an approach to address issues themselves.

Applying this logic specifically to situations where employees speak up to managers, we argue that the level of managers' competence likely impacts their ability and motivation to understand issues and apply the resources afforded by their hierarchical position to implement the suggestions provided by employees. Although managers in general have greater access to resources given their positional power, more competent managers have an increased personal capacity to devote these resources to effective uses (Wood and Bandura 1989, Mintzberg 2009). In the case of voice, competent managers can leverage their influence by directing resources in favor of the ideas voiced by employees, thereby improving the odds that the ideas are successfully implemented. Additionally, although some financial resources may be solely under the discretion of one manager, successful change or problem-solving offer requires political skill to marshal other types of resources or support. As Kanter (1988) noted, "[t]he features of successful ideas have more to do with the likelihood of gathering political support than with the likelihood of the idea to produce results" (Kanter 1988, p. 186). Ideas that are championed by influential organizational members are more likely

implemented (Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017). Thus, getting competent managers involved can help sell and implement the issues employees raise precisely because they can better obtain political support (Howard-Grenville 2007).

In contrast, when employees speak up to managers with limited competence, the potential for performance improvements is comparatively diminished. Although less competent managers may have access to financial or other resources, they do not possess the same motivation or ability to marshal such resources effectively. They may lack the interpersonal or political skills needed to fully muster the support necessary for implementation. Less competent managers are also less likely to recognize good ideas and are generally less receptive to voice from below precisely because of a hesitancy to implement the suggestions made (Fast et al. 2014). As a result, employees voicing to less competent managers face limits to their ability to realize performance gains because their managers lack the motivation and ability to successfully engage and implement their ideas.

In sum, although managers in general hold more formal power than their subordinates to enact changes, managers still differ in the agency needed to take an idea and put it into action in ways that might affect the performance of those who speak up. Because the personal relevance (to speakers) of the issues raised to managers is likely high, higher levels of manager competence make it likely that speakers will experience gains in performance.

Hypothesis 2. *Manager competence moderates the relationship between employee upward voice and task performance. When manager competence is higher, the relationship between employee upward voice and task performance is more positive.*

Additionally, we argue that peers who are more competent at their core job tasks should, as a result, be able to mitigate at least some of the negative effects for speakers who engage in sideways voice. Although peers do not have the same level of formal power and direct control of resources like those above them do, competent peers can often demonstrate agency in other ways. Competent peers are better able to influence change on their own because they feel more efficacious in applying their expertise (Elliott and Dweck 1995, Spreitzer 1995) and applying their knowledge to the task (van der Vegt et al. 2006) and are often given more opportunities to do so (Chen et al. 2012). As noted, competence also allows for an increased capacity to influence others through advice and increased efficacy to change their environment (Driskell et al. 1993, Spreitzer 1995). More competent employees are also more likely to provide more diagnostic and accurate advice to peers (Bunderson 2003). This advice could center on how to address an issue without needing to get someone with more power involved. Because of this increased capacity and motivation for action in higher competence peers, the ideas raised to these targets are more likely to be addressed and likely to produce positive outcomes for speakers.

In contrast, speaking sideways to less competent peers may only result in the receipt of poor advice and the attempted implementation of ill-fated counsel. Additionally, because less competent peers are less efficacious in enacting change on their own, speaking to them will be even less likely to result in substantial changes. Taking into account the thoughts of people who do not possess requisite skills or influence is likely to lead to a series of decisions or actions that are not conducive to bettering one's own performance. At a minimum, spending more time talking about problems or ideas without receiving useful feedback or action might diminish performance by taking time away from important tasks, increase the speaker's frustration, and further focus more attention on issues that cannot be resolved (Shapiro 1993). As a result, those without access to more competent peers are less likely to see their issues addressed in ways that improve their performance. They may even see their performance decline.

Hypothesis 3. *Peer competence moderates the relationship between employee sideways voice and task performance. When peer competence is higher, the relationship between employee sideways voice and task performance is more positive.*

Study 1

Study 1 describes a field study to test predictions about how competence influences the relationship between voice (upward and sideways) and task performance. For this study, we collected interview and quantitative survey data from sales employees of a large national insurance company headquartered in the United States. Salespeople within this company are responsible for selling insurance products to potential customers over the telephone. They typically work from a script for each call and enter customer information into their underwriting software to generate initial quotes for automobile and home insurance. Their sales calls are graded across several metrics (e.g., number of calls made, sales per call, etc.), which are translated into an overall measure of objective task performance. Employees work within groups of 10–15 other sales employees under the direction of a manager who administers training, coaching, and other human resource (HR) policies, like paid time off, and who oversees breaks and deals with problems during shifts. Although they are organized in teams and collaborate to share ideas for improvement, the core task of selling is completed

individually (i.e., there are no sales calls performed as teams). Studying sales employees, who are organized in teams, presents unique advantages for assessing our hypotheses; the performance of these sales employees is constructed from objective metrics (e.g., sales, time on the phone, number of potential clients called, etc.) that the company then also uses in aggregate to assess team performance.

Given the nature of insurance sales, it appeared to us at first that these sales employees worked largely independent of each other, as they placed calls to their own to individual customers. Thus, both to familiarize ourselves with this context and confirm the appropriateness of this sample for testing our hypotheses, we conducted interviews with 41 personnel in the sales function prior to collecting our survey data. Specifically, although the context provided the advantage of having very quantitative, objective performance metrics available, we wanted to (a) ensure that employees did, in fact, collaborate in ways that allowed for speaking sideways despite a context that seemed low in peer interdependence; (b) assess whether the targets of voice were selected based on the characteristics central to our predictions; and (c) assess who might benefit if individuals spoke up or sideways in this environment.

We asked informants questions about their voice behavior, including what they spoke up about and to whom, to determine whether this context was appropriate to test our theory. Individuals reported that they did target their voice to both supervisors and peers (upward and sideways), and we discerned that they were sometimes clearly guided by consideration of the target's competence and other times were not. Specifically, we found that individuals spoke upward (about 37% of voice episodes shared) and sideways (about 63% of voice episodes shared), which suggests that individuals in this organization do direct their voice to individuals of varying formal power, thereby reducing our initial concern about the independent nature of work in this context. Second, informants often cited competence when selecting targets. For example, one sales representative noted that she spoke sideways to those whose work she respects: "I know that they're high performers and they've been here a while and they have experience." Finally, we found that individuals within this context reported speaking up about issues that had personal impact that might affect their own work outcomes. Put simply by one sales representative: "Well if it's gonna affect me, I'll definitely speak up." Another salesperson discussing the possibility of speaking up about changing the script on sales calls noted, "And to me, it's like, listen, if I need something done for me, if it's gonna give me more sales, then I need to do it." In another example, one interviewee shared that "we were getting repeated copies of the same question," which resulted in twice the work and time to complete some sales. This certainly impacted her entire team, yet she further noted that "if I didn't correct the problem then it was going to be ongoing and it was gonna get bigger … and I [would be the one] to deal with it if it got bigger." In short, the data from our exploratory interviews suggest that employees in this sales context do speak up about things that are personally impactful and that their targets for voice do vary based on the targets' influence, including their formal position and their competence.

To quantitatively test our hypotheses, we sent surveys to 581 sales employees within the organization and received complete data from 227 employees, resulting in a response rate of 39%. Surveys were targeted to separate work groups such that none of the surveyed employees participated in our exploratory interviews. Our performance measure covers the three-month period following our survey. Of those who responded, the sample is approximately half male and half female (52% and 48%, respectively), and respondents had, on average, two years of experience at the company. The tenure, gender, team size, and individual- and team-level performance of respondents were not statistically different from nonrespondents.

To minimize common method and single-source problems associated with the data used to test our hypotheses (Podsakoff et al. 2003), we collected survey data from multiple respondents over multiple waves and used multiple types of data. For upward and sideways voice, we used a self-rated measure on our first survey. To assess the competence of peer targets, we used data from a second survey sent out two weeks later to multiple coworkers (and excluding the focal employee) to derive a more consensual rating of the dimensions of competence for each target of sideways voice. To assess manager competence, we sent a survey to managers' coworkers to derive a consensual rating using the same measure. For individual-level performance, we used the objective measure (i.e., the score that results from the company's weighting of multiple objective performance criteria) acquired from the company's HR department.

Measures

Upward Voice. We measured employees' *upward voice* (to their supervisor) using the three items ($\alpha = 0.89$) that comprise the Detert and Burris (2007) improvement-oriented voice scale. Respondents assessed their voice behavior using a five-point frequency scale ranging from one (almost never) to five (almost always). This measure is based on, but simplifies the language of, some items in the Van Dyne and LePine (1998) voice behavior scale. Items include "I speak up with ideas about doing things differently," "I give suggestions

about how to make this company better," and "I speak my mind about the way things are around here."

Sideways Voice. To measure *sideways voice*, each focal employee was given a survey that listed the names of all teammates. Employees were asked to rate how often they talked with each of their team members about improving efficiency or some new ideas for improving results on important outcomes (like sales volume, customer satisfaction, or employee morale). We again asked respondents to answer on a five-point frequency scale. To calculate the frequency of sideways voice for the focal employee, we then summed the ratings of voice to each teammate. Employees rated their voice to, on average, 11 other individuals.

Given our use of short and not entirely equivalent measures for assessing upward and sideways voice, we undertook a separate study to assess the convergent validity of these items with respect both to each other and to other extant measures of voice. As described in detail in Online Appendix 1, the four items we used to assess *upward voice* and *sideways voice* clearly load on a single factor in exploratory factor analyses. This suggests that despite using different items, we tapped the same underlying latent construct for voice to a specific target. Additionally, these four items demonstrate convergent validity with other extant scales of voice.

Upward and Sideways Voice Target Competence. We measured the *competence* of each manager by using ratings from managers' peers on two items ($r = 0.88$): "This employee is skilled at his/her job," and "[t]his employee does things competently." We created these two items based on the description of competence provided by Fiske et al. (2007) and the most directly relevant extant scale, the ability dimension of the Mayer and Davis (1999) trust scale (see Online Appendix 2 for additional construct validity evidence for this measure). The competence of Manager A, for example, was calculated by averaging the ratings provided by Managers B, C, D, etc. We calculated intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs; i.e., ICC(1) and ICC(2)) to assess the extent to which the variation in ratings of competence are attributable to the manager being rated and to assess the reliability of these ratings. The ICC(1) value was 0.11, and the ICC(2) value was 0.94, both above the suggested minimum cutoffs of 0.05 and 0.60, respectively (Bliese 2000). We followed a similar procedure for peer voice targets. Employees rated, on average, 11 other coworkers, and the ICC(1) value of 0.15 and the ICC(2) value of 0.70 were again both above the suggested minimum cutoffs.

Individual Performance. We measured *individual-level objective performance* using data provided by the company's HR department. The company uses this metric to inform decisions, such as base salary and promotions. Each individual is assessed based on the objective performance across the key outcomes of sales effectiveness (i.e., percentage of calls the individual turns into a sale), continuation rate (i.e., whether the sale stays on the books for a time period following the call), efficiency (i.e., length of time to make each sale), customer satisfaction (i.e., how satisfied the customer was with the sale process, a metric computed from data collected from customers), and cross-sell effectiveness (i.e., pursuit of additional product sales). These measures are combined into one objective measure of performance, which is then scaled by the company to range from one to four (where higher numbers mean better performance). We multiplied this metric by 100 to aid in the interpretation of the coefficients of our independent variables. Performance covers the three-month period following our collection of the independent variables. In interviews, senior managers suggested that this was the appropriate time frame for assessing the impact of voice in this environment because ideas and problems, if addressable, can be implemented and results observed quickly.

Control Variables. We used the recommendations laid out by Carlson and Wu (2012) to determine which control variables were appropriate for our models. They suggested that two of the primary purposes of control variables are to account for alternative explanations and to assess incremental prediction. Regarding the first purpose, we controlled for various individual-level factors that could affect performance or the relationship between voice and performance. First, we controlled for *gender* (male = 1, female = 0) because women are often treated differently than men. For example, men and women can be given different tasks or held to different standards (Ely and Thomas 2001), which in turn, can affect their performance, especially sales performance (McKay et al. 2008). Second, we controlled for dispositional characteristics related to personality and job attitudes. Because more proactive people engage in their task performance with more motivation and engage in the type of citizenship behaviors that are conducive to job performance, we controlled for *proactive personality* using a four-item measure ($\alpha = 0.94$) from Detert and Burris (2007). Example items include "[i]f I see something I don't like, I fix it" and "I am always looking for new ways to improve my life." We also controlled for job satisfaction with one item ("I am satisfied with my job") because it is known to affect individual job performance (Judge et al. 2001).

Second, we controlled for team factors that could influence individual performance, namely *team-level frequency of upward and sideways voice*. Prior research shows that teams where there is more upward voice perform better and more sideways voice perform worse

(Detert et al. 2013), so it is important in our case to control for the effect of being on a team with more upward or sideways voice because this could influence each individual's performance. Doing so allows us to tease apart the distinct performance effect attributable to the focal employee's voice, above and beyond how much others on the team voice. For team-level upward voice, we averaged the individual-level data for upward voice. For team-level sideways voice, we averaged the individual-level data for sideways voice.

Third, we controlled for *prior individual performance* to assess incremental prediction. We used the same performance measure as our dependent variable, computed for the three months prior to the month our independent variables were collected, including prior performance accounts for other sources of unobserved heterogeneity in employee performance.

Finally, we controlled for *team-level performance*. Because we hypothesize about the relationship between voice and individual-level performance, it is important to empirically tease apart the effect of voice above and beyond the performance effects for the team. It is possible that others within the speaker's team could benefit from the ideas suggested because the purpose of voice is inherently prosocial (Morrison 2014), so controlling for team-level performance provides a more precise test of whether the speaker stands to differentially benefit. For this measure, we averaged the individual-level data for performance across the team.

Analysis Strategy

In our data, we have three levels of analysis: the pattern of the focal employee's sideways voice to coworkers of various levels of competence (level 1) that is nested within the employee (level 2), which is nested within specific work teams led by different managers (level 3). These different levels of analysis present some unique challenges in how we perform our analyses and test our hypotheses. For example, although our analyses are conducted at the employee level when predicting performance, employees are nested within teams. Thus, for all hypotheses, we employed multilevel analyses to explicitly model the nonindependence resulting from team membership (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002).

In addition, whereas for Hypothesis 2 (namely, that the effect of upward voice on individual performance depends on the target manager's competence), we can use a traditional moderation approach (e.g., Aiken and West 1991), the fact that the set of sideways voice patterns is nested within employees creates difficulties in testing Hypothesis 3 using the same approach. Here, our "moderation" occurs at level 1 (the frequency with which employees speak sideways to coworkers who are more or less competent), and our dependent variable occurs at level 2 (the employee's individual performance). Currently available methods (i.e., traditional moderation) do not provide a clear means of testing a level 1 accentuating or attenuating force as a predictor of a level 2 outcome. Thus, we used a subgrouping strategy (Stone and Hollenbeck 1989, Stone-Romero and Anderson 1994) because it better accounts for the nuances of speaking sideways to individual coworkers with unique characteristics.

Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations of our Study 1 variables. To assess the convergent and discriminant validity of the job satisfaction, proactive personality, and voice measures obtained from employees, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (Bentler and Dudgeon 1996). We specified a three-factor structure, which the data fit well ($\chi^2(24) = 48.91$, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = 0.03) and significantly better than alternative models. In addition, all factor loadings were statistically significant.

We first examined the relationships between the control variables and individual-level performance. As Model (1) of Table 2 shows, these variables as a group significantly contribute to the model's explanatory power compared with the null model ($\Delta\chi^2$ (7) = 75.80, $p < 0.01$) and explain 22% of the variance in lagged objective task performance. In Hypothesis 1, we predicted that the effect of upward voice would be significantly more positively related to performance compared with sideways voice. To test this, we included the variables for upward and sideways voice. In Model (2), we included the variables for upward and sideways voice and find both to be significantly related to individuals' performance, albeit in different directions; upward voice is positively related to performance (unstandardized $\beta = 6.89$ [*standard error (SE)* = 3.28], $p < 0.05$), whereas sideways voice is negatively related to performance (unstandardized $\beta = -0.64$ [$SE = 0.29$], $p < 0.05$). Collectively, these variables significantly contribute to the model's explanatory power beyond the model with only control variables ($\Delta\chi^2 = 10.29$, $p < 0.01$) and explain an additional 2% of the variance in lagged performance. Next, to test whether the two coefficients are significantly different from each other, we conducted the linear hypothesis test in R. We find that the effect of upward voice on task performance is significantly more positively related to task performance compared with the effect of sideways voice ($X^2 = 4.84$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Next, as shown in Model (3), we used a traditional moderation approach to examine Hypothesis 2 and find that manager competence significantly influences the effect of speaking up on individual performance (unstandardized $\beta = 12.42$ [$SE = 5.35$], $p < 0.05$). We plotted this interaction (see Figure 1) and find that the

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

No.	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	*Gender*[a]	0.48	0.50												
2	*Proactive Personality*	6.01	1.12	−0.17**											
3	*Job Satisfaction*	5.43	1.46	0.07	0.14*										
4	*Team-Level Performance*	231.69	14.26	−0.01	0.02	−0.05									
5	*Team-Level Upward Voice*	3.56	0.34	−0.01	0.10	0.11	−0.10								
6	*Team-Level Sideways Voice*	16.99	4.18	−0.14*	0.14*	−0.03	−0.08	0.36**							
7	*Prior Individual Performance*	272.99	45.57	0.21**	0.06	0.06	0.22**	−0.05	−0.04						
8	*Upward Voice*	3.59	0.91	−0.04	0.26**	0.08	0.01	0.40**	0.14*	0.15*					
9	*Sideways Voice*	17.87	9.96	−0.07	0.04	−0.05	−0.02	0.14*	0.39**	−0.05	0.33**				
10	*Sideways Voice to Lower Competence*	9.24	9.35	−0.02	−0.06	−0.14*	−0.13	−0.18**	−0.13	−0.09	0.01	0.35**			
11	*Sideways Voice to Higher Competence*	12.40	8.51	0.03	0.09	0.11	0.04	0.33**	0.52**	−0.05	0.35**	0.71**	−0.11		
12	*Manager Competence*	4.00	0.48	−0.07	−0.03	0.06	0.29**	−0.10	−0.10	0.00	0.02	0.00	−0.01	0.09	
13	*Individual Performance*	232.04	41.82	0.17*	0.11	0.00	0.29**	0.02	0.05	0.42**	0.16*	−0.08	−0.22**	0.03	0.02

Note. $n = 227$.
[a]1 = male; 0 = female.
*$p < 0.05$ (two tailed); **$p < 0.01$ (two tailed).

form of the interaction is as predicted. The simple slopes are in the hypothesized directions, such that the impact of upward voice on individual-level performance is positive and significant for high-competence managers (unstandardized $\beta = 9.57$ [$SE = 3.61$], $p < 0.01$) but insignificant for low-competence managers (unstandardized $\beta = 2.50$ [$SE = 3.36$], *not significant*). Thus, we find support for Hypothesis 2.

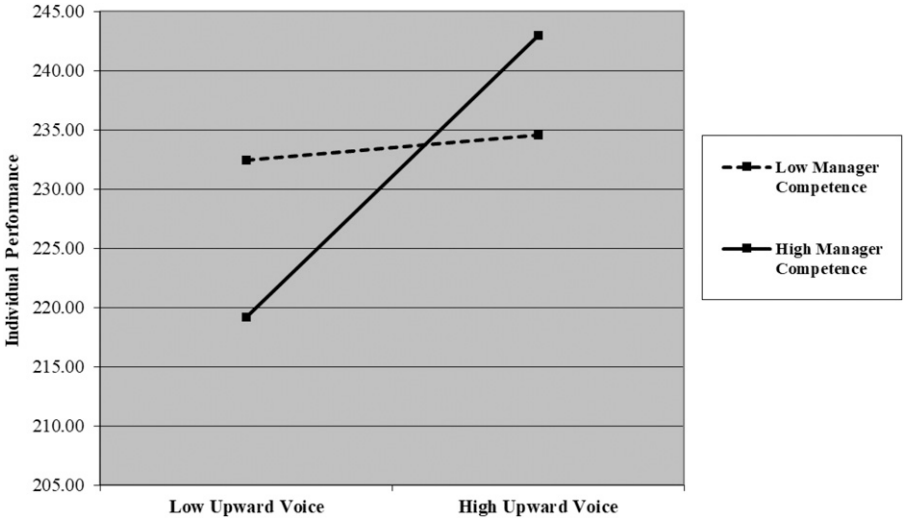
Next, as shown in Model (4), we used subgroup analysis to examine Hypothesis 3. This strategy requires creating subgroups based on the moderator variable scores and then, comparing the effect of each subgroup on the dependent variable. In our case, this strategy requires that we create subgroups based on peer targets' competence, calculate the frequency of sideways voice to members of each subgroup, and then, test for differential

Table 2. Multilevel Model Results for Individual Performance

	Model (1) Control variables	Model (2) Voice variables	Model (3) Upward to competent managers	Model (4) Sideways to competent peers
Intercept	123.28 (57.92)	123.80 (57.28)	294.70 (91.83)	149.88 (60.49)*
Control variables				
Gender	10.52 (5.19)*	10.94 (5.14)*	10.12 (5.12)*	11.36 (5.17)*
Proactive Personality	3.87 (2.30)	2.63 (2.34)	2.64 (2.33)	2.74 (2.33)
Job Satisfaction	−0.94 (1.72)	−1.09 (1.71)	−0.92 (1.70)	−1.37 (1.72)
Team-Level Average Upward Voice	2.97 (7.81)	−4.32 (8.48)	−3.48 (8.45)	−5.64 (8.48)
Team-Level Average Sideways Voice	0.75 (0.64)	1.40 (0.69)*	1.32 (0.69)	0.98 (0.73)
Team-Level Average Performance	0.64 (0.18)**	0.65 (0.18)**	0.70 (0.18)**	0.59 (0.18)**
Prior Individual Performance	0.32 (0.06)**	0.29 (0.06)**	0.28 (0.06)**	0.28 (0.06)**
Independent variables				
Upward Voice (Hypothesis 1)		6.89 (3.28)*	−42.54 (21.59)*	6.31 (3.24)*
Sideways Voice (Hypothesis 1)		−0.64 (0.29)*	−0.62 (0.28)*	
Moderator variables				
Manager Competence			−47.12 (19.89)*	
Interactions				
Upward Voice × *Manager Competence* (Hypothesis 2)			12.42 (5.35)*	
Subgroup analysis				
Sideways Voice to Lower Competence (Hypothesis 3)				−0.77 (0.27)**
Sideways Voice to Higher Competence (Hypothesis 3)				−0.34 (0.37)
Team-level variance[a]	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
−2 residual log likelihood	2,237.79	2,227.50	2,211.51	2,224.19
Δ−2 residual log likelihood	75.80**	10.29**	26.28**	13.60**
Pseudo-R^2	0.22	0.24	0.25	0.27

Notes. $n = 227$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented with the standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo-R^2 variance explained by each model is computed as the proportional reduction on the total variance of the dependent variables.
[a]Estimate of the random variance between teams.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Figure 1. Interaction Between Upward Voice and Manager Competence



effects on individual performance across the subgroups. We created two categories for competence based on the ratings provided by each individual's peers. Employees were placed in the low-competence category when their score was below the mean and into the high-competence category when their score was above the mean. We then summed the sideways voice to low- and high-competence peers. Using this strategy, we find that speaking sideways to low-competence peers significantly and negatively relates to individual-level performance (unstandardized $\beta = -0.77$ [$SE = 0.27$], $p < 0.01$), whereas speaking sideways to high-competence peers is not significantly related to individual-level performance (unstandardized $\beta = -0.34$ [$SE = 0.37$], *n.s.*). These results suggest that the negative effect of speaking sideways is mitigated by speaking sideways to more competent peers. Although these results do not technically provide support for Hypothesis 3 as we predicted the relationship between voice and performance would become more positive when voice is directed to competent peers (whereas we find that this relationship becomes less negative), the underlying pattern is consistent with the intuition of the hypothesis.

We also conducted three sets of supplemental analyses to increase confidence in our results. In the first set of analyses, we explored our hypotheses without control variables (Becker 2005, Carlson and Wu 2012). Some scholars have raised issues with the use of control variables in management and organization research (Becker 2005, Carlson and Wu 2012) and suggested that heightened awareness of the impact of control variables on the interpretation of results is warranted. In all cases, the direction and significance levels of our results remain the same.

In a second supplemental analysis, we assessed whether our results depend on how we model individual performance. In the analyses presented, we use individual performance as our dependent variable and account for team performance as a control variable. An alternative way to structure our models is to use team-centered individual performance (without a control for team performance). Team centering is a logical alternative because it can be easily interpreted in light of our theory about the effects of voice above and beyond team performance effects (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). Again, in all cases, our results remain substantively the same.

In a third set of analyses, we explored Hypothesis 3 using a traditional moderation approach (Aiken and West 1991). This approach requires us to analyze our data all at the employee level (level 2). It entails aggregating the level of competence of the peer targets of the focal employee's sideways voice. That is, for instance, we would calculate the average competence of all of the coworkers in the team to whom a focal employee voiced and multiply this by the level of sideways voice to all such targets. The independent variable (i.e., *Sideways Voice*) and moderator variable (i.e., *Team Competence*) would then both be at the employee level of analysis. This approach, although allowing for conventional modeling, does not capture whether each focal employee (level 2) is speaking sideways more or less often to the more competent people on the team (level 1). It, instead, only captures whether the focal employee is speaking sideways to all coworkers within a team who, on average, are more competent. Thus, we argue that this method would not be an accurate test because it cannot empirically capture the granularity of our theoretical arguments. That said, we explored the results using this method as part of our supplementary analyses.

To calculate the interaction variables using a traditional moderation approach, we aggregated (i.e., summed) the

ratings of competence for focal Employee A's voice targets (named "*Team Competence*") and then multiplied these variables by the level of sideways voice to all voice targets. Thus, the independent variable (i.e., Sideways *Voice*) and moderator variables (i.e., *Team Competence*) are all at the individual employee level of analysis. Using this approach, as expected, the interaction term between sideways voice and team members' average competence is not significant (unstandardized $\beta = 0.00$ [$SE = 0.01$], *n.s.*). These results suggest that speaking sideways more in a team with, on average, more competent members is not in itself sufficient for changing an individual speaker's performance.

In sum, in Study 1 we hypothesized and found preliminary evidence for the effect of speaking up and sideways on individual performance, including for how the competence of these targets influences these relationships. Although there are many benefits to the design and method used, a major limitation is that we could not unpack the mechanisms through which targets affect change. Our arguments underlying the relationship between voice and task performance centered on targets' ability to implement changes in the organization to address the issues raised. Further, based on the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (Bandura 2001), the mechanisms underlying proxy agency were argued to be a combination of both structural position and competence. Accordingly, our arguments focus on different mechanisms for competent managers (increased agency through the better use of resources derived from their formal power) versus competent coworkers (increased agency through increased efficacy and better advice given), yet we could not provide evidence for these proposed mechanisms.

In addition, although our design had desirable features, including a time-lagged dependent variable and a measure of prior performance (both of which are helpful in determining causal ordering), and measures obtained from multiple sources to help minimize single-source and common method biases, it is correlational in nature and cannot empirically show how target agency can help translate voice into action that results in improvements for the speaker. Finally, we note that the nature of the jobs in Study 1 was largely independent. As such, the impact of speaking up on individual task performance may be different for jobs in more interdependent contexts, where teasing apart one individual's performance from that of a group is more difficult. We, therefore, conducted a conceptual follow-on in a second study to examine, across a variety of jobs, (1) *implementation* as a focal dependent variable, (2) the effect of target competence on the relationships between each type of voice (upward and sideways) and implementation, and (3) the unique agency-related mechanisms proposed to underlie each relationship. We formally hypothesize the mechanisms for how manager versus peer competence influences the relationship between voice and idea implementation and report on the results of a study designed to test these predictions in an event-contingent study (c.f., Howard-Grenville 2007, Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017, Farh et al. 2020).

Study 2

We argued that for voice to translate into changes in performance, it must first generate implementation by or with the assistance of targets. This is inherently an influence process because voice targets must take steps to change the larger environment based on the speaker's suggestion (Farh et al. 2020). Our arguments thus far have rested on three potential mechanisms underlying this influence process: devoting resources, giving advice, and efficacy to act. In the case of managers, they can influence others through advice or acting on their knowledge, but the more role-specific mechanism through which managers enact their agency is through the devotion of resources (Detert et al. 2013). Further, as argued previously, competent managers can leverage these resources more effectively (Bandura 2001), which increases their ability to implement the ideas provided by employees. In contrast, incompetent managers may misuse resources or not align resources with other stakeholders to drive the implementation of employee ideas. Therefore, we predict the following.

Hypothesis 4. *Manager devotion of resources mediates the relationship between upward voice to more competent managers and idea implementation.*

We argued that speaking up to more competent peers is beneficial to individual performance because competence includes a greater ability to give useful advice (van der Vegt et al. 2006) and more efficacy in applying knowledge to act on an idea themselves (Bandura 2001), despite not having more formal power than the speaker. Given that getting advice to help develop an idea and having others champion an idea via their own actions are critical steps in the journey between generating an idea and its implementation (Perry-Smith and Mannucci 2017), directing voice to competent peers increases the likelihood that employees see their idea implemented. In contrast, incompetent peers are likely to offer less relevant advice or are less efficacious in generating useful action based on their knowledge (van der Vegt et al. 2006). As a result, they may be less likely to help implement the ideas offered by those who engage in voice. Thus, we predict the following.

Hypothesis 5 (a). *Peer advice giving mediates the relationship between sideways voice to more competent peers and idea implementation.*

Hypothesis 5 (b). *Peer efficacy mediates the relationship between sideways voice to more competent peers and idea implementation.*

Methods

Because we are interested in whether voice targets implemented the idea suggested to them, we collected data to first capture the details of voice events and then to track how the target subsequently responded (i.e., whether they worked to enact the idea). We used an online panels company (i.e., ROI Rocket[2]) to recruit employees to participate. Employees included those who worked full time in the United States across a variety of industries, including information technology, education, engineering, and healthcare. Because the sales jobs in Study 1 involved working largely independently of coworkers, for better generalizability of our results, we wanted to ensure that the sample for Study 2 included more variation in the level of interdependence required. In response to the question, "I work fairly independently of others in my work" (item adapted from Pearce and Gregersen 1991), the average among Study 2 participants is 2.160 (SD = 1.27) on a scale of 1 ("disagree") to 5 ("agree"). This suggests that employees in Study 2 were, on average, more likely to work *interdependently* than not.

We used an event-contingent design (Wheeler and Reis 1991, Mitchell et al. 2015, Liu et al. 2017), whereby we invited individuals to participate if they had engaged in voice to a manager or to a peer over the past work week but not yet had resolution on what, if anything, had been done to address the issue. This design—also referred to as a critical incident technique—is ideal when examining specific events and has been shown to be a valid approach for assessing reactions to specific events (Hershcovis 2011, Mitchell et al. 2015). To minimize recall bias that might shape the responses, best practices for this design suggest capturing the details of the event as close to its occurrence as possible and before any outcomes of the event are realized (Wheeler and Reis 1991).

Individuals were invited to recall an instance of speaking up to their boss *or* sideways to their peer. Individuals were selected into the study if they responded "yes" to the question, "Did you speak up about an idea for change to your boss (to your peer) within the last week?" If so, they were invited to complete the Time 1 survey. Participants were then asked to describe the specific idea that they spoke up or sideways about based on the following prompt: "Now, recall what the idea was that you thought about previously and the issue it was meant to address. Below, please use rich explanations (5–8 sentences) and not short phrases to describe the basic content of the issue and the specific idea you raised to your boss (to your peer). As you describe the idea below, please do so in a way that others could read your description and have a good grasp of the issue and idea presented." After providing details of the voice event, participants were asked to provide information about the competence of the target. Finally, we collected demographic information, including gender and tenure of participants.

We then sent a second survey to the voice target approximately two weeks after the voice event occurred to capture the specific actions taken as a result of receiving the voice provided by our participants. We used a two-week lag period because we wanted these targets to easily recall the voice event and be able to accurately respond with what actions they had taken. At the start of this survey, targets were told the following: "A few weeks ago, we surveyed one of your colleagues at work. He/she told us about a time that s/he spoke up about an idea to you." Then, we provided the speaker's name and exact written detail of the idea that was provided by the speaker in Time 1. Targets were asked whether they recalled the voice event, and if so, they continued on to evaluate their response to the idea. (If not, they were dismissed from the survey.) Both manager and peer targets were asked to evaluate the extent to which they *devoted resources*, *gave advice*, *or had the efficacy to enact the idea*. We also collected demographic information about the targets, including their gender and tenure. Simultaneously, the speakers were provided a second survey to evaluate whether, to their knowledge, change occurred after they spoke up, including their evaluation of the extent to which the target helped implement the idea.

ROI Rocket initially invited 1,670 people to participate. We received completed surveys from the speaker at both Times 1 and 2 for 231 participants. Of those speakers who completed both surveys, we were able to match 181 target surveys, including 87 managers and 94 peers, to create our dyad-level data set. This reflects a final dyad-level response rate of 11%. There were no significant differences regarding gender, tenure, or idea implementation between the participants whose target responded and those whose target did not.

Measures

All scales were rated on a five-point scale (from one equals "strongly disagree" to five equals "strongly agree").

Target Competence. We measured the competence of each target using ratings from the voice-providing employee using the Mayer and Davis (1999) six-item measure of ability (manager targets: $\alpha = 0.93$; peer targets: $\alpha = 0.91$; items: "This person is very capable of performing his/her job," "This person does things competently," "This person is known to be successful at the things he/she tries to do," "This person has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done," "This person has specialized capabilities that lead to high performance," and "This person is well qualified").

Resource Devotion. We measured the degree of resource devotion using ratings from the target with five items (manager targets: $\alpha = 0.91$; peer targets: $\alpha = 0.87$) based on the KEYS sufficient resources scale (Amabile et al. 1996). Items are "I enabled access to resources to act on this suggestion," "I helped obtain the adequate budget to address this suggestion," "I helped get time, materials, or information to act on this suggestion," "I helped navigate organizational politics to move this suggestion forward," and "I used my personal capital to advocate for this idea."

Advice Giving. We measured advice giving by each target using ratings from the target on two items (manager targets: $\alpha = 0.71$; peer targets: $\alpha = 0.77$) based on the Bamberger et al. (2017) instrumental help scale: "I gave advice or tangible assistance to this person," and "I lent an ear or counseled this person."

Efficacy to Act. We measured the perceived efficacy to act of each target using ratings from the target on three items based on the Liu et al. (2013) voice efficacy scale adapted to represent targets' ability to apply their knowledge to address the issue themselves (manager targets: $\alpha = 0.79$; peer targets: $\alpha = 0.84$; items: "I am confident in my ability to act upon this issue/idea," "I have enough skills and experience to act upon this issue/idea," and "I have the capabilities to take action to address the work-related issue/idea raised").

Idea Implementation. We measured idea implementation using ratings from the speaker using three items (manager targets: $\alpha = 0.88$; peer targets: $\alpha = 0.82$) based on Baer (2012): "This person helped approve this idea for further development," "This person helped transform this idea into a useable product/process/procedure," and "This person has successfully helped implement this idea."

Controls. We controlled for speaker, target, and idea characteristics to rule out alternative explanations for why each idea was or was not implemented. For the speaker and the target, we controlled for gender because this can affect how others respond to ideas for change (Howell et al. 2015, McClean et al. 2018). Additionally, tenure may impact the legitimacy of the speaker's ideas (Howell et al. 2015) or the target's ability to respond (Bunderson 2003). Finally, we controlled for the size/magnitude of the change as measured by the target because suggesting larger changes may impact the target's ability to respond independent of their competence level (Burris et al. 2017). Targets evaluated the following item on a five-point scale (from one equals extremely small to five equals extremely large): "How large a change did this person suggest?"

Results

Manager Target (Hypothesis 4). Table 3 shows the means, standard deviation, and correlations of our Study 2 variables for voice to the manager targets. To assess discriminant validity, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (Bentler and Dudgeon 1996). We specified a five-factor structure (i.e., target competence, resource devotion, advice giving, efficacy to act, and idea implementation), which the data fit reasonably ($\chi^2(142) = 239.44$, CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.07) and significantly better than alternative models with four or fewer factors. In addition, all factor loadings were significant.

In Hypothesis 4, we argued that the main reason why manager competence affects idea implementation is through resource devotion. Models (1) and (2) of Table 4 display the results for the effect of our control variables and manager competence on resource devotion. Per Model (2), a manager's competence is positively and significantly related to his or her devotion of resources (unstandardized $\beta = 0.33$ [$SE = 0.15$], $p < 0.05$). In contrast, a manager's competence is not significantly related to his or her advice giving (unstandardized

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for *Manager* Targets

No.	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	*Speaker Gender*[a]	1.49	0.50									
2	*Speaker Tenure*	9.13	6.93	−0.08								
3	*Target Gender*[a]	1.40	0.49	0.43**	0.10							
4	*Target Tenure*	12.26	9.59	0.10	0.39**	0.06						
5	*Size of Change*	3.94	1.08	0.00	−0.11	0.06	−0.03					
6	*Manager Competence*	4.45	0.69	0.22*	0.02	0.34**	0.13	0.20				
7	*Advice Giving*	4.14	0.72	0.06	−0.17	0.00	−0.08	0.21	0.03			
8	*Efficacy to Act*	4.45	0.54	0.06	0.06	0.09	0.20	0.11	0.05	0.40**		
9	*Resource Devotion*	3.93	0.93	0.04	−0.25**	−0.02	−0.10	0.27	0.24*	0.49**	0.51**	
10	*Idea Implementation*	4.20	0.94	0.28**	−0.07	0.20	−0.06	0.20	0.44**	0.42**	0.30**	0.60**

Note. $n = 87$.
[a]Male = 1, female = 2.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Table 4. Results for Manager Competence on Agency Mechanisms and Idea Implementation

	Resource devotion		Advice giving		Efficacy to act		Idea implementation		
	Model (1) Controls	Model (2) Manager competence	Model (3) Controls	Model (4) Manager competence	Model (5) Controls	Model (6) Manager competence	Model (7) Controls	Model (8) Manager competence	Model (9) Mechanisms
Intercept	3.35 (0.52)	2.31 (0.69)	3.71 (0.42)	3.75 (0.57)	4.13 (0.35)	3.98 (0.48)	2.67 (0.53)	0.96 (0.67)	−0.92 (0.84)
Control variables									
Speaker Gender[a]	0.09 (0.22)	0.04 (0.21)	0.08 (0.18)	0.08 (0.18)	0.12 (0.15)	0.12 (0.15)	0.49 (0.22)*	0.42 (0.21)*	0.38 (0.17)
Speaker Tenure	−0.03 (0.02)	−0.03 (0.02)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)
Target Gender	−0.08 (0.23)	−0.021 (0.23)	−0.003 (0.18)	0.00 (0.19)	0.03 (0.15)	0.00 (0.16)	0.14 (0.23)	−0.07 (0.22)	0.03 (0.18)
Target Tenure	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
Size of Change	0.21 (0.09)*	0.17 (0.09)	0.13 (0.08)$^{+}$	0.13 (0.08)$^{+}$	0.04 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	0.18 (0.09)$^{+}$	0.11 (0.09)	0.00 (0.07)
Independent variables									
Manager Competence (Hypothesis 4)		0.33 (0.15)*		−0.01 (0.12)		0.05 (0.10)		0.54 (0.15)**	0.40 (0.12)**
Mediators									
Resource Devotion (Hypothesis 4)									0.46 (0.11)**
Advice Giving									0.28 (0.12)*
Efficacy to Act									−0.06 (0.18)
F change	2.25^{+}	4.91*	1.17	0.01	0.42	0.21	2.50*	14.12**	14.66**
Adjusted R^2	0.07	0.11	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.21	0.48

Notes. $n = 87$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented with the standard errors in parentheses.
[a]Male = 1, female = 2.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; $^{+}p < 0.10$.

$\beta = -0.01$ [$SE = 0.12$], *n.s.*; see Model (4)) or reported efficacy to act (unstandardized $\beta = 0.05$, [$SE = 0.10$], *n.s*; see Model (6)). Next, we tested for the effect of manager resource devotion on idea implementation. Models (7) and (8) display the results for the controls and manager competence on idea implementation. Model (9) shows that manager resource devotion is positively and significantly related to idea implementation (unstandardized $\beta = 0.46$ [$SE = 0.11$], $p < 0.01$) above and beyond our control variables and the other potential mechanisms (advice giving and efficacy to act).

To test the hypothesized mediating effects, we estimated the indirect effects of manager competence on idea implementation through resource devotion and its corresponding bootstrapped confidence intervals using the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2017, model 4). We allowed all three agency variables (i.e., potential mediating mechanisms) to covary in our analysis and found that the indirect effect of manager competence on idea implementation is positive and significant through his or her resource devotion (unstandardized $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.15$ [$SE = 0.08$], 95% Confidence Interval (CI) [0.01, 0.33]) but not advice giving (unstandardized $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.00$ [$SE = 0.04$], 95% CI [−0.07, 0.08]) or efficacy to act (unstandardized $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.00$ [$SE = 0.02$], 95% CI [−0.07, 0.05]). Thus, although both manager advice giving and resource devotion are associated with idea implementation, only resource devotion explains the relationship between manager competence and idea implementation. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Peer Target (Hypotheses 5, (a) and (b)). Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of our variables for the sample involving a voice episode to peer targets. To assess discriminant validity, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (Bentler and Dudgeon 1996). We specified a five-factor structure (i.e., target competence, resource devotion, advice giving, efficacy to act, and idea implementation), which the data fit reasonably ($\chi^2(142) = 270.39$, CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.07) and significantly better than alternative models with fewer factors. In addition, all factor loadings were significant.

In Hypotheses 5, (a) and (b), we argued that the mechanisms through which peer competence affects idea implementation are peers' advice giving and perceived efficacy to act. Models (3)–(6) of Table 6 display the results for the effect of our control variables and peer competence on his or her advice giving and efficacy to act. Per Models (4) and (6), peer competence is positively and significantly related to his or her advice giving (unstandardized $\beta = 0.30$ [$SE = 0.13$], $p < 0.05$) and efficacy to act (unstandardized $\beta = 0.48$ [$SE = 0.11$], $p < 0.01$). In contrast, peer competence is not significantly related to his or her resource devotion (unstandardized $\beta = 0.23$ [$SE = 0.14$], *n.s.*; see Model (2)). Next, we tested for the effect of peer advice giving and efficacy to act on idea implementation. Models (7) and (8) display the results for the controls and peer competence on idea implementation. Model (9) shows that after including all control variables, peer efficacy to act is positively and significantly related to idea implementation

Table 5. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for *Peer* Targets

No.	Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	*Speaker Gender*[a]	1.53	0.50									
2	*Speaker Tenure*	8.83	7.43	−0.08								
3	*Target Gender*[a]	1.45	0.50	0.40**	0.09							
4	*Target Tenure*	10.07	7.20	0.25**	0.14	0.17						
5	*Size of Change*	3.99	1.00	0.14	0.17	−0.10	−0.03					
6	*Peer Competence*	4.47	0.58	0.26*	−0.12	0.40**	0.09	0.09				
7	*Advice Giving*	4.34	0.69	0.21*	−0.06	0.02	0.12	0.27**	0.27**			
8	*Efficacy to Act*	4.43	0.61	0.21*	0.11	0.15	0.14	0.37**	0.41**	0.31**		
9	*Resource Devotion*	4.03	0.88	0.21*	0.07	0.12	−0.07	0.57**	0.25*	0.19	0.45**	
10	*Idea Implementation*	4.29	0.73	0.19	−0.01	0.09	0.09	0.18	0.43**	0.21*	0.49**	0.57**

Note. $n = 94$.
[a]Male = 1, female = 2.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

(unstandardized $\beta = 0.25$ [$SE = 0.11$], $p < 0.05$), but advice giving is not (unstandardized $\beta = 0.03$ [$SE = 0.09$], *n.s.*).

To test the hypothesized mediating effects, we estimated the indirect effects of peer competence on idea implementation via advice giving and efficacy to act and these effects' corresponding bootstrapped confidence intervals using the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2017, model 4). We allowed all three agency variables to covary in our analysis and found that the indirect effect of peer competence on idea implementation is positive and significant through his or her efficacy to act (unstandardized $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.12$ [$SE = 0.07$], 95% CI [0.002, 0.29]) but not advice giving (unstandardized $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.001$ [$SE = 0.03$], 95% CI [−0.05, 0.10]) or resource devotion (unstandardized $\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.11$ [$SE = 0.08$], 95% CI [−0.04, 0.30]). Thus, Hypothesis 5(b) was supported, but Hypothesis 5(a) was not.

Discussion

The findings from Study 2 shed light on the mechanisms through which target competence affects how speaking up and speaking sideways affect subsequent idea implementation. As predicted, we found that manager competence is positively related to idea implementation via their ability to devote resources to the idea. On the other hand, although competent peers may give more advice and be better able to respond to

Table 6. Results for Peer Competence on Mechanisms and Idea Implementation

	Resource devotion		Advice giving		Efficacy to act		Idea implementation		
	Model (1) Controls	Model (2) Peer competence	Model (3) Controls	Model (4) Peer competence	Model (5) Controls	Model (6) Peer competence	Model (7) Controls	Model (8) Peer competence	Model (9) Mechanisms
Intercept	1.53 (0.41)	0.76 (0.63)	3.34 (0.38)	2.34 (0.57)	3.09 (0.35)	1.47 (0.47)	3.45 (0.41)	1.51 (0.58)	0.71 (0.54)
Control variables									
Speaker Gender[a]	0.19 (0.17)	0.16 (0.17)	0.26 (0.16)	0.23 (0.16)	0.06 (0.15)	0.01 (0.13)	0.21 (0.17)	0.15 (0.16)	0.06 (0.13)
Speaker Tenure	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Target Gender	0.25 (0.17)	0.15 (0.18)	−0.07 (0.16)	−0.21 (0.17)	0.20 (0.14)	−0.02 (0.13)	0.04 (0.17)	−0.21 (0.17)	−0.28 (0.14)
Target Tenure	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Size of Change	0.50 (0.08)**	0.48 (0.08)**	0.18 (0.07)*	0.15 (0.07)*	0.22 (0.06)**	0.18 (0.06)**	0.11 (0.08)	0.07 (0.07)	−0.22 (0.07)*
Independent variables									
Peer Competence (Hypothesis 5)		0.23 (0.14)		0.30 (0.13)*		0.48 (0.11)**		0.57 (0.13)**	0.33 (0.12)*
Mediators									
Resource Devotion									0.48 (0.08)**
Advice Giving (Hypothesis 5)									0.03 (0.09)
Efficacy to Act (Hypothesis 5)									0.25 (0.11)*
F change	10.16**	2.62	2.56*	5.22*	3.15*	18.34**	1.16	18.60**	15.97**
Adjusted R^2	0.33	0.34	0.08	0.12	0.10	0.25	0.01	0.17	0.46

Notes. $n = 94$. Unstandardized coefficients are presented with the standard errors in parentheses.
[a]Male = 1, female = 2.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

others' ideas themselves, our indirect effect tests suggest that their competence only affects idea implementation via their efficacy to act; merely giving advice was not instrumentally beneficial in the same way.

General Discussion

Prior research has characterized voice as a prosocial behavior that primarily benefits some collective (e.g., Van Dyne and LePine 1998, MacKenzie et al. 2011, McClean et al. 2013). Our research extends this work by showing that voice is related to the outcomes of the individual speaking up, but the direction and magnitude of this relationship are contingent on specific characteristics related to the types and use of agency by different targets. Specifically, we find that targets' formal positional power within the organizational hierarchy influences the voice-performance relationship such that not only does speaking up to one's direct boss lead to more positive performance outcomes than speaking sideways to peers but also, speaking sideways generally worsens individual performance. We also show that the competence of voice targets further explains the relationship between voice and speaker performance; speaking up to more competent managers enhances the positive relationship between voice and individual performance, and speaking sideways to more competent peers mitigates the generally negative effect of sideways voice. We argued that the reason for the positive effects of speaking to competent targets is through their increased ability to take action and implement the ideas suggested to them. In a second study, we provide evidence of this type of agency by demonstrating that competent managers are better at devoting resources compared with less competent managers, increasing their ability to implement ideas brought to them by subordinates. In contrast, competent peers have increased efficacy to act on their own compared with less competent peers, meaning they are more able to make change despite not having any more formal power than the peers who bring them ideas. In sum, we find (a) that voice impacts the speaker's own objective performance, even after accounting for collective gains; (b) that these effects vary depending on two characteristics related to voice targets' agency (their formal position and their competence); and (c) that the agency of targets does in fact affect their ability to take action and implement the ideas suggested to them.

Theoretical Implications

Our research makes several contributions to the literature on voice. Over the last several decades, significant progress has been made in identifying the outcomes of voice (Morrison 2011). Current theories explaining these outcomes of voice rely on arguments centering on reciprocity—noting that some receiving voice might reward those who speak up with elevated performance ratings (Van Dyne and LePine 1998), whereas those who feel challenged by voice might enact negative consequences on those speaking up (Seibert et al. 1999). Yet, whether people react to voice in a defensive, threatened manner or in a way that reflects a comfort in receiving critical feedback (Burris 2012, Fast et al. 2014), the impact of these subjective judgments may be distinct from whether implementation or action steps occur that result in objective performance improvements (Thomas et al. 2010). Further, these theories do not account for the variance in performance as a function of the targets to whom employees direct their voice. Our research extends current understanding of the outcomes of voice by highlighting the conditions under which the individual speaking up is likely to fare better or worse. We theorized that the benefits (or costs) accrued as a result of engaging in voice depend on the types of agency demonstrated by the target. Our research thus highlights how identifiable characteristics of voice targets have a marked impact on how those who speak up see their efforts translate into objective performance. In highlighting the role of the targets of improvement-oriented voice, our work extends research by explaining how the characteristics of targets might influence not only collective or target outcomes but also, outcomes for the speaker himself or herself.

In particular, we drew on theories of agency to explain how individual speakers can experience distinct personal benefit as a function of engaging in voice, provided that they choose their targets wisely. We argued that one fundamental reason why employees speak up is to generate some corrective action for problems affecting themselves and others, and so, to the extent that the targets of voice have the agency to facilitate that action, voicing employees should be more likely to realize personal benefit from speaking up. For instance, in line with past research, we found that targets in positions of higher structural power within the organizational hierarchy can use greater decision authority and control over resources to convert ideas from employees below them into substantive action, especially in contrast to peer voice targets who have no more structural power than the speaker (Detert and Burris 2007). Extending this research, we also found that among ideas voiced to targets at any level, the agency stemming from the target's competence further shapes the relationship between voice and the individual performance outcomes for the speaker. Our research illuminates how the target's agency to implement change is a function of characteristics that extend beyond formal power and resources.

Such a perspective on target agency extends prior research on the important characteristics of the targets of voice that elicit voice behavior. For example, prior

research has examined the role of leader openness (Dutton et al. 2002, Detert and Burris 2007), inclusiveness (Nembhard and Edmondson 2006), or general attitudes toward dissent (Morrison and Milliken 2000) as antecedents to subordinate voice. Additionally, prior work has noted that peers' emotions help employees assess whether the social context is favorable to speak up (Liu et al. 2015). Yet, far fewer studies have focused on how target characteristics, whether they be leader or nonleader targets, can shape whether employees realize positive outcomes *after* they exhibit voice (e.g., Chiaburu et al. 2015). For instance, whereas some research treats speaking to leader and nonleader targets very similarly (LePine and Van Dyne 1998, Liu et al. 2010), more recent work has started to theorize stark differences in the dynamics and outcomes of speaking sideways versus speaking up (Detert et al. 2013). In doing so, our research highlights the importance of examining target ability and motivation to enact change as a critical factor in whether individuals benefit from speaking up.

Finally, our research sheds light on the specific—and different—mechanisms through which competent targets of upward versus sideways voice are able to more successfully implement ideas from employees. Past research has long noted the impact that competence has on members of organizations. Competent employees contribute greater knowledge that is valued by other organizational members (van der Vegt et al. 2006), contribute more in teams (Littlepage et al. 1995), and leverage the prestige accompanying expertise to influence others (Berger et al. 1977). Yet, our studies reveal that individuals at different hierarchical levels within an organization leverage their competence in different ways to enact changes suggested by employees; competent managers implement employee ideas most prominently through the devotion of formal and political resources, whereas competent peers are better equipped to apply their knowledge within their more limited formal sphere of control to change their environment. Our results thus not only extend current research on the outcomes of voice directed to managers versus peers (Detert et al. 2013) by highlighting how ideas voiced to targets of similar power can result in different outcomes depending on the informal power of the targets but also, inform theories of competence by showing how individuals with different levels of formal power can leverage their competence to influence decisions and outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted. For example, despite our ability to control for employees' prior levels of performance in Study 1 and our use of an event-contingent design in Study 2, we still cannot fully rule out the possibility of reverse causality. For instance, it could still be the case that the better-performing employees tend to seek out more competent managers and peers. Although an examination of the correlations in Table 1 does not suggest this to be the case (e.g., prior performance is not associated with speaking sideways to more competent peers ($r = -0.05$, *n.s.*)), future research could explore these relationships over multiple time periods to fully understand how the characteristics of targets of voice and subsequent speaker performance relate to one another. Additionally, although we have controlled for many possible alternative explanations and conducted a second study to shed light on some of the mechanisms underlying the implementation of voice, there could be other factors that explain both the propensity of individuals to speak up to different targets and overall performance. For instance, we argued that one reason why the frequency of voice to peers has a less positive impact on individual performance compared with upward voice is the amount of time spent (wasted) talking to peers with no greater power to take action, yet we did not measure this specifically.

Other limitations and needs for future research arise from the context-specific nature of our empirical setting in Study 1 and in particular, our dependent variable. Although the job role and industry in Study 1 allowed us to use specific, objective metrics of employee performance, which make it statistically possible to examine individual performance, we acknowledge that the benefits or costs of speaking up may be materially different in many other environments, where some or all of performance assessment is determined more subjectively, or in more interdependent contexts, where teasing apart one individual's performance from that of a group is more difficult. In cases where the tasks are more interdependent, the impact of voice for the individual may not extend as much beyond the impact on the larger group. Further, the impact of speaking sideways to peers may be demonstratively more positive because any performance benefits would depend on those individuals changing their behavior. Correspondingly, speaking sideways to competent peers may even generate positive outcomes for individual performance, not just mitigating negative performance outcomes. In addition, where metrics for assessing objective performance are not readily available or included prominently in overall evaluation, speaking up to bosses—who can, for example, get offended and angry and allow those emotional responses to negatively affect performance judgments (e.g., Seibert et al. 1999, Burris 2012)—may not be positively related to the overall evaluations employees receive. Of course, even where performance is objectively determined, negative boss reactions could result in bosses limiting the resources they allocate to addressing the issues raised. Thus, despite Study 2 using a more diverse sample of

employees and job contexts, future research that assesses multiple types of employee outcomes simultaneously in different contexts is needed, as is research that takes each voice episode as the unit of analysis, to further delineate the outcomes of speaking up and sideways for both individuals and their respective teams.

Practical Implications and Conclusions

Our research highlights an oft-ignored reality in discussions about the pros and cons of voice—namely, that employees seek to solve problems or exploit opportunities for improvement not only because doing so might positively influence the broader organization or others but also, because doing so can be directly and distinctly beneficial for their own performance. This, in turn, makes voicing to the right targets—those most able to actually help address the issues raised—also highly important personally for speakers themselves. Our research suggests that employees should target their voice as much as possible to those with more formal power, especially when they have highly competent managers. In contrast, employees should think twice about the time they spend speaking sideways to targets with no more power than themselves to fix underlying impediments to performance. Also, because there are inevitably occasions and reasons to speak sideways, employees should be urged to choose their most competent peers—those coworkers who are most able to apply their knowledge to help get ideas implemented.

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Endnotes

[1] We reviewed voice articles published between 2008 and 2021 in the following journals: *Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Applied Psychology, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes,* and *Organization Science*.

[2] ROI Rocket is an online panels company similar to Qualtrics Panels that recruits and validates participants for research purposes. Unlike other online recruitment platforms (e.g., MTurk), ROI Rocket maintains a proprietary database of potential respondents and uses various methods to validate participants identities. We chose this recruitment strategy because we wanted to recruit employee-voice target dyads across a variety of industries.

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