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The Role of Employee Voice in Enhancing Sustainable Organisational Performance. A Conceptual Review

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ABSTRACT: Modern business organisations are operating under difficult environments as a result of the advent of pandemics, changes in technology, globalisation, climate change and changes in consumer tastes. As such, there is need to adopt a raft of strategies so as to remain viable and productive. Employee voice is one such human resource management strategy that organisations can leverage on for their survival in such complex operating environments. This paper analysed how employee voice can influence the sustainable performance of organisations. Review of related literature method was used in the exploration. From the review, it emerged that the encouragement of employee voice behaviour positively and significantly influences employee innovativeness, employee retention, employee commitment and employee motivation which are the necessary elements for the sustainable performance of organisations. Therefore, it is recommended that organisations consider the adoption of employee voice as a strategy for their enhanced performance. However, a further research is recommended with a practical methodology so as to validate the findings of this review.

KEYWORDS: Employee voice; globalisation; human resource management; organisational performance; sustainable

INTRODUCTION

It is not in doubt that modern organizations are operating under volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment. This is as a result of rapid changes in technology, advent of pandemics, globalisation, climate change and changes in consumer tastes. In such a dynamic digital and globalised era, human resource management practices (HRM) are becoming relevant strategies for enhancing organisational performance. This is against the backdrop of having the role of employees as stakeholders in human resource management discussions being largely overlooked in favour of economic analysis in modern business management. It is therefore, becoming increasingly and fundamentally important for business leaders to start embracing and employing ideas from employees for enhanced organisational performance. Employee voice is one of the various human resource management strategies that is crucial for organisational performance and sustainability (Hosseini & Sabokro, 2022; Mohammad, et al., 2023).

Of late, it is becoming impossible for organizations to remain competitive with employees who merely obey orders without contributing meaningfully to organisational activities. According to Um-e-Rubbab and Naqvi (2020), organisational performance is enhanced if employees act and think beyond the formal provisions of job descriptions. This is because the dynamic and uncertain nature of modern business environment has increased the importance of proactive behaviours for long-term performance, management of change and adaptation (Crant et al., 2011 in Um-e-Rubbab & Naqvi, 2020). Encouragement of employee voice is an example of such proactive behaviours organisations may adopt for the participation of their employees in business management.

The concept of employee voice has been the focus of many studies which includes its characteristics, capability development, and its impacts on employee performance (Tigre et al., 2022). Other studies have investigated the factors that affect employee voice (Ge, 2020; Song et al., 2022; Ashiru et al., 2022), while others have looked at the influence of leadership styles on encouraging employee voice behaviour (Lei et al., 2021; Kalenychenko, et al., 2023; Edi et al., 2023). However, according to Li and Tangirala (2021), this behaviour often entails potential errors for employees, such as authority challenges, interpersonal tensions, unanticipated adverse results and other errors, a situation that frequently causes employees to remain silent when facing organisational problems. This results in the marginalisation of voice platforms such as trade unions,

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significantly limiting the expression of employee voices within organisations. Therefore, this paper discusses how employee voice influences sustainability in organisational performance.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Social Exchange Theory

According to Ahmad et al (2023), the theory was developed by Homans in the 1950s. The theory provides a suitable theoretical framework for understanding employee voice behaviours. It explains individual interactions as a negotiation process involving potential exchange rules such as reciprocity, rationality, power inequality, and group benefits (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005 in Ahmad et al., 2023). Social exchange theory defines power as the ability to provide valuable rewards, influence and control others, and shape their activities. As further interactions occur between individuals over a while, they feel more obliged to return the favour and support received from the other person, this custom is known as reciprocity. If this social cycle of reciprocity completes, it results in the creation of a trusting and loyal relationship.

In social exchange, employee voice results in respecting and maintenance of mutual relationships in an organization. The Social Exchange theorists thus believe that employees will be encouraged to propose constructive and fundamental suggestions if they are satisfied with their job or feel emotionally committed to their employers (Hosseini et al., 2021). The theory has implications in the management of human resources at the workplace. The assumption is that, if employees have the freedom to participate in decision making and being part of the overall process, they are more likely to get motivated and perform well. Therefore, the theory was found to be applicable in explaining how the encouragement of employee voice can be instrumental in enhancing sustainable performance of modern organisations, given the complex environment in which they are operating under.

Overview of the concept of employee voice

The concept of employee voice can be traced back over two centuries and is still applicable today (Kaufman, 2015 in Mohammad et al., 2023). In the current dynamic environment, it is becoming impossible to solve all problems in business management by solely relying on the wisdom of management. Therefore, there is a growing necessity of encouraging employees to participate in the management of business organisations. In modern business management, the importance of employees in organisations go beyond their labour contributions to include their ability to generate innovative ideas and viewpoints. Employee voice is thus defined as the behaviour exhibited by employees who take the initiative to propose improvement ideas to solve existing problems in their organisational work modes or processes with the aim of improving organisational performance (Morrison, 2023). Similarly, Nwizia and Saale (2022) define it as the degree to which workers freely and safely express their dissatisfaction, exchange of views or ideas and contribute to organisational decision-making process. Thus, in short, employee voice demonstrates how employees or union representatives can influence key and significant decision that enhances the sustainability of an organisation. It reflects a vital concept capturing the expression of ideas, opinions, concerns, and suggestions about work issues by employees. Therefore, in this case, employees are considered to have a voice when they can safely express their views without fear of oppression and retaliation from management.

The general view is that the performance of any organisation can be achieved through the participation of employees in the formulation and management of policies, effective union representative, open communication, collective bargaining and joint consultation. Employee voice has an enlarged channel of representation which includes union representation, individual representation, direct and indirect representation (Nwizia & Saale, 2022). It creates room for employees to share ideas with the management through direct or indirect representation which in turn encourages the sustainable performance of an organisation. This is supported by Akinwwale (2019) in Morrison (2023) who indicated that employee voice is a tool where by workers work within the system, employing face-to-face communication to bring about internal change that generates business survival. The author further emphasised that employee voice is formed primarily from personal and contextual or relational factors that support employees to be actively involved. Organizations benefit immensely when employees speak up to identify problems or opportunities and propose solutions as this spark learning, innovation, and continual improvement. Therefore, as Nwizia & Saale (2022) further asserted, the dimensions of employee voice are open communication, union representation, employee participation in decision making and employee empowerment.

Employee voice and sustainable organisational performance

Employee voice is among the dominant topics of interest in the human resource management （HRM) area. Employee voice significantly benefits organisations in various ways. In this study, various dimensions of employee voice and their impact on the sustainable performance of organisations were discussed. These include employee innovativeness, retention, commitment and motivation.

Employee innovativeness

In the current digitalised economy, innovative business ideas are considered a main tool of business development, which results in the competitive advantage of organisations (Kremer, et al., 2019 in Muhammed & Syed, 2022). It is increasingly becoming the foundation of growth and survival of organisations in the modern business environment. According to Yun (2018) in Yaron (2023), in the globally competitive environment, business innovations have become essential strategies for business organisations to develop competitiveness and market potential. In this regard, innovation is defined as the generation of new ideas, methods, or approaches that benefit both individuals and the organisation (Halawa et al., 2023). Innovative work behaviour, as a multidimensional process involves different behaviours which can be linked to three discrete levels that is development of unique ideas, promotion of new ideas and the implementation of ideas. Thus Yeron (2023) concluded that innovativeness at the work place means finding out and search for modern technology, introducing new schemes to attain targets and using latest work methods to implement unique concepts.

Employee voice is perceived as a necessary conduit for facilitating innovative behaviour organisations. It is a critical antecedent of creativity because it improves organisational learning and group decision. Thus, the importance of employee innovative behaviour, in enhancing the sustainable performance of organisations cannot be underestimated. The view is supported by a study by Cainelli et al (2010) in Yaron (2023) where it was found that innovative firms outperform non-innovative firms in terms of productivity levels and economic growth. This is because, the behaviour is a response in terms of concern, opinion, suggestion, and idea regarding work-related issues with intentions to improve

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organizational processes. It denotes the tendency of employees to vigorously talk about a productive idea. Thus, the flourishing of innovation in an organisation require the management of the capabilities of employees. Accordingly, Wati et al (2023) advises that the successful implementation of new ideas is based on the innovative behaviour of employees which is mainly encouraged as it is not normally an innate trait. Thus, employees are likely to be innovative where employee voice is encouraged in organisations through sharing of ideas and thoughts (Townsend et al., 2022; Isaakyan et al., 2021).

In support of the aforementioned views, empirically, a study by Shanker et al cited in Muhammed and Syed (2022) found that encouraging employee voice behaviour helps to implement the change, creativity and new knowledge that enhances the work performance of employee and ultimately the whole business performance. Similarly, Ahmed et al (2018) in Townsend et al (2022) also found employee voice as one of the important factors that influence innovative work behaviour. The authors allude that employees who receive positive gesture in response to voice behaviour, spare more time to think of creative solutions for the organizational issues. Furthermore, Černe, et al (2017) cited in Muhammed and Syed (2022) found that when employees are involved in organisational matters through voice, they feel an obligation to increase their innovativeness, while Chen and Hou (2016) cited in Yeron (2023) found that employee voice opportunities determine their innovativeness. Therefore, from the foregoing, innovative culture and environment can be promoted through speaking to share knowledge and ideas. Managers can introduce certain norms such as promoting interaction and voice culture in organisations so as to cultivate an innovative environment which subsequently leads to the sustainable performance of the organisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between employee voice behaviour and innovation which subsequently leads to the sustainable performance of organisations.

Employee retention

Retention of employees remains one of the major challenges bedevilling modern organisations in view of the complex operating environment. According to Mohanty (2009) in Barween et al (2020), stakeholders and managers have to consider employee retention in their plans and estimate its long-term effects on sustainable organisational productivity. Employee retention is defined as the effort by an employer to keep desired workers so as to attain the objectives of a business enterprise (Frank et al, 2004 in Barween et al., 2020). It is a planned and coordinated activity that the organisation undertakes so as to meet the needs of the employees with the view of retaining them. Conversely, turnover is described as the unplanned and voluntary loss of an employee through leaving an organisation. It is expressed in some pattern as turnover, absenteeism and decisions to retire (Saari & Judge 2004 in Van Gramberg et al., 2020). The professional life of employees is affected when they feel that their voice is ignored. Suppressed employee voice regarding issues or problems that ultimately results in feelings of being unappreciated, make employees more vulnerable and stressed leading to job dissatisfaction and subsequent turnover intentions. Once they experienced that their input is not being considered, employees physically remove themselves from the situation and may psychologically withdraw from their job.

The ability to retain employees is imperative for the performance of organisations in terms of achieving the set objectives. This is because, the retention of talented and loyal employees enables the organisation to survive and grow perpetually even under difficult operating conditions, since they are bound to raise their productivity levels (Azeez, 2017 in Van Gramberg et al., 2020). Employees who are provided with an opportunity to voice their suggestions and opinions are most likely to stay in an organisation (Hirshman, 1970 cited in Van Gramberg et al., 2020). This is because employee voice increases job satisfaction levels and work engagement thus decreasing turnover intentions (Mir et al., 2020). Thus, Barween et al (2020) asserts that the retention of skilled employees can be considered an important source of competitive advantage in any organization in terms of increasing profitability, shaping the market image and improving the reputation of an organisation. Therefore, as Metha et al (2014) in Van Gramberg et al (2020) stressed, organisations need to have suitable human resources policies and practices in place in order to be able to retain talented and committed employees.

A study by Herlin and Lia (2023) revealed that when employees feel that the situation of withholding self-expression is increasing in an organisation, they may choose to resign and seek more conducive workplaces. Similarly, Moynihan and Landuyt (2008) in Van Gramberg et al (2020) found that the loyalty of employees and their autonomy in decisions and abilities to use their constructive voice, negatively influence turnover intention. Thus, Mir et al (2020) concluded that if the voice of employees is ignored, many positive outcomes turn into negative ones. The unpleasant environment coupled with redundancy in terms of idea suppression, social isolation, and withdrawal behaviour can weaken their bond with the organisation because employees feel tired and may find their work tiring because they exert their efforts to restrain self-expression. Therefore, in view of the foregoing, it can be concluded that employee voice is positively and significantly related to employee retention which subsequently enhances organisational sustainable performance.

Employee commitment

Positive opinions regarding organisations stem from the psychological commitment of employees to the organisation and its ideals, indicating an active relationship between the company and its personnel (Ofosu, 2025). Organisational commitment is defined as the level with which a person identifies and gets involved in his or her organization (Mowday et al. 1982 as cited in Mahadharu et al., 2024). The authors further describe employee commitment as a measure of the ability of an employee to be identified with the values and goals of the organization. It shows the capacity of an individual to be devoted to working for the organisation regarding the duties, responsibilities and requirements necessary for performing the job. According to Ofosu (2025), the three dimensions of organizational commitment includes affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment refers to the means whereby an employee wants to affiliate with an organization, normative commitment describes how an employee feels obligated to part of an organisation, and how employees feel the need to belong to the organization relates to continuance commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991 cited in Mahadharu et al., 2024). Higher levels of commitment among employees enhance their likelihood of contributing to organisational goals and stay with the organisation (Karim et al., 2021).

Employee voice is imperative in organisations operating in complex environment because of its strategic implications. It gives employees the opportunity to contribute to decision-making, and to voice their opinions on matters concerning the organisation thus becoming a driving force of their commitment. In this regard, Barron (2022) asserts that the commitment of employees to their organisation is highly influenced by their perception of the organisation to them. If the perception is positive, employees feel obligated to respond to organisational actions, leading to their

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increased commitment. As such, Prasadika et al. (2018) cited in Barron (2022) concluded that having a voice at work and engaging employees in decision-making is one of the powerful tools which management can employ to improve the organisation-employee relationship. This perception is supported by the social exchange theory which suggests that employees see the activities of an organisation as an indication of its commitment to them. Having a voice at work can take the form of individual channels or collective representation in the form of trade unions. This results in employees believing that they can influence the decision-making process of the organisation thereby getting more committed to it.

The embracing of employee voice as a high-performance human resource practice has been found to transform traditionally adversarial labour-management relationships into collaborative partnerships, promoting trade union renewal. This is because, in the contemporary competitive world, organisations depend on the commitment of their employees for their progress and survival (Prasadika et al., 2018 in Barron, 2022). The authors further suggest that organisation have to give due consideration to the viewpoints and suggestions of their employees so as to gain their commitment. Employees who communicate themselves through voice normally feel committed to the organisation. This is regardless of its potential negative impact on the decisions and interests of the management.

To enhance organisational commitment, emphasis is placed on direct employee voice mechanisms, participation in task-based as well as problem solving (Barron et al., 2022). Having a voice at work is implicated as an antecedent of numerous positive outcomes to the organisation (Kim & Leach, 2020), which includes employee commitment and job performance (Machokoto & Dzvimbo, 2022). Empirical literature on the impact of employee voice on organisational commitment have reported positive outcomes (Barron, 2022; Machokoto & Dzvimbo, 2022). In support of the findings, Kim and Leach (2020) revealed that having a voice at the workplace enables employees to have confidence in themselves that their participation, ideas, and suggestions are always welcome and acted upon. Additionally, Holland et al (2017) in Kim and Leach (2020) found that employee voice has a strong connection with their commitment towards the working organisation. Furthermore, a study by Pohler et al (2020) also revealed that involving employees in the process of decision-making through employee voice helps in the achievement of sustainable organisational performance. This is confirmed by the findings of a research by Prasadika and Nishanthi (2018) in Barron et al (2022) where employee voice and commitment were found to be positively correlated in manufacturing organisations in Sri Lanka. Conversely, Van Gramberg et al (2020) found employee silence and limited involvement in organisational matters to have a negative impact on the employees' level of commitment, trust and sense of belonging to the organisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that employee voice has a positive and significant impact on the commitment of employees and subsequent sustainable performance of organisations.

Employee motivation

Motivation of employees is perceived to have a positive impact on the performance of organizations. Any workplace is viewed as having convenient working conditions if it has a positive impact on the motivation of employees. However, many organisations do not either realize this benefit or they have but lack the capacity to implement the concept (Kumara et al., 2021). This is regardless of the fact that motivation is an ideal tool for achieving the superior performance of employees at the workplace which results in the effectiveness of the organisation (Nyinyimbe, 2020). In support of the assertion, Ahsan et al (2020) perceives employee motivation as dominant in determining the success of any organisation and ensures that work continues smoothly without any hindrances and in a proficient manner. In this case, Nel et al (2011) in Acha-Anyi and Masaraure (2021) define motivation as an intentional and persistent behaviour aimed at achieving a goal. In other words, Liu et al (2020) describe it as the process of stimulating people to take the right actions to reach their goals or targets. Therefore, the concept can be referred to as a process that stimulates employees to act to achieve organisational goals, from an organisational perspective.

The significance of employee motivation is premised on the fact that all corporate activities require either direct or indirect human effort to be realised. Thus, the two forms of motivation namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a critical role in employee performance (Ahsan et al., 2020). In this case, examples of the factors affecting intrinsic motivation include responsibility, freedom to act, courage to use and develop persons own skills, interesting tasks and opportunities for advancement. Therefore, intrinsic motivation can be described as an inner driving force that propels a person to achieve more. On the other end, extrinsic motivation is attributed to factors at the workplace such as money and other non-monetary benefits such as working conditions, vehicles, offices, medical and funeral insurances and pension packages, among others (Ahsan et al., 2020).

Employee voice is one of the critical sources of motivation which is overlooked by many organisations. According to Akinsola et al (2023), open communication and recognition which are the dimensions of employee voice plays a vital role in establishing a connection between motivational strategies and employee performance. The belief is that, when employees are formally recognized for their accomplishments, they mostly likely to be motivated which reinforces their positive behaviours and performance. Given an opportunity to express their opinions and ideas in decision making, contributes to employees' sense of achievement, boosts self-esteem, and reinforces desired behaviours, resulting in increased employee motivation and enhanced performance (Safin & Kiner, 2020). When employees receive formal recognition for their efforts, they feel valued and motivated to sustain their high-level performance. Therefore, the provision of an opportunity for employee voice in the form of acknowledgment for achievements, motivates employees, reinforces positive behaviours, and fosters sustained performance improvement. In view of the aforementioned analysis, it can be concluded that employee voice has a positive and significant influence in employee motivation which results in an enhanced sustained performance of organisations.

Conceptual framework

The role of employee voice as a human resource management strategy in enhancing the sustainable performance of organisations was summarised in the form of a flow diagram as shown below. Employee innovativeness, retention, commitment and motivation are variables through which employee voice influences sustainable organisational performance.

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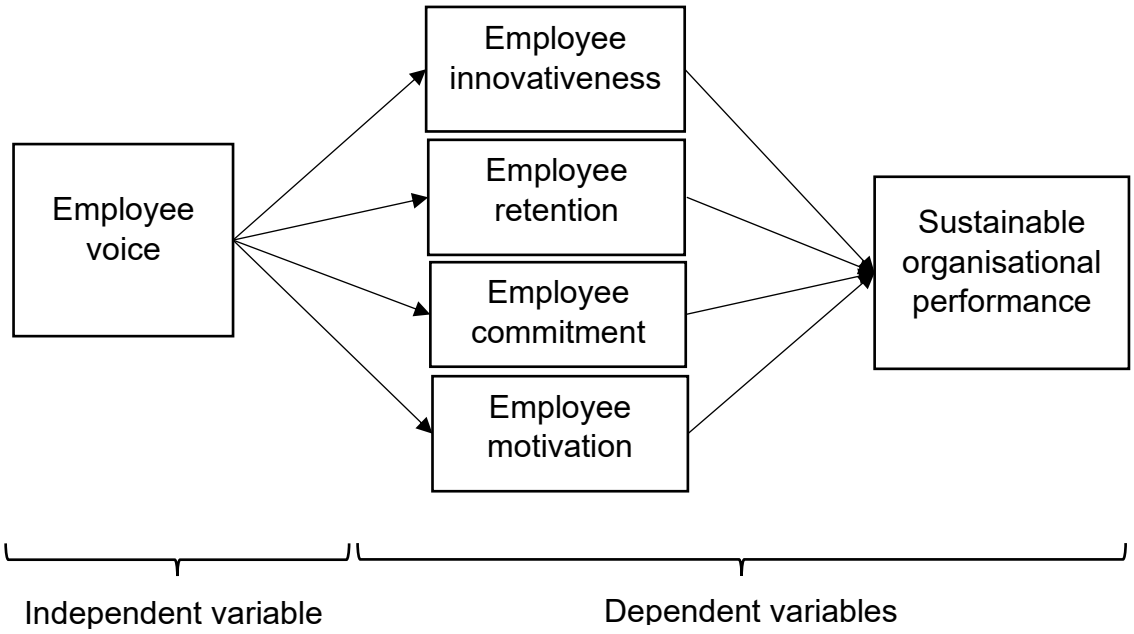
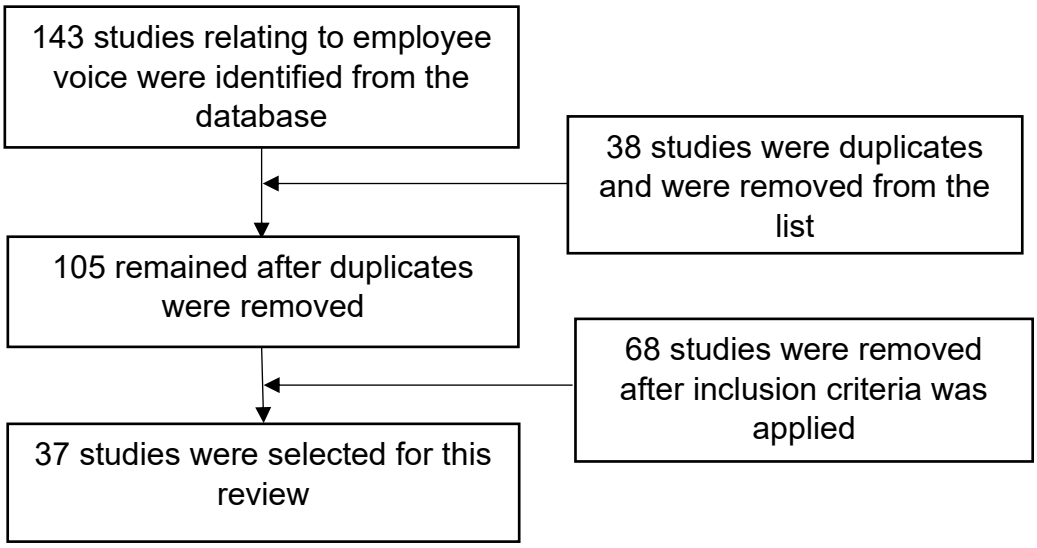


Figure 1. The role of employee voice in sustainable organisational performance

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the literature review method. The idea was to obtain relevant studies so as to improve the reliability of this study since the most recent studies present current issues. In this regard, the search strategy included recent studies across the world, specifically primary studies that are peer-reviewed and published in English from 2020, with full access (see Selection Process below). According to Farisyi et al (2022), the relevant studies were obtained from Science Direct, ResearchGate and Google Scholar databases, with the search terms "employee voice" used. These databases were selected because of their reputation (Chhatoi, Sahoo, & Nayak, 2021). The databases found a total of 254 studies on employee voice. These studies were put through a rigorous selection process to choose the most relevant material for this paper as shown on the flow diagram below.

Selection Process



Therefore, 37 studies were selected for this review and were later critically analysed. A content analysis technique was used to see what was in these studies, and the authors concluded the content of these 37 studies. Like any other literature-based study, this paper could have been exposed to the bias of authors. For example, the search strategy used by researchers could have favoured particular studies. However, the authors used several databases to counteract this challenge and improve the reliability and validity of this paper.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The review proved that various dimensions of employee voice have an influence on the sustainable performance of organisations. Firstly, studies by Muhammed and Syed (2022) and Chen and Hou (2016) cited in Yeron (2023), found that the encouragement of employee voice in an organisation positively and significantly promotes employee innovativeness resulting in the sustainable performance of an organisational. The

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findings are confirmed by the social exchange theory whose assumption is that reciprocity to innovative by employees is normally as a result of voice encouragement.

Secondly, employee voice was also found to influence employee retention. A study by Azeez (2017) cited in Van Gramberg et al (2020) revealed that the retention of talented and loyal employees enables the organisation to survive and grow perpetually even under difficult operating conditions, since they are bound to raise their productivity levels. Additionally, Moynihan and Landuyt (2008) in Van Gramberg et al (2020) found that loyalty of employees and their autonomy in decisions and abilities to use their constructive voice, negatively influence turnover intention. The findings are confirmed by the social exchange theory which believes in the lasting and loyal relationship between employers and employees which results in the sustainable performance of an organisation.

Thirdly, organisational commitment was also found to be influenced by employee voice resulting in sustained organisational performance (Pohler et al., 2020; Kim & Leach, 2020; Barron, 2022; Machokoto & Dzvimbo, 2022). In support of the findings, the Social Exchange theorists also believe that employees will be encouraged to propose constructive and fundamental suggestions if they are satisfied with their job or feel emotionally committed to their organisation.

Lastly, employee voice was found to be influential in employee motivation which is crucial for sustainable organisational performance (Ahsan et al., 2020; Kumara et al., 2021). In support of the findings, social exchange theory defines power as the ability to provide valuable rewards, influence and control others, and shape their activities. The assumption of the theory is that, if employees have the freedom to participate in decision making and being part of the overall process, they are more likely to get motivated and perform well.

From the review of related literature, it can be concluded that employee voice positively and significantly influences employee innovativeness, retention, commitment and motivation which are all critical for the sustainable performance of organisations. Therefore, managers are recommended to promote employee voice for the sustainable performance of their organisations. However, a further research is recommended with a different methodology to validate the findings of this review.

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