The Power of Employee Voice: A Key to Building a Culture of Ethics and Engagement in the Workplace

Kazeem Adebayo Oladimeji

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria

Correspondence Email: oladimeji.ka1@gmail.com

Abstract: This study investigated the relationship between employee voice, ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and engagement in the public service. Using a purposive sampling technique of 125 employees as samples from five selected ministries and agencies in the Kwara State Civil Service in Nigeria, a questionnaire was administered and analysed using Structural Equation Modelling—Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The study found that employee voice positively influenced ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and employee engagement. Ethical behaviour, in turn, had a positive effect on employee commitment and engagement. The study also revealed that employee commitment partially mediated the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement. The results suggest that empowering employees to speak up and provide feedback on ethical issues can lead to a greater sense of commitment and engagement. The study recommends that organisations prioritise ethical behaviour and integrity in their operations, provide training and support to help employees feel more comfortable speaking up, and create a culture of transparency and accountability. The study also highlights the importance of promoting employee commitment to improve employee engagement through professional development opportunities, recognition and rewards, and a supportive work environment.

Keywords: Employee Voice, Ethical Behaviour, Employee Engagement, Employee Commitment, Public Service

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Introduction

In today's highly competitive and dynamic business environment, organisational success depends on attracting, retaining, and engaging talented employees. Employee engagement is a critical factor in achieving organizational goals and objectives, as it has been linked to higher productivity levels, job satisfaction, and employee retention (Bin & Shmailan, 2015). To enhance employee engagement, organisations must create a positive work environment that fosters a sense of commitment and engagement among employees. Ethical behaviour is another critical factor in creating such an environment, positively influencing employee commitment and engagement (Afsar et al., 2020).

Research has shown that ethical behaviour in the workplace is a crucial factor in promoting employee engagement. Ethical behaviour is a set of moral principles that guide behaviour in a given context, and it encompasses aspects such as honesty, integrity, and fairness. Organisations that prioritise ethical behaviour create a positive work environment that fosters a sense of commitment and engagement among employees (Biddison et al., 2016). While the relationship between ethical behaviour and employee engagement has been established in previous research, much is still to be learned about the mechanisms through which this relationship operates (Abu-Shamaa et al., 2015; Lu et al., 2016). One potential mechanism that has received increasing attention in recent years is employee voice, which refers to the extent to which employees are willing and able to express their opinions and ideas within the organisation (Jena et al., 2017).

Employee voice has been shown to have a number of benefits for organizations, including improved decision-making, more significant innovation, and increased employee engagement (Farndale et al., 2011). Employee voice, or the ability of employees to provide input and feedback on organizational issues, has also been linked to higher levels of employee commitment and engagement (Milliken et al., 2003). Employee voice can help to identify and address ethical concerns, promote a sense of ownership and empowerment among employees, and enhance their commitment to the organisation (Hameed & Waheed, 2011; Morrison, 2023). Therefore, the relationship between employee voice, ethical behaviour, and employee commitment and engagement is greatly interesting to organisational management.

There is a dearth of research on this issue in the Nigerian context, particularly in the public sector. The majority of the studies on employee voice are in the private sector context, such as those by Akinwale (2019), Oruh and Mordi (2016), and Iloekwe (2022). However, only a few are reported in the public sector. The Nigerian public sector has been plagued by numerous ethical issues, including corruption, embezzlement, and fraud (Oyedele et al., 2017). These issues have led to a lack of trust and confidence in the public sector, which has undermined its effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, it is important to examine the relationship between employee voice, ethical behaviour, and employee commitment and engagement in the Nigerian public sector to identify strategies for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between

employee voice, ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and engagement in the Kwara State Civil Service in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: What is the relationship between employee voice and ethical behaviour in the Kwara State Civil Service? What is the relationship between ethical behaviour and employee commitment and engagement in the Kwara State Civil Service? And to what extent does employee commitment mediate the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement in the Kwara State Civil Service?

The findings of this study have important implications for organisational management in the Nigerian public sector and beyond. By identifying the factors that influence ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and engagement, this study can help organisations create a positive work environment that fosters employee engagement and enhances organisational effectiveness and efficiency. Furthermore, the study can contribute to the existing literature on employee voice, ethical behaviour, and employee commitment and engagement, particularly in the African context.

Theoretical Background

The study of employee voice and its impact on ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and engagement is within the larger organisational behaviour framework and human resource management. The concept of employee voice refers to the extent to which employees can express their opinions, ideas, and concerns within the organisation (Morrison, 2023). This concept is often linked to employee empowerment, participation, and involvement, as well as organisational citizenship behaviour (Milliken et al.,

2003; Morrison, 2023). Specifically, this study is linked to several theoretical perspectives, including social exchange, stakeholder, and ethical leadership theories.

Social exchange theory posits that individuals engage in social exchanges in which they give and receive benefits and that these exchanges can influence their attitudes and behaviours (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Shiau & Luo, 2012). In the workplace, social exchange theory suggests that employees are more likely to engage in positive behaviours when they feel their contributions are valued and recognised (Shiau & Luo, 2012). Stakeholder theory emphasises the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders, including employees, in organisational decision-making processes (Hasnas, 2013; Reynolds et al., 2006). This theory suggests that organisations are responsible for creating value not only for their shareholders but also for their employees, customers, suppliers, and the broader community. While ethical leadership theory focuses on the role of leaders in promoting ethical behaviour within organisations (Oladimeji & Abdulkareem, 2022). This theory suggests that leaders who display ethical behaviour and values are more likely to create a culture of ethical behaviour and motivate employees to act ethically (Oladimeji & Abdulkareem, 2022; Shareef & Atan, 2018).

The study of employee voice and ethical behaviour is relevant to the above theoretical perspectives. Employee voice is related to social exchange theory, as it suggests that employees who feel valued and recognised are more likely to engage in positive behaviours, including ethical behaviour. Additionally, employee voice is linked to stakeholder theory, as it emphasizes the importance of considering

the interests of employees in organizational decision-making processes. More so, ethical leadership theory is also relevant to the study. It suggests that leaders who promote ethical behaviour and values are more likely to create a culture of ethical behaviour and motivate employees to act ethically.

The study also relates to the broader framework of organisational behaviour and human resource management. The employee voice is an important aspect of employee engagement, which is critical for organisational success. When employees feel their opinions and concerns are heard, they are more likely to be committed to the organization and engaged in their work. Additionally, ethical behaviour is essential for creating a positive work environment and promoting employee motivation and commitment. Furthermore, this study provides insights into the mechanisms through which employee voice can promote ethical behaviour and employee commitment and engagement. By empowering employees to speak up and express their opinions, organisations can identify and address ethical issues, creating a culture of ethical behaviour. This, in turn, can increase employee commitment and engagement, as employees are more likely to feel valued and recognised within the organization. The study also highlights the importance of creating a positive work environment that fosters employee voice and ethical behaviour, which can benefit both the organisation and its employees.

Hypothesis formation

Based on the theoretical background and research questions, a conceptual model is drawn as shown in Figure 1, which suggests that employee voice positively affects ethical behaviour and employee commitment, which in turn positively affects employee engagement. Additionally, employee commitment is hypothesised to mediate the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement, while ethical behaviour is hypothesised to mediate the relationship between employee voice and employee commitment.

H1: Employee voice has a positive effect on ethical behaviour in organisations.

H2: Employee voice has a positive effect on employee commitment in organisations.

H3: Employee voice has a positive effect on employee engagement in organisations.

H4: Ethical behaviour has a positive effect on employee commitment in organisations.

H5: Ethical behaviour has a positive effect on employee engagement in organisations.

H6: Employee commitment mediates the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement in organisations.

H7: Ethical behaviour mediates the relationship between employee voice and employee commitment in organisations.
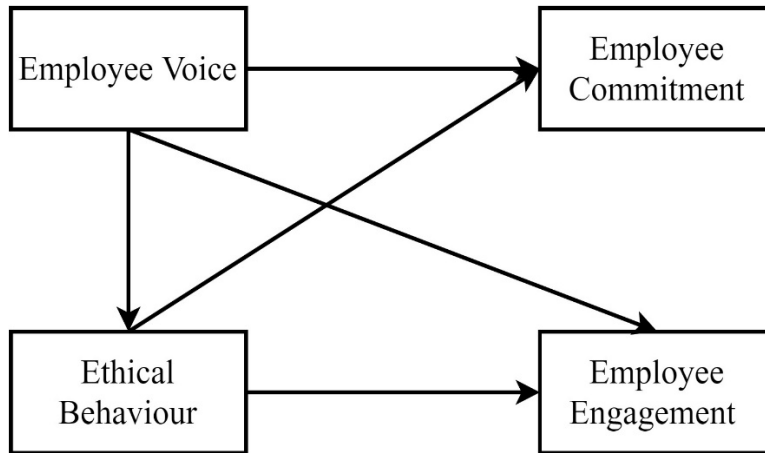
Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Methodology

The methodology for this study involved a quantitative research design using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to examine the relationship between employee voice and ethical behaviour in the workplace, as well as its impact on employee commitment and engagement. The study used a purposive sampling technique to select a sample of 125 employees from five ministries and agencies in the Kwara State Civil Service. The purposive sampling technique was used because the study focused on a specific population: Kwara State Civil Service employees.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the selected employees. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section gathered demographic information, while the second section assessed the level of employee voice in the workplace with three items adapted from Milliken et al. (2003). The third section measured the organisation's ethical behaviour, which consists of four questionnaire items adapted from Treviño et al. (2006), and the fourth section evaluated employee commitment (three items) and engagement (four items) adapted from Allen and Meyer (1996) and Schaufeli et al. (2002), respectively. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale to rate the responses, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Content validation of the questionnaire was carried out by four public administration experts. The experts reviewed the questionnaire for clarity, relevance, and consistency with the study's objectives. The experts provided feedback, which was used to revise and improve the questionnaire. A pilot study was conducted with 17 respondents to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The pilot study aimed to identify potential issues with the questionnaire and ensure respondents understood the questions. Based on the results of the pilot study, minor revisions were made to the questionnaire.

The collected data was analysed using Structural Equation Modelling—Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS software. This technique was suitable for analysing the relationships between latent variables and manifest variables in a model, making it an appropriate choice for this study. The analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved the assessment of the measurement model, while the second

stage involved testing the structural model to determine the relationship between employee voice, ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and engagement.

The study employed a quantitative research design using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to investigate the relationship between employee voice and ethical behaviour in the workplace and its impact on employee commitment and engagement. The study included a sample of 125 employees from five ministries and agencies in the Kwara State Civil Service, selected through a purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of 64% male and 36% female employees, with the majority of participants (65%) falling between the ages of 30 and 45. The majority of participants (71%) had worked in their

current position for more than five years and had spent more than ten years in public service.

The measurement model was assessed through factor loadings, convergent validity, and composite reliability. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating that the items measured their intended constructs. The convergent validity and composite reliability were within acceptable ranges, indicating that the constructs were reliable and valid. Also, the discriminant validity was evaluated, with the results indicating that the HTMT values were below the 0.9 benchmark. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are no discriminant validity issues in the data set.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Ethical Behaviour					
I believe that my organization operates with honesty and integrity.	EB1	0.83	0.77	0.84	0.57
I feel that my organization treats employees fairly and equitably.	EB2	0.93			
I am confident that my organization follows ethical principles in its business practices	EB3	0.68			
I am willing to report unethical behavior if I witness it	EB4	0.52			
Employee Commitment					
I plan to stay with this organization for the foreseeable future.	EC1	0.83	0.79	0.88	0.70
I feel a strong emotional attachment to this organization.	EC2	0.89			
I am willing to put in extra effort to help this organization achieve its goals.	EC3	0.78			
Employee Engagement					
I am proud to work for this organization.	EE1	0.78	0.86	0.90	0.70
I feel a strong sense of commitment to my job.	EE2	0.86			
I am motivated to go above and beyond what is expected of me in my job.	EE3	0.87			

I am enthusiastic about my job and my organization	EE4	0.83			
Employee Voice					
I feel comfortable expressing my opinions and ideas at work.	EV1	0.90	0.81	0.89	0.72
I am encouraged to share my thoughts and suggestions about work-related issues.	EV2	0.84			
My supervisor listens to and acts on my feedback.	EV3	0.82			

Table 2: Discriminant Validity

	Employee Commitment	**Employee Engagement**	**Employee Voice**
Employee Commitment			
Employee Engagement	0.77		
Employee Voice	0.50	0.59	
Ethical Behaviour	0.60	0.46	0.34

The structural model was developed to test the relationships among employee voice, ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and employee engagement in organizations. The model included seven hypotheses. The results of the analysis showed that employee voice had a significant positive effect on ethical behaviour (β = 0.33, t = 3.36, p < 0.01), employee commitment (β = 0.27, t = 3.42, p < 0.01), and employee engagement (β = 0.40, t = 5.23, p < 0.01). Ethical behaviour also had a significant positive effect on employee commitment (β = 0.47, t = 8.27, p < 0.01) and employee engagement (β = 0.31, t = 3.39, p < 0.01). The structural model also tested the mediating effects of employee commitment and ethical behaviour. The results showed that employee commitment partially mediated the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement (β = 0.14, t = 3.39, p < 0.01), while ethical behaviour partially mediated the relationship between employee voice and employee commitment (β = 0.15, t = 2.90, p < 0.01). The coefficient of determination (R^2) result showed that employee commitment is explained by 38% of the total variance while employee engagement is explained by 34%, which implied that employee voice and ethical behaviour in organizations explain a substantial amount of variances of employee commitment and engagement.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing

Relationships	β	T-value	P-value <	Decision
H1: Employee Voice -> Ethical Behaviour	0.33	3.36	0.01	Supported
H2: Employee Voice -> Employee Commitment	0.27	3.42	0.01	Supported
H3: Employee Voice -> Employee Engagement	0.40	5.23	0.01	Supported
H4: Ethical behaviour -> Employee Commitment	0.47	8.27	0.01	Supported

H5: Ethical Behaviour -> Employee Engagement	0.31	3.78	0.01	Supported
H6: Employee Voice -> Employee Commitment -> Employee Engagement	0.14	3.39	0.01	Supported
H7: Employee Voice -> Ethical Behaviour -> Employee Commitment	0.15	2.90	0.01	Supported

R^2: Employee Commitment = 0.379 Employee Engagement = 0.337

Result and Discussion

The results of this study provide important insights into the relationships among employee voice, ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and employee engagement in rganizations. The findings suggest that employee voice significantly promotes ethical behaviour, employee commitment, and employee engagement. These results are consistent with the theoretical background, highlighting the importance of employee voice in promoting ethical behaviour and creating a positive work environment.

One of the key implications of this study is that organisations should empower their employees to speak up and provide feedback on ethical issues. This can help identify and address ethical concerns and create a culture of transparency and accountability. Organisations can also provide training and support to help employees feel more comfortable speaking up and providing feedback. Organisations that encourage employee voice and feedback on ethical issues will likely create a work environment that fosters open communication, transparency, and accountability (Jiang & Men, 2017; Men & Stacks, 2014). Empowering employees to speak up and provide feedback enables the organisation to identify and address ethical concerns and helps create a culture that values and respects employee input (Zhu et al., 2004). This, in turn, can lead to improved employee satisfaction and engagement, as employees feel that their voices are being heard and making a meaningful contribution to the organization.

In order to effectively promote employee voice and feedback, organisations need to offer guidance and assistance to help employees feel at ease expressing their opinions. This may involve establishing transparent communication channels, like suggestion boxes or frequent town hall meetings, and implementing confidential reporting systems for employees who may feel apprehensive about speaking up due to concerns about retaliation or negative outcomes. Additionally, organisations should offer training on ethical behaviour and decision-making and on how to communicate effectively and resolve conflicts.

The findings of this study further demonstrate that ethical behaviour is a key factor in promoting employee commitment and engagement. When employees perceive that the organisation operates ethically and morally, they are more likely to feel proud of their affiliation with the organisation and be committed to its goals and values (Oladimeji & Abdulkareem, 2022; Shareef & Atan, 2018). This is because employees view ethical behaviour as an indicator of the organisation's trustworthiness and reliability. Given the importance of ethical behaviour in promoting employee commitment and engagement,

organisations must prioritise ethical behaviour and integrity. This includes developing a code of ethics that guides the behaviour of all employees, from top-level executives to entry-level staff. The code of ethics should be communicated to all employees and reinforced through regular training and discussion.

In addition to creating a code of ethics, organisations should ensure that employees know the importance of ethical behaviour. This can be achieved through training programmes that focus on ethical decision-making and the consequences of unethical behaviour (Klopotan et al., 2020). Organisations need to create an environment in which employees feel comfortable reporting ethical breaches and feel confident that they will not face retaliation for doing so. When organisations prioritise ethical behaviour, it sends a message to employees that the organisation values integrity and ethical decision-making (Klopotan et al., 2020). This can positively impact employee morale, satisfaction, and engagement. In turn, this can lead to improved productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced organisational performance (Sawad & Andrews, 2021; Weatherly, 2021).

The results of this study indicate that employee commitment plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement. In other words, when employees are given a voice and encouraged to provide feedback on ethical issues, they are more likely to be committed to the organization, which, in turn, leads to higher levels of engagement (Zheng et al., 2021). This finding has important implications for organisational management. It highlights the importance of focusing on promoting employee commitment as a means of improving

employee engagement. Organisations can achieve this by providing opportunities for professional development, such as training programmes, mentorship, and career advancement opportunities. When employees see that the organisation is invested in their growth and development, they are more likely to be committed to the organisation's goals and values.

Recognition and rewards are also important in promoting employee commitment. Organisations can recognise outstanding performance through awards, bonuses, or promotions (Asaari et al., 2019; Jeni et al., 2020). This not only incentivizes employees to perform at their best but also demonstrates that the organisation values and appreciates their contributions. Also, creating a supportive work environment is another important factor in promoting employee commitment. This includes providing a safe and healthy work environment, promoting work-life balance, and fostering positive employee relationships. When employees feel supported and valued in their work environment, they are more likely to be committed to the organisation and to contribute to its success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the role of employee voice in promoting ethical behaviour in organisations and its impact on employee commitment and engagement. The results indicate that when employees are empowered to speak up and provide feedback on ethical issues, it can lead to greater commitment and engagement, ultimately contributing to the organisation's success.

The study has also highlighted the importance of ethical behaviour in promoting employee commitment and engagement. Organisations prioritising

ethical behaviour and integrity in their operations are more likely to create a positive work environment and foster a sense of employee pride and loyalty. The finding that employee commitment partially mediates the relationship between employee voice and employee engagement has important implications for organisational management. Organisations should promote employee commitment by providing opportunities for professional development, recognition, and rewards and creating a supportive work environment. By doing so, they can improve employee engagement and ultimately enhance organisational performance.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The data was collected using a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causality. Additionally, the study was limited to a sample of employees from the Kwara State Civil Service in Nigeria, which may limit generalizability to other settings. Future research could build on these findings by using a longitudinal design to examine the causal relationships between employee voice, ethical behaviour, commitment, and engagement. It could also explore the effectiveness of different interventions in promoting ethical behaviour and employee commitment and engagement.

Acknowledgments

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