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**HOW VOICE CONTENT IS DEVELOPED BY EMPLOYEES AND EVALUATED BY
MANAGERS: A CONSTRUAL LEVEL PERSPECTIVE**

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**How Voice Content is Developed by Employees and Evaluated by Managers:
A Construal Level Perspective**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

The previous research has documented the important role that voice content plays in influencing managers' reactions to upward voice and voicers. These studies primarily spoke to the function of voice content as a signal of voicers' work capabilities and/or work attitudes, while little effort has been made to investigate how managers evaluate the voiced issue by forecasting the organizational outcomes if the voice is enacted. Responding to recent calls for viewing voice content with respect to implementation (Burriss et al., 2017; Farh et al., 2022), I draw on construal level theory to identify two dimensions of voice content: voice desirability and voice feasibility. I also examine whether, how, and when voice desirability and feasibility link abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue to voice endorsement. A study with an event-sampling method supported the positive indirect relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement via voice desirability and the positive indirect relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement via voice feasibility. I further found a positive interactive relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and organizational tenure in predicting voice feasibility.

Keywords: abstract construal, concrete construal, voice desirability, voice feasibility, voice endorsement.

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Introduction

Upward voice is the employees' upward-directed communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues intended to improve organizational or unit functioning (Burris et al., 2008; Morrison, 2011). Employee voice helps the managers locate existing problems and improve organizational or unit innovation and task performance (e.g., Guzman & Espejo, 2019; Li et al., 2017) and have important implications for the voicers' career success (e.g., Howell et al., 2015). Recent studies have increasingly recognized that voice recipients evaluate not only how often the employees speak up but also what they speak up (i.e., voice content), including whether the voice is intended to preserve existing practices (supportive voice) or challenge the accepted sets of status quo (challenging voice; Burris, 2012), whether the voice is focused on solutions (promotive voice) or problems (prohibitive voice; Liao et al., 2021), whether the voice is related to task execution (agentic content) or the relational aspects of the unit (communal content; McClean et al., 2022), whether the voice is aligned with the organizational or unit goal (Brykman & Raver, 2021; Nelson & Proell, 2018), whether the voice contains a feasible solution (Brykman & Raver, 2021; Whiting et al., 2012), and whether the voice is generally high quality (Ng et al., 2022).

Though has deepened our understanding of voice recipients' responses to voice content, this line of research primarily treated voice content as a lens through which recipients evaluate voicers. These studies theorized that voice content signals to the recipients the voicers' competence and capabilities (Brykman & Raver, 2021; McClean et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2022) and attitudes towards the organization or people in the organization such as loyalty and threat (Burris, 2012; Liao et al., 2021), benevolence (McClean et al., 2022), and commitment and prosocial motives (Brykman & Raver, 2021; Whiting et al., 2012). However, in addition to

evaluating voicers, it is also an important task for managers to evaluate the voiced issues by forecasting what will happen to the organization if the voice is implemented (Berg, 2016). A few recent studies have pointed to the importance of conceptualizing voice content in reference to forecasted organizational outcomes; these studies started to examine how managers respond to voice content and how individuals' relatively stable attributes help foster certain voice content (Burriss et al., 2017; Farh et al., 2022). However, what is missed in these emerging studies is whether voice content and subsequent managerial reactions fluctuate across episodes, and how the cognitive activities in each episode lead to voice bearing certain organizational outcomes. The voice literature has long recognized the ebb and flow of voice behavior (e.g., Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Liu et al., 2017). The recent scholarly works on voice content also pointed to that voice endorsement has significant within-person variance (Lam et al., 2022; Lam et al., 2019); and that employees' fluctuating views and interpretations of the world largely influence voice content in each episode (Lam et al., 2022; Lin & Johnson, 2015). The current study aims to examine how leaders evaluate and respond to voice content in terms of the anticipated outcomes of implementing each voice; and how the cognitive activities in each voice episode explain the generation of certain voice content.

In this paper, I fuse voice literature and construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2012) to outline how managers evaluate and respond to voice content regarding potential organizational outcomes and how voicers' episode-level cognitive process leads to certain voice content. According to construal level theory, desirability and feasibility are two important criteria people use to assess the outcomes of an activity and make future decisions (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003). The issue selling literature (Dutton & Ashford, 1993) and voice literature (Brykman & Raver, 2021;

Burris et al., 2017; Nelson & Proell, 2018; Ng et al., 2022; Whiting et al., 2012) have suggested that leaders value ideas that are desirable and feasible. It is also noted that people are more likely to commit to an activity (e.g., endorsing a voice) when the activity is evaluated as desirable and feasible (Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996; Krueger Jr et al., 2000; Vroom, 1964). I thus identify voice desirability and voice feasibility as two dimensions of voice content, with voice desirability reflecting the end-state benefits of implementing the voice and voice feasibility reflecting the ease of the means used to implement the voice. Voice desirability and feasibility may positively predict the managers' endorsement of each voice, including recognizing the value of voice (Burris, 2012), allocating additional resources to the voiced issues (Dutton & Ashford, 1993), and taking the suggestions to the boss (Fast et al., 2014).

Construal level theory also lends insights into the cognitive antecedents of voice desirability and feasibility. According to construal level theory, objects or events can be mentally construed in abstract and concrete ways (Trope & Liberman, 2003; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Abstract construals are more general and inclusive, while concrete construals are more specific and detailed (see Trope & Liberman, 2010 for a review). I conceptualize *construal of voiced issue* as the extent to which people allocate attention to the abstract and concrete aspects of the voiced issue, determining which information is deemed relevant and important in the idea development process. Voice research indicated that the more information the employee has, the more likely he/she speaks up (Shepherd et al., 2019; see also Burris et al., 2008; Tucker & Turner, 2015). Extending the above notion regarding information amount and voice tendency, I argue that what information they pay attention to and the way they process the information in each episode, e.g., abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue, influence what they speak up in a specific episode as reflected in voice desirability and feasibility.

In addition, with accumulating organizational tenure, referring to the time employees spent in the organization, employees gain organization-specific information (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998) and are more able to take advantage of abstract and concrete style processing of information while developing ideas and suggestions. I further predict that organizational tenure strengthens the relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability and the relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility. The conceptual model outlining the hypothesized relationships is shown in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

This study attempts to make four theoretical contributions to voice research and construal level theory. First, I extend the studies on voice content that highlighted its function as indicators of the voicers' attributes (e.g., Burris, 2012; McClean et al., 2022). By borrowing the desirability-feasibility framework from construal level theory, I shed light on how managers evaluate and respond to the voiced issue itself by forecasting the outcomes of implementing a voice. Second, by taking a within-individual approach to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of voice content, I provide a nuanced and coherent view of how voice content is developed by voicers and analyzed by recipients in each voice episode. In so doing, I go beyond the existing individual-level antecedents of voice content such as identification and proactivity (Burris et al., 2017; Farh et al., 2022) to identify abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue as novel antecedents of voice content. Third, the current study advances the previous voice research that focused on the relationship between information amount and voice frequency (e.g., Shepherd et al., 2019). In particular, I examine how information amount (represented by organizational tenure) and the voicers' cognitive processing of information interact to influence

voice content. Fourth, this study broadens the construal level theory, which conceptualized construal level as a continuum with abstract representations on one end and concrete representations on the other (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Drawing on and extending the recent research on construal flexibility and construal ambidexterity (Steinbach et al., 2019; Wiesenfeld et al., 2017), I reconceptualize construals as an attention allocation process, meaning that the voicers can be both abstract and concrete in a voice episode to produce the best-quality voice.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Voice Endorsement

Voice endorsement is a set of favorable managerial responses to employee voicing, which recognizes the validity of upward voice and facilitates the implementation of upward voice (Burris, 2012). As expected by Van Dyne and colleagues (1995), voice is not always positively viewed by the recipients, and thus not every idea raised by employees obtains managerial support. The endorsement of employee voice requires additional resources such as money, time, effort, and political recourses (Burris et al., 2017; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017), so the voice recipients should be careful when deciding to support an idea proposed by subordinates. Hence, the emerging research on voice endorsement shifted the traditional research focus from “how often” the employees speak up (e.g., Aryee et al., 2017; Detert & Burris, 2007) to the predicting factors of the endorsement of voice, including what is spoken up (the characteristics of voice content), how it is spoken up (the characteristics of voice delivery method), who speaks up (the characteristics of voicer), and to whom it is spoken up (the characteristics of the recipient). This shift largely extends the scope of voice research.

What is spoken up. The previous studies have devoted extensive attention to the content of voice messages, the “what” aspect, which varies from the problems that need to be addressed

(prohibitive voice) to the innovative solutions and suggestions for future improvement (promotive voice; Liang et al., 2012; see also Morrison, 2011); from the stabilization or preservation of current practices (supportive voice) to the modification of the status quo (challenging voice; Burris, 2012; see also Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). In linking different types of voice content to managerial responses, Lam and his coauthors (2022) found that daily promotive voice is positively related to daily voice endorsement, while daily prohibitive voice is not. The results from a time-lagged field study conducted by Liao et al. (2021) showed a positive relationship between promotive voice and voice endorsement only when voicer's political skill is high; they found a positive relationship between prohibitive voice and voice endorsement when the voicer's political skill is low but a negative relationship between prohibitive voice and voice endorsement when the voicer political skill is high. Burris (2012) also examined managerial endorsement in response to different types of voice content. Across three studies, he found that leaders are more likely to endorse supportive voice but less likely to endorse challenging voice. McClean et al. (2022) categorized upward voice into agentic and communal voice based on both voice content (task or relationship-related issue) and delivery method (language used). They argued that the content and presentation style of voice interact with the gender of the voicer to influence managerial endorsement, such that "positive counter-stereotypical voice" (i.e., communal voice for males and agentic voice for females) is more likely to receive endorsement than the "positive yet stereotypical voice" (i.e., agentic voice for males and communal voice for females).

Other investigations regarding voice content took a different perspective and shifted the focus from the types of ideas themselves to the potential consequences of the voiced ideas if they are implemented. Urbach & Fay (2018, 2021) explored the anticipated consequences of the

voiced ideas for the voice recipients: power threat vs. power gain. For example, voicers may recommend increased or reduced control for the supervisor over the performance evaluation. Their studies indicated that the voice recipients assess the possible consequences of the proposed ideas and make attributions of the intent behind the voice (benefit the organization or the unit vs. seek power). The leaders tend to be more supportive of the voiced ideas if they are attributed to prosocial (vs. egoistic) intentions. A larger amount of research has centered on the anticipated organizational or unit outcomes following the implementation of the voiced ideas. These investigations proposed that leaders provide more support for the voice that contains a complete solution and that allows adequate time for implementation (Whiting et al., 2012), that aligns with the unit goals (Nelson & Proell, 2018), that points out problems that are severe and involve a large number of individuals, and require fewer resources and interdependencies to implement (Burriss et al., 2017), and that is well-reasoned, feasible, organizational-focused, and novel (Brykman & Raver, 2021; see also Liu, 2022; Ng et al., 2022). This perspective is valuable because it highlights the key features of voice, i.e., communicating for the organization's or unit's future good, by integrating the potential future outcomes of voiced ideas into the managerial responses at the moment. However, most of these studies largely tied managers' evaluations of voice content to the evaluations of voicers. That is, these works consider voice content to be a signal of the voicers' competence (Ng et al., 2022) and thus to contribute to the voicers' social and career success (Brykman & Raver, 2021; Nelson & Proell, 2018; Ng et al., 2022), missing a thorough discussion of how managers analyze and react to the content factors that link to the future good of the organization or unit.

How it is spoken up. Another line of research concentrated on the implications of the delivery tactics of upward voice, the “how” aspect. The first body of research centered on the

choices of time, place, and channel implicated in voice expression. Studies on issue selling emphasized the importance of opportune timing for successful upward communication, for example, the right time for the voice recipients, and the right time for the organization considering the external pressures and strategic choices (Dutton et al., 2001). Lam et al. (2022) also alluded to the possibility that voice endorsement lies in the voicer's ability to choose an appropriate time to speak up, for example, speak up when the supervisor is in a positive mood and is open to suggestions. Other studies focused on the place where the voice is raised (e.g., public vs. private settings) but led to different results. Across five studies, Isaakyan et al. (2021) found support for their arguments that ideas raised in front of an audience (vs. raised in one-on-one settings), which cause image threat for the recipient, are less likely to be endorsed, especially when the voicer has a weak exchange relationship with the recipient. The implicit theories of voice such as "Don't embarrass the boss in public" were supportive of their findings (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). Xu et al. (2020) instead found through two studies that employees' public (vs. private) voice tactics pressure the recipients to be open and responsive and thus positively predict the success of voice. The authors also investigated the use of formal or informal channels, indicating that the use of formal channels secures the recipients' attention and support. Nevertheless, the issue-selling articles highlighted the fit of issue-selling channels with the organizational norms (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al., 2001). The somehow conflicting results invite further exploration of these topics. The effectiveness of voice communication in public (vs. private) settings, via formal (vs. informal) channels may depend on other aspects of voice, such as the voice message and characteristics of the leader.

The language used is also a critical element that determines the success possibility of upward voice. Lam et al. (2019) indicated that leaders prefer ideas that are expressed directly and

explicitly, especially when the voicer uses polite language at the same time. Whiting et al. (2012) suggested that raters give more positive evaluations to ideas that adopt positive framing (vs., negative framing). According to a study by Mayer and coauthors (2019), when selling social issues, moral language is more effective than economic language, especially when the moral arguments are framed to fit with the organization's values and/or mission. In addition, studies on issue selling also placed emphasis on the succinctness of language (Dutton & Duncan, 1987) and whether the evidence or data is presented in line with the logic of a specific context (Dutton et al., 2001; McCroskey, 1969).

Other studies shed light on the effects of voicers' capacities and skills on voice endorsement. For example, employees' political skills, defined as the ability to understand and influence others to achieve personal and organizational goals (Ahearn et al., 2004), can enable the voicers to package their ideas in a contextually strategic way and may interact with different types of upward voice to affect the managerial endorsement (Liao et al., 2021). Upward voice also has an affective component. The voicers' emotion regulation knowledge, by helping the voicers to hide or regulate negative emotions such as fear and anger related to voice, may also facilitate the acceptance and endorsement of voice (Grant, 2013).

Who speaks up. Regarding the characteristics of voicers, the credibility of voicers received the most research investigations. Whiting et al. (2012) noted that the supervisors depend on the expertise and trustworthiness to assess the constructiveness of and good motive behind upward voice (Jungermann & Fischer, 2005), so the voiced suggestions are more likely to be supported if the voicing employee is perceived by the supervisor as highly expert and trustworthy. In line with this logic, later investigations found that the credibility of the voicer makes some threatening voice tactics (e.g., direct voice expression) more acceptable (Lam et al.,

2019, study 1 and study 2), and that the expertise of the voicing employee likely counters the supervisor's inclination to reject the voice due to ego depletion (Li et al., 2019). Moreover, the receivers infer from various indirect but relevant information about the credibility of voice source. For example, high task performance, by indicating the voicer's ability to raise constructive suggestions, likely increases the possibility of voice endorsement (Duan et al., 2021). Additionally, the leader-member exchange relationship (LMX) may prompt the leader's trust in the loyalty of the voicing employee and thus mitigate the abovementioned negative effects of threatening voices, either threatening because of the content (Urbach & Fay, 2021) or threatening because of the delivery method (Isaakyan et al., 2021).

Research in this area also pointed to the effect of voicer gender. Voicer gender primarily interacts with other factors in voice communication to influence managerial favorable responses. As described earlier, voicer gender interacts with the content and presentation style of voice to impact voice endorsement (McClellan et al., 2022). Guarana et al. (2017) underscored the manager-subordinate gender match and documented an interactive effect of this match and leader characteristics. In particular, leaders high in social comparison orientation, defined as the inclination to engage in social comparison, are more likely to endorse ideas from opposite-gender employees than those from same-gender ones. Farh and colleagues (2020) examined the gender effect in team settings. In a study of active-duty military teams, they found that team leaders respond more favorably to ideas voiced by a token female in a male-dominated team than those voiced by a comparison male in an all-male team; this effect is strengthened by the team leader's favorable beliefs about females' competence in the military.

Status is another critical factor in predicting the success of these upward influence attempts. Howell et al. (2015) showed that leaders are more likely to credit ideas voiced by

subordinates who possess high status, either ascribed (signaled by demographic variables), assigned (signaled by full-time work status), or achieved (signaled by their centrality in informal social networks) status, and that the recognition of employee voice can convert into higher performance evaluation a year later. A study by Kim et al. (2021) demonstrated a similar effect of voicer status by linking voicer status to leader voice ratings via instrumental network centrality. Specifically, high status (vs. low status) as a signal of quality and future productivity positions the employees at the center of instrumental social structure; the central position in turn guarantees the information needed for proposing high-quality ideas and leadership attention and thus voice endorsement. However, they also found an opposing effect pathway, suggesting that low-status (vs. high-status) employees receive more voice endorsement through extensive use of impression management and issue selling tactics. The two mutually countervailing effects are contingent on the team context. High-quality team interpersonal relationships make the first effect weaker but the second effect stronger.

The studies in this area suggested a close connection between the “who” and the first two predicting factors of voice endorsement, “what” and “how”. That is, particular members, such as those who are highly expert and trustworthy (Whiting et al., 2012; Li et al., 2019), those who rate high in task performance (Duan et al., 2021), and those who hold certain personality profile (Crant et al., 2011) are expected to and often do raise ideas that are especially constructive for the organization or unit. Particularly, the recent examination of the link between “who” and “what” has increasingly recognized the dynamic nature of voice by identifying within-person cognitive fluctuation as a predictor of voice content. That is, employees’ fluctuating views and interpretations of the world largely influence the content of their voice (Lam et al., 2022; Lin & Johnson, 2015). This mirrors the earlier voice research that conceptualized upward voice as a

within-individual phenomenon that fluctuates across episodes (e.g., Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Liu et al., 2017). By delving into the within-person-level variance of the “who” and “what”, scholars may develop a more nuanced understanding of voice content and identify novel antecedents of voice content.

To whom it is spoken up. Some leaders are less responsive to employees’ inputs than other leaders. For example, Fast et al. (2014) found that managers who have a low efficacy belief in their own ability to take the managerial role are less likely to seek subordinate input and more likely to negatively evaluate the voicers. Another study by Li and colleagues (2019) indicated that managers under ego depletion may spend less cognitive resources in processing subordinate voices and thus respond less favorably to subordinate voices.

The role of the recipients in voice endorsement has also been interspersed in the previous sections of this review. Implicit in many of the beforementioned studies is that leaders differ in terms of their evaluations of and preferences for different types of voice. Leaders’ gender-related beliefs and orientations influence their evaluation and endorsement of ideas raised by employees of different genders (Farh et al., 2020; Guarana et al., 2017); their power motives influence their sensitivity to the power threatening components of employee voice and thus influence their endorsement of voice if the implementation of the voice may consequently constitute a power threat to the leader (Urbach & Fay, 2018, 2021). Besides, across a set of experiments, Sijbom, and colleagues (2015a; 2015b) found that recipients with a mastery goal orientation are more supportive of subordinates’ creative inputs than those with a performance goal orientation. In addition, the negative effects of performance goal orientation can be mitigated by appropriate delivery manners of creative ideas (e.g., using considerate language, rather than aggressive ones).

In sum, the prior investigations have clearly demonstrated four predicting factors of voice endorsement, i.e., the characteristics of voice content (“what”), voice delivery method (“how”), voicer (“who”), and voice recipient (“to whom”). In addition, across the review there surfaces complex links between these four factors and their predicting effects. For example, the characteristics of a voicer may influence voice endorsement through the effects on voice content. The following sections of this paper will develop and test a thorough framework that integrates the “who” and “what” aspects within a model to reveal their interrelationship and their effects on voice endorsement.

Construal Level Theory

Construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2012) is a highly influential theory that describes the ways that people encode and retrieve information. According to the theory, the same objects or events (e.g., upward voice) can be mentally construed in abstract or concrete ways (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Abstract construals are more general and inclusive, focusing more on the superordinate, coherent, and goal-relevant features. In contrast, concrete construals are more specific and detailed, focusing more on the subordinate, incidental situational factors, and the practicality concerns (see Trope & Liberman, 2010 for a review).

The initial discussions on abstract and concrete construals were driven by the desire to understand how people assess and deal with temporal distance (e.g., Liberman & Trope, 1998). Trope & Liberman (2003) generalized the core tenet to three more dimensions of psychological distance: spatial distance, social distance (e.g., self vs. other), and hypothetical distance (e.g., more vs. less probable to happen). They suggest that even though having the same information, people’s evaluations and responses to the objects or events may vary across psychological

distance because psychological distance systematically changes the way people conceptualize and represent objects or events. Specifically, people produce an abstract representation of objects or events that are distant in terms of space or time, happen to other people, or are not likely to occur, while they produce a concrete representation of objects or events that are here and now, happen to oneself, or are very likely to occur. The abstract and concrete mental representations are not only the outcome of distance, but they are also predictors of experienced psychological distance (McCrea et al., 2008). More importantly, abstract and concrete mental representations direct people's attention to objects or events at different distances. Abstract construals broaden people's time horizons, enabling people to transcend the here and now to think hypothetically and learn vicariously, whereas concrete construals focus people's attention on the here and now (Trope & Liberman 2010).

In Trope & Liberman's (2010) early discussion, construal level has been defined as a continuum with abstract representations on one end and concrete representations on the other. Their conceptualization suggests that construal level theory is rooted in the notion of limited cognitive resources (Reyt & Wiesenfeld, 2015). That is, accompanying the broader mental scopes and meaning generation (abstract representation) is people's constrained ability to process contextualized details and complexity (concrete representation; Trope & Liberman, 2010). However, I argue that in the context of voice development, abstract and concrete construals should be defined as a matter of degree rather than mutually exclusive.

Although construal level should be either abstract or concrete at the same time in the same person, the voicers could shift their attention between abstract and concrete aspects of the voiced issue in the process of developing a voice. I view voice development as a process because upward voice has long been identified as a planned behavior---employees make complex

cognitive preparations before they engage in voice behaviors (Liang et al., 2012). The implicit voice theories also support the process perspective by noting that there is a perceived need to spend time and effort repeatedly polishing the idea (Detert & Edmondson, 2011). For example, the voicers collect solid data, seek complete solutions, and prepare for unexpected questions before they speak up. Thus, in the voice development process, voicers revisit the ideas multiple times; they have the opportunity and motivation to integrate various considerations (e.g., abstract and concrete construals) to improve their voice before they speak up.

An explicit assumption of construal level theory is that construal level is context-dependent and is readily variable across situations (Ledgerwood et al., 2010). Empirical studies lend support to this position by manipulating abstract and concrete construals in experiments (e.g., Mueller et al., 2014) and capturing the daily variance of construals (Venus et al., 2019). Recent research on the flexibility and ambidexterity of construal level further facilitates the scholarly understanding of complex cognitive processes. Specifically, abstract and concrete representations can coexist in the same cognitive task, and the integration of abstract and concrete construals is an effective strategy to perform complex cognitive tasks (Steinbach et al., 2019; Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). Therefore, I conceptualize abstract and concrete construal of the voiced issue as the extent to which employees allocate attention to the abstract and concrete aspects of the voiced issue in the voice development process. In a voice episode, the voicer may focus on either aspect of the idea or on both aspects of the idea; focusing on one aspect of the idea does not necessarily prevent paying attention to the other one.

Construal of Voiced Issue as Predictors of Voice Desirability and Feasibility

The construal level theory notes that abstract and concrete construals direct employees' attention to certain information and guide them to interpret and make use of the information in

certain ways (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2003). I expect that abstract construal of voiced issue in the idea development process leads to voice that is more desirable, while concrete construal of voiced issues in the idea development process leads to voice that is more feasible. First, abstract construals feature a long-term concern, enabling people to transcend the here and now and think hypothetically (Liberman & Trope, 2008; Trope & Liberman, 2010). If an employee thinks about the voiced issue in a more abstract way, he/she may pay more attention to the end state desirability of the proposed change, which is always hypothetical and relatively far away from here and now. They may collect information about the long-term realities of the organization or unit and polish the idea based on this information. In contrast, concrete construals involve a short time horizon (Liberman & Trope, 2008). Concrete construals in the voice development process imply a preference for what is feasible here and now. This mental model also pressures the voicer to collect means-related details to tackle the immediate feasibility-related problems before the ideas reach the management.

Second, abstract representations involve the abstract “why” aspect and extract the single central, superordinate, and goal-relevant features of the issue under consideration (Nussbaum, Liberman, & Trope, 2006; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2003). If considering the voiced issue abstractly, the voicer may pay tight attention to the ultimate goal and end state of implementing the voice (Liberman & Trope, 1998) and thus raise suggestions that can potentially bring great benefits to the organization or unit. By contrast, the concrete mental model involves the concrete “how” aspect and attends to the subordinate, peripheral, and detailed issues (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Such mental representation of voiced issues may direct the voicers’ attention to the vivid situational details and/or means as to how the suggested change will take place. The voicers are therefore more able to take account of

the constraints of the context. They are also more able to identify, examine, and make plans for all the potential roadblocks and contingencies for reaching desired outcomes, thus increasing voice feasibility (Liberman, Sagristano, & Trope, 2002; Magee, Milliken, & Lurie, 2010).

Third, because of the missing of specific details that may present uncertainty and contingency, abstract construals tend to represent the negative event in more positive (or less negative) terms (Magee et al., 2010) and are less loss averse (Malkoc & Zauberman, 2006; Polman & Emich, 2011). The construal level theory indicates that construal level theory and regulatory focus theory are interrelated such that abstract construals invite promotion-related concerns, which focus on the pursuit of positive outcomes (Pennington & Roese, 2003). Thus, abstract mental models free the voicers to amplify gains from the proposed change rather than focus on potential risks and drawbacks, in turn increasing the favorability of the end state. Differently, concrete mental models provide rich details related to drawbacks and costs, and the increased focus on the forgone has been noted to be related to higher levels of loss aversion (Malkoc & Zauberman, 2006). When construing an issue concretely, the voicer is more sensitive to what it costs to reach the desirable end state and is more able to minimize costs and increase voice feasibility.

We conceptualize abstract and concrete construal as the attention allocation pattern in the voice development process, meaning that paying attention to the abstract (concrete) aspect of an issue does not prevent paying attention to the concrete (abstract) aspect of the issue. In the voice development process, the voicer may think over the idea from both aspects and consequently raise ideas that are both desirable and feasible. In this sense, I expect that abstract construal of voiced issue does not necessarily decrease voice feasibility, and concrete construal of voiced issue does not necessarily decrease voice desirability.

Hypothesis 1a. Abstract construal of voiced issue is positively related to voice desirability.

Hypothesis 1b. Concrete construal of voiced issue is positively related to voice feasibility.

Voice Desirability and Feasibility as Predictors of Voice Endorsement

According to the construal level theory, desirability and feasibility of outcomes are the two important considerations when people evaluate the attractiveness of an activity and make future decisions (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Voice desirability represents the extent to which the voiced issue, if implemented, will bring desirable outcomes for organizations or units in the end; voice feasibility represents the extent to which the voiced issue can be easily enacted in the context of the existing knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources of the organization or unit (Trope & Liberman, 2003; see also Haynie et al., 2009). For example, voice desirability may reflect the potential profit increase due to the implementation of a voice, whereas voice feasibility may reflect the amount of time, effort, and money the company has to invest to enact the change. Leaders may examine the desirability and feasibility aspects of the voiced issues to assess what is the possible outcome of implementing the voice, based on which the leader determines whether to endorse the voice.

I expect that both desirability and feasibility of the voice contribute to higher levels of voice endorsement. Construal level theory is conceptually related to the theories on motivation such that the distinction between desirability and feasibility corresponds to the distinction between ends and means, valence and expectancy, which significantly and respectively influence people's commitment to an activity (e.g., to support a voice; Liberman & Trope, 1998; Steel & König, 2006; Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). Valence (or desirability) reflects the positive affective orientations toward actions or the anticipated favorability of outcomes of engaging in an action,

while expectancy (or feasibility) reflects the subjective probability of successfully enacting an action or the investment leading to an outcome or performance (Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996; Vroom, 1964). People seek the maximization of end-state value and the minimization of effort or cost (Bettman et al., 1998). They are thus more likely to regard desirable and feasible wishes as valid goals, and desirability and feasibility jointly determine whether the individual shows commitment to an activity (Ajzen, 1985). Leaders tend to show higher levels of managerial support for ideas and suggestions that are more desirable and feasible.

In addition, the desirable and feasible voice fits well with the reality of managerial work. The organizational stakeholders pressure the management to stay responsive to the opportunities that potentially bring favorable outcomes for the organization (Dutton & Duncan, 1987). An important criterion for effective management work is to identify these opportunities and achieve benefits for the organization or unit. By endorsing highly desirable voices, the leader may go a step further in management effectiveness achievement and attain a good reputation for recognizing the opportunity to invite desirable outcomes (see Burriss et al., 2013). The reality of managerial work also induces managers to provide support for voice of high feasibility. Because of the complexity of managerial work, managers often refrain from endorsing infeasible ideas, which may bring additional and possibly difficult problems (Burriss et al., 2017). They are more likely to view a proposed change as an opportunity and less likely to view it as a threat when there is a fit between the resources required by the change and the resources possessed by the organization or unit (Barreto & Patient, 2013; Dutton & Duncan, 1987; Julian & Ofori-Dankwa, 2008). In contrast, endorsement of infeasible voices may cause resource waste and reputation damage to the endorser (Howell et al., 2005; Maidique, 1980). Based on the above reasoning, I propose:

Hypothesis 2a. Voice desirability mediates the positive relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement.

Hypothesis 2b. Voice feasibility mediates the positive relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement.

The Moderating Effects of Organizational Tenure

Abstract and concrete construals of voiced issue describe how voicers allocate attention to certain information and how they evaluate and interpret the information (Trope & Liberman, 2010; Trope & Liberman, 2003). That is, having an abstract/concrete construal makes cognitive styles needed for developing a desirable/feasible voice more accessible in the mind of employees. However, the two cognitive styles can direct the voicer in different directions based on which information the employees rely on (Luguri & Napier, 2013; Venus et al., 2019). I thus argue that the effectiveness of abstract and concrete construals depends on whether the voicer has access to sufficient and accurate information related to the voiced issue, which is the “ingredient” of abstract and concrete thinking. That is, whether abstract thinking can lead to suggestions that are truly desirable to the organization or unit is highly dependent on the extent to which the voicer deeply understands the mission and goals of the organization or unit. Similarly, whether concrete thinking can lead to suggestions that are truly realistic to the organization or unit is highly dependent on the extent to which the voicer has accurate information regarding the resources possessed by the organization or unit. Spending longer time in the organization is among the best ways to accumulate organization-specific information that fuels desirable and feasible voice (see Farh et al., 2022); thus, it may play an important role in whether the voicer is able to effectively use abstract and concrete mental styles to collect and process information in the voice development process.

Drawing upon human capital theory (Becker, 1964) and social capital theory (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973), I propose that organizational tenure is associated with two types of information that are relevant in the voice development process. According to the human capital theory (Becker, 1964), the accumulated organizational tenure is associated with an increase in organization-specific human capital, including gaining a more intimate understanding of the organization's values and goals (Chatman, 1991) and contextual information (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998). First, the insights into the organization's values and goals help the employees to better understand what the organization or unit needs, or what is beneficial to the organization or unit, in the long run. Such understanding channels abstract construal of a specific issue to the right direction, the end of which can benefit the organization or unit to a larger extent. Second, the extensive knowledge about the specific organizational environment gained by staying longer with the organization helps the employees to accurately understand the advantages and disadvantages of the organization and especially the contextual constraints here and now. With such extensive knowledge and accurate understanding, concrete construal of voiced issue can be channeled to the right direction to generate realistic ideas for the organization or unit.

According to the social capital theory (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973), organizational tenure also assists employees in gaining organization-specific social capital resources, i.e., the resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of social relationships in a particular organization. Long tenure in an organization provides ample opportunities for employees to familiarize themselves with colleagues, supervisors, and/or subordinates over time and to establish social links that bear important information relevant in the voice development process (Louis, 1980; Ng & Feldman, 2011). Consequently, organizational tenure enhances the employees' understanding of what the people in the

organization need and possess. By better understanding what the coworkers need, voicers who attend to and analyze the abstract aspect of a voiced issue can be better able to identify the benefits for the collective. By better understanding what the coworkers possess, including their abilities, skills, and resources, voicers who think an idea concretely are more able to raise realistic voice given the resource constraints of people in the organization. Based on these two reasons, I raise the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a. Organizational tenure moderates the relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with longer organizational tenure.

Hypothesis 3b. Organizational tenure moderates the relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with longer organizational tenure.

The Moderated Mediation Model

Thus far, I have provided a theoretical basis for the positive relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability (Hypothesis 1a) and a positive relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility (Hypothesis 1b). Considering that both voice desirability and voice feasibility play a role in the endorsement of upward-directed voice, I also argue that abstract construal of voiced issue has a positive indirect effect on voice endorsement through voice desirability (Hypothesis 2a) and that concrete construal of voiced issue has a positive indirect effect on voice endorsement through voice feasibility (Hypothesis 2b). Nonetheless, the effects of abstract construal on voice desirability (Hypothesis 3a) and the effects of concrete construal on voice feasibility (Hypothesis 3b) are contingent on

the voicers' organizational tenure. This reasoning also indicates two moderated mediation hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a. Organizational tenure moderates the indirect relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement via voice desirability, such that the indirect relationship is stronger for employees with a longer organizational tenure.

Hypothesis 4b. Organizational tenure moderates the indirect relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement via voice feasibility, such that the indirect relationship is stronger for employees with a longer organizational tenure.

METHODS

Pilot Study for Scale Validation

Sample and procedure

The main purpose of the pilot study was to validate the scales for abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue. To do this, I recruited 181 full-time employees from Credamo. com. A participant was eliminated from the final sample because of failing the attention check question, resulting in a final sample of 180 employees. In the final sample, 116 of the participants were female. The mean age and mean organizational tenure were 33.30 years ($SD = 7.28$) and 6.01 years ($SD = 5.18$), respectively.

I used a slightly adapted version of Freitas et al.'s (2004) how/why task to manipulate the participants' abstract/concrete construal. The participants were randomly assigned to the abstract construal condition or the concrete construal condition. Participants assigned to an abstract construal condition were instructed to consider why they would raise ideas and suggestions to leaders, whereas participants assigned to a concrete construal condition were instructed to consider how they would raise ideas and suggestions to leaders.

Then, the participants responded to abstract and concrete construal scales developed for this study to see whether the ratings can well reflect the manipulation. I captured the abstract and concrete construal with five items, respectively. The first three items were adapted from Venus et al.'s (2019) measure. The following two items in the abstract and concrete scales, respectively, were developed for this study to capture the key elements of abstract (why things are done and long-term goals) and concrete construal (how things are done and short-term goals; Trope & Liberman, 2010). A sample item for abstract construal was "At this moment, I am focused on the big picture" (1 = "not at all" to 7 = "to a large extent"; $\alpha = .86$). A sample item for concrete construal was "At this moment, I am focused on the details" (1 = "not at all" to 7 = "to a large extent"; $\alpha = .89$).

After rating their abstract and concrete construal, participants were directed to respond to the work-based construal level scale, which was developed by Reyt & Wiesenfeld (2015) and used in later studies (e.g., Efrat-Treister et al., 2020). The scale consisted of 18 common work activities with a forced-choice response format. For each statement (e.g., "Using a computer"), participants select the option that best represents the work activity, with one response reflecting an abstract construal ("Typing on a keyboard") and the other reflecting a concrete construal ("Processing information"). Thus, there were 18 abstract representations and 18 concrete representations included in the scale, and a construal-level score was obtained by counting the number of high-level descriptions that are chosen. I have slightly adapted the work-based construal level scale to reflect my conceptualization of abstract and concrete construal as an attention allocation process. The participants were asked to rate to what extent the abstract option and the concrete option, respectively, represent the work activity (1 = "not at all"; 7 = "to a large extent") rather than choose one from the two. Their ratings on the 18 abstract options were

averaged to reflect work-based abstract construal ($\alpha = .93$); the ratings on the 18 concrete options were averaged to reflect work-based concrete construal ($\alpha = .95$). At the end of the survey, the participants provided demographic information.

Results

I conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to explore the factor structure of the abstract and concrete construal scale. The principle component analysis with a varimax rotation showed a two-factor solution, which explained 68% of the variance. The five items for abstract construal and five items for concrete construal were loaded on the corresponding factors.

One-way ANOVAs on abstract and concrete construal showed that the construal manipulation had a significant effect on both the abstract construal scale ($F(1, 178) = 11.798, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .062$) and the concrete construal scale ($F(1, 178) = 12.267, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .064$). As expected, the participants in the abstract construal condition ($N = 90, M = 5.70, SD = 0.63$) rated higher on the abstract construal scale than those in the concrete construal condition ($N = 90, M = 5.18, SD = 1.28$); the participants in the concrete construal condition ($M = 5.17, SD = 1.03$) rated higher on the concrete construal scale than those in the abstract construal condition ($M = 4.60, SD = 1.17$). Therefore, the manipulations of both abstract and concrete construal states were successful. In addition, the correlation analysis of the whole sample ($N = 180$) suggested that the abstract construal was positively related to Reyt & Wiesenfeld's (2015) work-based abstract construal ($b = .48, p < .01$) but was not significantly related to their work-based concrete construal ($b = -.09, n.s.$); the concrete construal was positively related to Reyt & Wiesenfeld's (2015) work-based concrete construal ($b = .44, p < .01$) but was not significantly related to their work-based abstract construal ($b = -.09, n.s.$). These correlations hold for the abstract condition ($N = 90$) and the concrete condition ($N = 90$).

The above results suggested sufficient convergent and discriminant validity of the measures for abstract construal and concrete construal.

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in a medium-sized technology company located in Eastern China. Based on the communications with the manager from the Human Resource Department, I found that the employees interacted with their leaders on a daily basis, allowing for plenty of opportunities for them to speak up. In addition, the organization encouraged front-line employees to raise ideas and suggestions to facilitate the organizational or unit functioning. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were allowed to complete the questionnaires during work time.

An event-sampling method with three data collection phases was adopted. For Phase 1, I sent an e-mail to all participants and invited them to fill out an electronic questionnaire that included organizational tenure and other basic demographic information items. Of the 253 possible participants, 230 answered the Phase 1 survey. For Phase 2, I provided the definition of upward voice to all of the 253 participants along with a few possible voice topics provided by the informants and instructed them to answer the survey whenever they have an idea/suggestion to speak up to their immediate supervisors. In the survey, the participants were asked to type out the idea/suggestion and rate on abstract construal of voiced issue and concrete construal of voiced issue. Phase 2 lasted for four weeks, and we collected 381 pieces of voice from 162 employees, with an individual-level response rate of 64% and an average of 2.35 pieces of voice per employee ($SD = 1.17$). In Phase 3, we followed Burris et al.'s (2022) procedure to anonymize the 381 pieces of voice and presented them to the corresponding supervisors. The supervisors rated the desirability, feasibility, and endorsement of each voice. In this phase, I received responses

from the supervisors' side for 374 pieces of voice. Therefore, I got 374 matched responses from both the employees and managers. To make sure that the voices under examination meet the definition of upward voice (Burriss et al., 2008; Morrison, 2011), two raters blind to the hypotheses independently coded each idea as "meeting the definition of upward voice" or "not meeting the definition of upward voice". The initial ratings from the two raters demonstrated 96.26% agreement, and the remaining discrepancies were resolved through discussion. As a result, I deemed 39 of the 374 ideas as not meeting the definition of upward voice and eliminated them from the sample, leaving 335 ideas from 154 employees. Examples of these eliminated voices include "to offer physical examination opportunities to employees annually" and "to care more about breastfeeding mothers." I also eliminated participants with only one idea that meets the definition of upward voice, who otherwise might have led to inflated results due to response bias. This resulted in a final sample of 280 ideas from 99 employees nested in 27 leaders, with an average of 2.83 ideas per employee ($SD = 0.78$) and 10.37 ideas per leader ($SD = 6.62$). Examples of voice episodes in the final sample include: "Provide training courses to employees," "Conduct retrospective analysis after the completion of each project," "Keep the approval flow as simple as possible."

Measures

All materials used in this study were presented in Chinese. I translated the items from English to Chinese using the standard method of back-translation (Brislin, 1980). A list of all items used in this study is presented in the Appendix.

Abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue. In Phase 2, I used the abstract construal scale developed and validated in the pilot study to capture the employees' abstract and concrete construal while developing the idea/suggestion. The scales were slightly rephrased to reference

the voice development process. A sample item for abstract construal of voiced issue was “In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on the big picture of the work” (1= “not at all” to 7 = “to a large extent”; $\alpha = .95$). A sample item for concrete construal of voiced issue was “In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on the details of the work” (1= “not at all” to 7 = “to a large extent”; $\alpha = .94$).

Voice desirability and feasibility. In Phase 3, the supervisors rated the desirability and feasibility of the ideas/suggestions raised by their immediate followers. The voice desirability scale was adapted from Flynn & Brockner’s (2003) four-item outcome favorability scale. A sample item was “If implemented, the organization/unit will directly benefit from this voice.” (1= “not at all” to 7 = “to a large extent”; $\alpha = .99$). Four items developed by Brykman & Raver (2021) were used to capture voice feasibility. A sample item was “There is enough time to implement the suggestion.” (1= “not at all” to 7 = “to a large extent”; $\alpha = .95$).

Voice endorsement. After reporting the desirability and feasibility of each voice, the supervisors also reported their extent of endorsing the voice with four items developed by Burris (2012). A sample item was “I think this idea should be implemented” (1 = “strongly disagree,” 7 = “strongly agree”; $\alpha = .98$).

Organizational tenure. Organizational tenure was reported by employees in years in Phase 1.

Control variables. I controlled for demographics such as employees’ gender, age, and education as reported in Phase 1. These variables have been found to influence leader-follower interactions and also potentially influence voice content and voice endorsement (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001). I also follow the previous studies on voice content to control for the influence of voice frequency by counting the number of ideas/suggestions a

participant submitted throughout the four weeks (e.g., Lam et al., 2019). Moreover, I controlled for the supervisors' subjective ratings of how large the suggested change was (i.e., change size), captured by a single item "How large of a change did this subordinate suggest?" on a scale of 1 (extremely small) to 7 (extremely large). Change size has been controlled in previous studies because of its possible predicting effects on voice endorsement (e.g., McClean et al., 2022).

Analytical Strategy

Prior to hypothesis testing, I conducted multilevel confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to assess the factor structure of the measures used in the present study. I then checked for systematic within-individual, between-individual, and between-leader variance in the ratings of episode-level variables and found that the episode-level variance was 22.00% for abstract construal of voiced issue, 29.30% for concrete construal of voiced issue, 49% for voice desirability, 45.80% for voice feasibility, and 48.00% for voice endorsement. A notable proportion of the variance of these episode-level factors was accounted for by the episode level. Considering this and the nested nature of the data (voice episodes were nested within individuals, which were in turn nested within leaders), I conducted three-level path analyses using the estimator of MLR (maximum likelihood with robust standard errors) in Mplus 8.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012-2019) to test the predicted relationships. An advantage of multilevel path analyses was to test the hypotheses simultaneously rather than in a causal sequence and piecemeal approach (see Chen et al., 2015; Chong et al., 2020).

At level 1, I simultaneously estimated the effects of abstract construal of voiced issue and concrete construal of voiced issue on voice desirability, voice feasibility, and voice endorsement. Then, I estimated the effects of voice desirability and voice feasibility on voice endorsement. I specified the slopes between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability, abstract

construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility, concrete construal of voiced issue and voice desirability, and concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility, to be random and all other slopes to be fixed to avoid potential complication (Preacher et al., 2010). At level 2, I allowed all the random slopes to covariate with voice endorsement and with each other. I also used organizational tenure to predict all these random slopes specified at level 1. Change size (Level 1), gender, age, education, and voice frequency (Level 2) were included as control variables with fixed effects (Chong et al., 2020). To facilitate the interpretation of the results and following best practices in multilevel path analysis (Preacher et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2009), predictors at the between-individual level were grand-mean centered (i.e., organizational tenure, gender, age, education, and voice frequency), and predictors at the within-individual level were group-mean centered (i.e., abstract construal of voiced issue, concrete construal of voiced issue, voice desirability, voice feasibility, and change size). Though no predictor was specified at the leader level (Level 3), I specified a three-level model to accurately reflect the data structure.

To accurately test the significance of multilevel indirect effects and moderated mediation effects, I performed the Monte Carlo bootstrapping with 20,000 simulations based on R to estimate 90% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs) (Bauer et al., 2006). Based on the covariance matrix of estimated model coefficients, this method repeatedly simulates indirect effects or moderated mediation effects with normal distributions. The effects were considered to be significant if the 90% CI excludes zero. The 90% CIs for indirect effects and moderated mediation effects were to correspond to one-tailed, $\alpha = .05$ hypothesis tests (see Watkins & Umphress, 2020; Preacher et al., 2010).

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, inter-correlations, and reliability coefficients among key variables. In line with our expectations, at the within-individual level, abstract construal of voiced issue was positively associated with voice desirability, which was in turn positively associated with voice endorsement. Though voice feasibility was positively associated with voice endorsement, the relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility was insignificant.

Insert Table 1 about here

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The hypothesized measurement model consisted of five within-individual latent variables (i.e., abstract construal of voiced issue, concrete construal of voiced issue, voice desirability, voice feasibility, and voice endorsement). I loaded the indicators of these variables on the respective within-individual level latent variables. The CFA results indicated that the five-factor model fit the data well, $\chi^2 (199) = 292.43$, scaling correction factor (SCF) = 1.69, comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = .96, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .04, standardized root mean squared residual (SRMR) at the within-team level = .05. The five-factor model also demonstrated better fit than other models, including a model in which I combined abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue $\chi^2 (203) = 408.33$, SCF = 1.65, CFI = .93, TLI = .92, RMSEA = .06, SRMR at the within-team level = .07, a model in which I combined voice desirability and voice feasibility, $\chi^2 (203) = 686.12$, SCF = 1.75, CFI = .83, TLI = .80, RMSEA = .09, SRMR at the within-team level = .08, and a model in which I combined voice desirability and voice endorsement, $\chi^2 (203) = 811.80$, SCF = 1.59, CFI = .78, TLI = .75,

RMSEA = .10, SRMR at the within-team level = .06. These model comparison results supported the discriminant validity of the measures used in this study.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1a suggested a positive relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability; Hypothesis 1b suggested a positive relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility. The path analysis results (see Table 2) showed that after controlling for the effects of change size, gender, age, education, and voice frequency, abstract construal of voiced issue was positively related to voice desirability ($\gamma = .54, p < .05$) but was not related to voice feasibility ($\gamma = -.12, n.s.$). After considering the effects of these control variables, concrete construal of voiced issue was marginally positively related to voice feasibility ($\gamma = .35, p < .10$) but was not related to voice desirability ($\gamma = .23, n.s.$). Hence, hypothesis 1a was supported, and hypothesis 1b was partially supported.

Hypothesis 2a predicted that voice desirability mediates the positive relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement; Hypothesis 2b predicted that voice feasibility mediates the positive relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement. As Table 2 shows, both voice desirability ($\gamma = .65, p < .01$) and voice feasibility ($\gamma = .15, p < .05$) had a positive relationship with voice endorsement. The results of the Monte Carlo simulation indicated a significant indirect effect of abstract construal of voiced issue on voice endorsement via voice desirability (*indirect effect* = .35, 90% CI = [.081, .643]) and a significant indirect effect of concrete construal of voiced issue on voice endorsement via voice feasibility (*indirect effect* = .05, 90% CI = [.001, .123]). The earlier mentioned results suggested that abstract construal of voiced issue was positively related to voice desirability (H1a)

but that concrete construal of voiced issue was only marginally related to voice feasibility (H1b). Thus, Hypothesis 2a received support; Hypothesis 2b received partial support.

According to Hypotheses 3a and 3b, organizational tenure strengthens the positive relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability (Hypothesis 3a) and the positive relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility (Hypothesis 3b). The results suggested that the predicting effect of organizational tenure on the random slope between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility was marginally positive ($\gamma = .22, p < .10$). However, the predicting effect of organizational tenure on the random slope between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability was not significant ($\gamma = -.02, n.s.$). I further plotted the cross-level moderating effect of organizational tenure on the relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility in Figure 2. As Figure 2 indicates, the effect of concrete construal of voiced issue on voice feasibility was stronger when organizational tenure was higher than when organizational tenure was lower. These results offered partial support for Hypothesis 3b but no support for Hypothesis 3a. Hypothesis 4a, the moderated mediation hypothesis, also received no support.

I then tested Hypothesis 4b, which suggested a moderated mediation model. Following Edwards & Lambert's (2007) procedure, I estimated the conditional indirect effects at lower ($-1 SD$) and higher levels ($+1 SD$) of organizational tenure. As predicted, the indirect relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement through voice feasibility was insignificant under a low organizational tenure (*conditional indirect effect* = $-.04$, 90% CI = $[-.150, .049]$) but was significant under a high organizational tenure (*conditional indirect effect* = $.14$, 90% CI = $[.019, .306]$). The difference estimate was significant (*difference* = $.18$, 90% CI = $[.007, .427]$). Thus, the indirect relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and

voice endorsement via voice feasibility was positively moderated by organizational tenure, supporting Hypothesis 4b.

Insert Table 2 & Figure 2 about here

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current research investigated whether, how, and when abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue influence voice endorsement by influencing voice content as reflected in desirability and feasibility. The results demonstrated support for the positive relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice endorsement via voice feasibility. This study also provided partial support for the positive relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility and thus the positive indirect effect of concrete construal of voiced issue on voice endorsement via voice feasibility. Regarding the moderating effects of organizational tenure, the results provided partial support for the prediction that organizational tenure strengthens the relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility, while organizational tenure did not influence the effects of abstract construal of voiced issue on voice desirability. In sum, abstract construal of voiced issue was positively related to voice desirability rated by supervisors, which in turn was positively related to the extent to which supervisors endorsed the voice. These effects were consistent under higher or lower levels of organizational tenure. In contrast, concrete construal of voiced issue was marginally related to voice feasibility rated by supervisors, which in turn was positively related to the extent to which supervisors endorsed the voice. The relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility was positive for employees with higher organizational tenure but not significant for employees with lower organizational tenure.

Theoretical Contributions

This study provides several theoretical contributions to the voice literature, leadership literature, and construal level theory. First, I identify voice desirability and voice feasibility as two dimensions of voice content to reflect the potential organizational outcomes of implementing

the voice. The previous research on the relationship between voice content and managers' attitudes towards voices or voicers (e.g., Burris, 2012; McClean et al., 2022) did not portray a complete picture of managers' evaluation of voice content. In the leadership literature, the differentiation between person orientation and task orientation (Burke, Stagl, Klein, Goodwin, Salas, & Halpin, 2006), and consideration and initiating structure (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004), have alluded to two primary tasks of leaders: manage people and manage work goals (Blake, Mouton, & Bidwell, 1962; Gartzia & Baniandrés, 2016). The prior research was informative on how leaders assess, respond to, and manage people's capabilities (e.g., Brykman & Raver, 2021; McClean et al., 2022) and work attitudes (e.g., Burris, 2012; Whiting et al., 2012) in the voice context. I extend these studies by demonstrating how managers manage organizational or unit goals in the voice context via evaluating and responding to voice desirability and feasibility.

Second, this study captures the within-individual variance of voice content in reference to potential organizational outcomes. Research has accumulated on the dynamic nature of voice behavior (e.g., Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Liu et al., 2017) and voice content (e.g., Lam et al., 2022; Lin & Johnson, 2015), while there is still an implicit assumption that individuals with certain personality or other stable attributes are able to produce ideas that can potentially bring about beneficial organizational outcomes, which in turn contribute to managerial support for these people's ideas (Burris et al., 2017; Crant et al., 2011; Farh et al., 2022). The current study unveiled that the episode level explained a notable proportion of the variance of voice content (49% for voice desirability and 45.80% for voice feasibility). This finding could be seen as opening the door to a more refined view of employees' idea-generation process and managers' idea-evaluation process.

Third, the current study identified novel cognitive antecedents of voice content, abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue, and examined their interactions with organizational tenure. This research builds on the old insight that a necessary precondition for voice is a latent opportunity to voice, that is, when the employee has something to say (Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Morrison, 2023). The amount of objective information the employee possesses positively predicts his/her voice tendency or voice frequency (Shepherd et al., 2019; see also Burris et al., 2008; Tucker & Turner, 2015). What is added here is that employees deem particular parts of the information they have access to as relevant and important in a particular voice episode. It is not only how much information the employee has but also how the employee selects and processes the information in each episode, e.g., abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue, that matters for the production of high-quality ideas. In addition, the voicer's dynamic cognitive activities in each voice episode (i.e., concrete construal of voiced issue) interact with the amount of information available to the voicer accumulated with the increasing organizational tenure to influence voice content and voice endorsement.

Finally, I also contribute to the construal level theory by defining abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue as an attention allocation process. The initial discussions on abstract and concrete construals have conceptualized construal level as a continuum from abstract representations to concrete representations (Trope & Liberman, 2010). The current study found that abstract and concrete construal of the same voice issue were moderately and positively associated at the episode level ($b = .50, p < .01$). Moreover, because the voicer can shift attention between the abstract and concrete aspects of the same issue, being abstract did not prevent the voicer from developing feasible voice ($b = -.12, n.s.$), and being concrete did not prevent the voicer from developing desirable voice ($b = .23, n.s.$). This is a timely response to the recent call

for examining the coexistence of and shifts between abstract and concrete construals in the same cognitive task (Steinbach et al., 2019; Wiesenfeld et al., 2017) and sheds light on the complexity of the relationship between abstract and concrete construals.

Managerial Implications

This study is also important for its implications for practice. First, the desirability-feasibility framework demonstrates the managers' criteria for evaluating the value of a voice. The results showed that desirable and feasible ideas/suggestions are what the managers need and are thus more likely to be supported. These findings may help potential voicers to better organize their thoughts before formally speaking up. They may seek to understand the organizational goals and missions and may collect information about the resource constraints of the organization or unit. They may also make efforts to figure out why a change should be implemented and how the change could be realized. By identifying abstract and concrete construal as important predictors of voice content and voice endorsement, my study also encourages the potential voicers to do cognitive training (Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997) to adapt to the increasingly complex cognitive demands for developing a high-quality idea. By effectively regulating their information processing style in the idea development process, they may be able to take a holistic view of both the abstract and concrete aspects of an issue and create ideas that are both desirable and feasible.

This study also bears implications for managerial work. The managers can guide and even provide training for the employees to look at both the forest (i.e., the abstract big picture) and the trees (i.e., the concrete details) of work issues before they speak up. Such guidance and training may enable employees to develop desirable and feasible ideas. Moreover, the organization-specific information accumulated with the increase of organizational tenure

increased the effectiveness of concrete thinking. The managers can improve voice quality by facilitating the employees' understanding of the specific organizational environment.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current research has at least two limitations. First, a salient limitation of this study is that I collected data on voice desirability, voice feasibility, and voice endorsement in the same time point from the same source (i.e., the supervisor), raising concerns regarding common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This concern is reflected particularly in the high correlation between voice desirability and voice endorsement ($r = .81$); we thus need to interpret the relationships with caution. I have collected data on the three variables this way because supervisors, the voice recipients, have been deemed as the most qualified to assess voice desirability, voice feasibility, and voice endorsement. It is in accordance with the reality that managers forecast the outcomes of implementing the voice and make decisions about whether to endorse the voice almost simultaneously (Berg, 2016). This reality has been reflected in other studies focusing on voice episodes, in which managers reported their evaluation of voice content and voice endorsement in the same survey (e.g., McClean et al., 2022). Voice desirability and voice endorsement are conceptually distinctive, with the former referring to the anticipated end-state outcomes of implementing the voice and the latter referring to the managerial support for the voice---a manager may still reject a desirable voice if it is infeasible. The concern can also be alleviated by the CFA results showing that the five-factor model (i.e., abstract construal of voiced issue, concrete construal of voiced issue, voice desirability, voice feasibility, and voice endorsement) fitted the data better than the model in which voice desirability and voice endorsement were combined (see Podsakoff et al., 2003). It is not uncommon in studies with a similar design to generate relatively high correlations between key variables (e.g., $r = .79$, Livne-

Ofer et al., 2019, Study 2; $r = .65$, Wang et al., 2011). Future studies may adopt an experimental design to test the effects of voice desirability and feasibility on voice endorsement. For example, future studies may use a scenario-based experimental design in which the researchers manipulate voice desirability and feasibility by describing the end state outcome and means of implementing the voice; and they can then instruct the participants to rate voice endorsement using the same scale in our study. In this way, the researchers will be able to establish the causality between voice desirability and voice endorsement and the causality between voice feasibility and voice endorsement.

Second, I did not find sufficient empirical support for the moderating effect of organizational tenure on the relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability. A plausible explanation for this insignificant moderating effect might be that the materials needed for abstract thinking, i.e., employees' understanding of organizational goals, values, and strategies, was deepened relatively quickly in the newcomers' early socialization process (Chatman, 1991). This is also supported by the construal level theory, which states that the information needed for abstract thinking is less detailed and complex than that needed for concrete thinking (Wiesenfeld et al., 2017). Wakslak et al.'s (2008) study lends support to this argument by stating that abstract mindsets are associated with a simpler structure of information than concrete mindsets. For these reasons, employees may spend a relatively short period accumulating information and knowledge needed for effectively engaging in the abstract construal of voiced issues. The interviews with the informants of the participating organization suggested that the organization organized regular meetings to communicate organizational goals and developmental directions, which may have further accelerated the employees' understanding of these aspects. The average organizational tenure in the current sample was 2.86 years ($SD =$

2.75). It is possible that the majority of the sample possessed sufficient information about the strategic goals of the organization; consequently, employees with higher or lower tenure did not differ much in terms of the relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability. Future research may examine the temporal factors influencing the relationship between abstract construal of voiced issue and voice desirability and the relationship between concrete construal of voiced issue and voice feasibility in newcomer samples. In so doing, researchers can compare the varying effects of abstract and concrete construal over time to see whether employees need less time to accumulate sufficient information that is needed for effective abstract thinking than that is needed for effective concrete thinking. It is also worth studying which organizational practices facilitate employees' accumulation of organizational-specific information, including organizational goals and contextual information.

Another way to extend the current study is to investigate other possible boundary conditions for the effects of abstract and concrete construal of voiced issue. In addition to staying longer in the organization, obtaining information from the leader is another way to accumulate organization-specific knowledge. In fact, leaders are a central source of organization-specific information in the workplace (e.g., Dineen et al., 2006). Leaders can increase the effectiveness of abstract/concrete construal of voiced issue by openly sharing, discussing, and communicating important information needed to make decisions and form judgments (Arnold et al., 2000). In addition, according to construal level theory, social-identity salience determines which information is considered important and relevant (Maitner et al., 2010) and may channel abstract and concrete thinking to different directions (Luguri & Napier, 2013; Venus et al., 2019). Abstract (concrete) construal of voiced issue may lead to voice that is desirable (feasible) to the organization/unit to the extent that the focal employee's self-definition is based on his/her social

group memberships (Johnson et al., 2006). In contrast, abstract (concrete) construal of voiced issue may lead to voice that is desirable (feasible) to the voicer him/herself when the voicer bases the self-concept at the individual level and acts out of self-interest (Johnson et al., 2006). Future research may provide a more complete picture of the relationship between construals and voice content by exploring additional boundary conditions.

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TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Within-individual variables</i>								
1. Change size	4.82	1.67						
2. Abstract construal of voice issue	5.90	1.03	.06	(.95)				
3. Concrete construal of voiced issue	5.69	1.12	-.02	.50**	(.94)			
4. Voice desirability	5.11	1.63	.56**	.17**	.06	(.99)		
5. Voice feasibility	4.32	1.76	.42**	.15**	.09	.58**	(.95)	
6. Voice endorsement	5.08	1.70	.61**	.08	.00	.81**	.58**	(.98)
<i>Between-individual variables</i>								
1. Gender ^a	1.45	0.50						
2. Age ^b	31.39	4.84	-.24*					
3. Education	2.04	0.20	-.08	.07				
4. Voice frequency	3.06	0.84	-.25*	-.10	.29**			
5. Organizational tenure ^b	2.86	2.75	.09	.60**	-.10	-.18		

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. $N = 280$ ideas nested in 99 individuals. Correlations between within-individual variables are based on within-individual scores. Values on the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha coefficients. ^a Gender was coded: Male = 0, Female = 1. ^b Age and organizational tenure were measured in years.

TABLE 2
Path Analysis Results for Estimated Coefficients of the Multilevel Moderated Mediation Model

Predictors	Voice desirability		Voice feasibility		Voice endorsement	
	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.	Estimate	S.E.
<i>Within-individual level</i>						
Change size	.52**	.10	.52**	.10	.21*	.09
Abstract construal of voiced issue	.54*	.25	-.12	.31	-.13	.10
Concrete construal of voiced issue	.23	.26	.35†	.18	-.04	.06
Voice desirability					.65**	.10
Voice feasibility					.15*	.07
<i>Between-individual level</i>						
Gender ^a					.33	.26
Age ^b					.05	.04
Education					-.16	.51
Voice frequency					.15	.14
<i>Cross-level moderation effects</i>						
Abstract construal of voiced issue X organizational tenure ^b	-.02	.07	-.09	.06		
Concrete construal of voiced issue X organizational tenure ^b	.07	.14	.22†	.11		
<i>Level-1 residual variance</i>	.43**	.12	.61**	.12	.43**	.11
<i>Level-2 residual variance</i>					.73**	.22

Note. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$, $N = 280$ ideas nested in 99 individuals. ^a Gender was coded: Male = 0, Female = 1. ^b Age and organizational tenure were measured in years.

FIGURE 1

Hypothesized Model

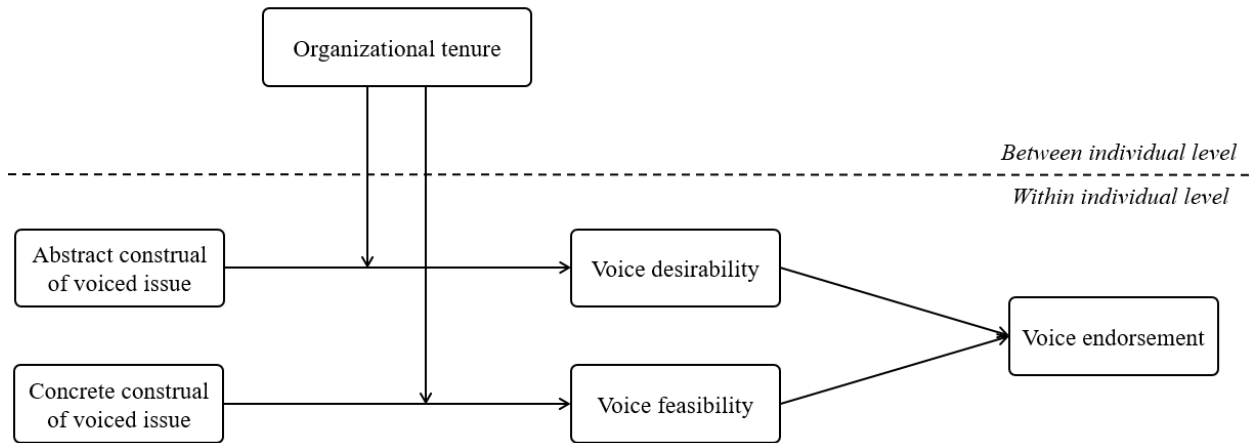
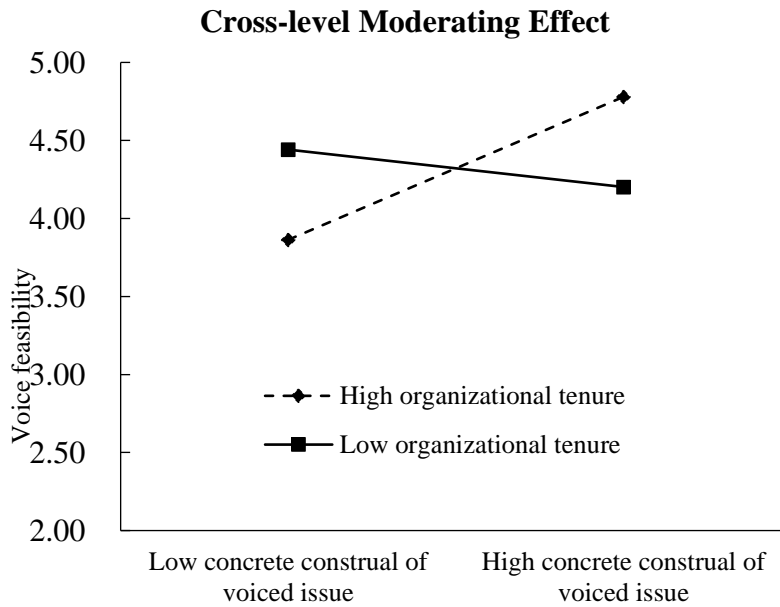


FIGURE 2



APPENDIX SURVEY ITEMS

Abstract construal of voice

1. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on long-term goals of the work.

2. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on the general meaning or overall effect of the work.
3. In the process of developing this idea, I cared more about central characteristics of the work.
4. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on the big picture of the work.
5. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on why we do the work.

Concrete construal of voice

1. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on short-term goals of the work.
2. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on the immediate context or concrete details of the work.
3. In the process of developing this idea, I cared more about specifics of the work.
4. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on the details of the work.
5. In the process of developing this idea, I was focused on how to do the work.

Voice desirability

1. If implemented, this voice will help the organization/unit.
2. If implemented, this voice will be exactly what the organization/ unit needs.
3. If implemented, the organization/unit will directly benefit from this voice.
4. If implemented, the organization/unit will be satisfied with the voice.

Voice feasibility

1. The organization/unit have sufficient resources to implement the idea.
2. There is enough time to implement the suggestion.
3. The suggestion is easy to implement.
4. This idea is practical.

Voice endorsement

1. I will take this person's comments to my supervisors or other managers.
2. I will support this person's comments when talking with my supervisors or other managers.
3. I think this person's comments should be implemented.
4. I agree with this person's comments.