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Résumé de l'article

Les organisations comptent sur le respect des tâches standardisées pour obtenir des résultats efficaces et sur l'expression par les employés de suggestions ou d'informations différentes pour améliorer les procédures et les performances. La normalisation des emplois fait-elle des employés des locuteurs actifs ou des locuteurs étouffés ? Cette étude examine comment et pourquoi la normalisation des emplois influence l'expression des employés. Cette étude utilise la théorie de la conservation des ressources (COR) pour formuler des hypothèses concurrentes et un processus de médiation pour le mécanisme individuel d'orientation du rôle des employés dans leur travail. Dans le cadre d'une enquête par panel en trois vagues, 232 employés ont répondu à des questionnaires. Les résultats indiquent que la standardisation des emplois est liée négativement à l'expression des employés par le biais d'une orientation des rôles plus étroite, ce qui est conforme à l'argument de la conservation des ressources de la théorie COR. Les résultats suggèrent que la normalisation des emplois épuise les ressources et que les employés qui y sont soumis ont tendance à avoir une vision de rôle plus étroite, qui se concentre sur la conservation des ressources pour répondre aux exigences du travail. Ils seront ainsi moins susceptibles de consommer des ressources pour exprimer des idées et des suggestions.

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Job Standardization and Employee Voice

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Summary

An organization expects its employees to comply with job standardization to improve its production efficiency, while also expecting them to make suggestions to improve their job performance. Are the two goals compatible? Does job standardization turn employees into active speakers or stifled ones? This study is about how and why job standardization influences employee voice. I use conservation of resources (COR) theory to articulate competing hypotheses and a mediating process for the individual mechanism of employees' role orientation in their job. In a three-wave panel survey, 232 employees completed questionnaires. The results indicate that job standardization reduces employee voice by narrowing the employee's role orientation, in line with the resource conservation argument of COR theory. The results further suggest that job standardization is resource-depleting and causes the employee to focus on resource conservation to fulfill job requirements. The employee is less likely to consume resources and thus less likely to voice ideas and suggestions.

This study shifts our understanding of employee voice from individual, interpersonal and organizational antecedents to the neglected antecedent of job characteristics. Given that the effects of job characteristics have often been explained in terms of the job itself, i.e., job characteristics theory, this study provides an alternative explanation in terms of the worker, i.e., resource theory. Organizations standardize jobs in order to improve production; in doing so, however, they create a dilemma: job standardization makes production more difficult to improve because the employees are less likely to voice their concerns. This study provides a specific, job-related way for managers to keep employee voice from being stifled or ignored. I propose that job standardization should consider the relative importance of employee voice and be classified as either discipline-related or job-content-related.

Abstract

An organization expects its employees to comply with job standardization to improve its production efficiency, while also expecting them to make suggestions to improve their job performance. Are the two goals compatible? Does job standardization turn employees into active speakers or stifled ones? This study is about how and why job standardization influences employee voice. I use conservation of resources (COR) theory to articulate competing hypotheses and a mediating process for the individual mechanism of employees' role orientation in their job. In a three-wave panel survey, 232 employees completed questionnaires. The results are consistent with

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the resource conservation argument of COR theory: job standardization is resource-depleting and tends to narrow the role orientation of employees, who thus focus on resource conservation to fulfill job requirements and are in turn less likely to consume resources and voice suggestions. This study provides a specific, job-related way for managers to keep employee voice from being stifled or ignored. Job standardization should consider the relative importance of employee voice and be classified as discipline-related or job-content-related.

Keywords: job standardization; employee voice; role orientation; conservation of resources

Résumé

Les organisations comptent sur le respect des tâches standardisées pour obtenir des résultats efficaces et sur l'expression par les employés de suggestions ou d'informations différentes pour améliorer les procédures et les performances. La normalisation des emplois fait-elle des employés des locuteurs actifs ou des locuteurs étouffés ? Cette étude examine comment et pourquoi la normalisation des emplois influence l'expression des employés. Cette étude utilise la théorie de la conservation des ressources (COR) pour formuler des hypothèses concurrentes et un processus de médiation pour le mécanisme individuel d'orientation du rôle des employés dans leur travail. Dans le cadre d'une enquête par panel en trois vagues, 232 employés ont répondu à des questionnaires. Les résultats indiquent que la standardisation des emplois est liée négativement à l’expression des employés par le biais d'une orientation des rôles plus étroite, ce qui est conforme à l'argument de la conservation des ressources de la théorie COR. Les résultats suggèrent que la normalisation des emplois épuise les ressources et que les employés qui y sont soumis ont tendance à avoir une vision de rôle plus étroite, qui se concentre sur la conservation des ressources pour répondre aux exigences du travail. Ils seront ainsi moins susceptibles de consommer des ressources pour exprimer des idées et des suggestions.

1. Introduction

In Taiwan, a high-profile restaurant chain is widely known for its consistent and stable service, thanks to its employees strictly complying with standard operating procedures (Managertoday, 2008). It is also known for its practice of encouraging them to provide suggestions or ideas for improvement (Managertoday, 2008). Such feedback is needed because standard operating procedures are static and do not easily adapt to changing internal or external circumstances. Employees, in the course of working and interacting with others inside or outside their organizations, continually see potential opportunities for organizational improvement. However, not all employees welcome the opportunity to speak out (Managertoday, 2008). Since job performance is governed by certain rules (i.e., standardized procedures), and voice is discretionary and not part of the standardized procedures of job performance, employees may see no need to speak out and may feel they should only follow the rules. With a considerable amount of literature showing that job standardization is associated with discretionary employee behaviour, such as turnover, creative or innovative behaviour and citizenship behaviour (Acar et al., 2019; Friedrich et al., 2016; Kerse & Babadag, 2018; Luoh et al., 2014), I hypothesize that job standardization and employee voice are related to each other, while being agnostic about the nature of the relationship.

Because it is ill-advised to rely solely on managers to identify all of their organizations' challenges and problems, particularly in current environments of increasing complexity, employees voicing their opinions and suggestions is key to improving corporate performance (Kwon et al., 2016). Employee voice is discretionary behaviour. It is not part of the procedures and requirements that employees have to follow and fulfill to do their jobs. It is a discretionary communication where employees seek to improve organizational functioning by providing concerns, opinions, ideas, suggestions and information to managers who have the authority to take actions. Such communication may differ from or challenge the status quo and upset others who are responsible for or feel personally attached to established thoughts and routines (Morrison, 2014; Sun et al., 2007). Because employee voice is important to improving organizational functioning and competitive advantages (Kwon et al., 2016), researchers have looked for antecedent factors that encourage or stifle it (e.g., Morrison, 2014). These factors are broadly classified as individual, interpersonal or contextual/organizational (e.g., Frazier & Bowler, 2015; Ng & Lucianetti, 2018; Zhang et al., 2015). However, the above case of a restaurant with strict standard operating procedures points to another antecedent factor.

There is little empirical evidence that job characteristics affect employee voice, although a few studies have demonstrated the impacts of job duty and job control (Tangirala et al., 2013; Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). This lack of knowledge is the reason for the present study, which aims to examine how the job characteristic of job standardization affects employee voice. Some studies have shown that job characteristics play a consequential role in employee behaviour and organizational performance (Agarwal & Gupta, 2018; Ohly et al., 2006), and job standardization has been consistently identified as a precursor for optimal productivity and adoption of best practices (Gounaris, 2008; Shalley & Gilson, 2017). Many employers are standardizing jobs as a means to eliminate variation in production among employees, especially in the current environment of widespread mass production of goods and services (Alfes et al., 2013; Luoh et al., 2014; Shalley & Gilson, 2017). Thus, the present study focuses on the role of job standardization in influencing employees' willingness to provide suggestions or information for organizational improvement.

Despite the lack of studies specifically on the relationship between job standardization and employee voice, other studies have shown a possible relationship. For example, job standardization has been found to be positively related to organizational citizenship behaviour

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(OCB) (Chen et al., 2009; Raub, 2008), which is employee behaviour that exceeds normal role expectations or job requirements for the benefit of an employer. A distinct form of OCB is employee voice (Morrison, 2014; Ng & Feldman, 2012). There is less evidence on the nature of the relationship between employees in more bureaucratic organizations, where jobs are often more standardized, or on their voice behaviour (Raub, 2008; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). In sum, the literature implies a relationship between job standardization and employee voice while failing to explain how job standardization is related to employee voice.

Specifically, previous assessments of the effect of job standardization on OCB have measured only the general OCB of employees, and not specific forms of OCB, including employee voice. Thus, the effect of job standardization on OCB cannot be generalized to employee voice because voice is generally recognized as incurring risks and costs that do not emerge from other forms of OCB (e.g., compliance, helping and sportsmanship) (Ng & Feldman, 2012; Organ, 1988). Other forms of OCB are cooperative behaviours that do not differ from or challenge a status quo, whereas voice may challenge a status quo (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003), upset others in favour of a status quo and often disrupt harmony in the workplace (Kwon et al., 2016). These aspects of employee voice are not found in other forms of OCB. Similarly, because existing findings concern only how employees generally perceive bureaucracy in their workplace, any findings on how bureaucracy affects employee voice cannot be generalized to workplaces where jobs are standardized. In other words, the concept of bureaucracy is much larger than that of job standardization, which is only one of its dimensions (Dormann et al., 2019). Employees may perceive a large bureaucracy in their organization, but their jobs may be standardized to different extents.

Due to inconsistent speculations and a lack of findings in the existing literature, I wish to ask the following question: “Is job standardization related to employee voice? If so, why?” In addition to examining whether job standardization requirements are a predictor of employee voice, I wish to investigate how employee role orientation functions as a mediating mechanism in order to study the relationship between job standardization and employee voice. Specifically, because employee voice has been shown to be influenced by aspects of personal mechanisms (Morrison, 2014) and because job standardization relates to the job attitudes and behaviours of employees (Acar et al., 2019; Friedrich et al., 2016; Kerse & Babadag, 2018; Luoh et al., 2014), I wish to identify how job standardization affects the job attitudes of employees and in turn affects their voice. Regarding the job attitudes of employees, the literature has provided insight into the ways employees see their jobs and thus incorporate certain responsibilities or activities into the role they play in their jobs, i.e., their role orientation. These are key to employee behaviour at work and to resulting success in organizational functioning (Parker et al., 1997). Role orientation in particular has been found to predict performance more strongly than other job attitudes (Parker, 2007) and has been investigated in several studies (Ohly & Fritz, 2007; Parker, 2007; Parker et al., 1997). Research on organizational behaviour has, notably, shifted from a focus on jobs and their fixed tasks to a broader understanding of employee roles in jobs in dynamic organizational contexts (Griffin et al., 2007, p. 327). In sum, by examining how job standardization affects employee role orientation and influences employee voice, I hope to make a consequential contribution to the literature.

Employee voice is important to an organization’s performance and advancement in a competitive market (Johnstone & Ackers, 2015; Kwon et al., 2016). It is also important in workplaces that have Taylorist employment/labour relations (Johnstone & Ackers, 2015; Littler, 1978) and emphasize quality of work life (QWL) (Cunningham & White, 1984). Specifically, it encompasses related practices that bring employees into communication, participation, partnership, negotiation, consultation and information exchange (Hickland, 2017). It is thus key to employment/labour relations (Hickland, 2017).

Job standardization is more broadly related to Taylorism. One aspect of Taylorism is the division of labour, in which job standardization plays a consequential role. Another is, implicitly, the reduction of interaction to a minimum in the employment relationship (Littler, 1978, p. 185). Taylorism leads to more job standardization and less emphasis on the informal elements of the employment relationship (Littler, 1978). To add to our understanding of Taylorism, I wish to examine whether an important aspect of the division of labour, i.e., job standardization, helps or hinders employee voice in the employment relationship. According to the literature, quality of work life includes job quality and the labour/management relationship (Hannif et al., 2008; Shrestha et al., 2019). Job standardization decreases job quality by aggravating burnout (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003). To extend our understanding of QWL, I wish to examine whether job standardization, as a negative QWL factor, helps or hinders employee voice, which contributes to QWL (Hickland, 2017). Altogether, by investigating the relationship between job standardization and employee voice, I hope to enrich our understanding not only of employee voice but also, more broadly of Taylorism, employment/labour relations and quality of work life.

Employee voice has long received widespread attention because it helps improve not only organizational productivity and competitiveness (Johnstone & Ackers, 2015; Kwon et al., 2016) but also various desirable employee attitudes, such as engagement, satisfaction, commitment and motivation (Atouba et al., 2019; Hickland, 2017; Johnstone & Ackers, 2015; Kim et al., 2018; Kwon et al., 2016), while reducing the intention to quit (Choi & Chung, 2016). Therefore, much research has identified those factors that can cause employees either to use their voices or to stifle them (e.g., Morrison, 2014). Those factors are individual, interpersonal and contextual or organizational. Specifically, they include the following: employees' attitudes toward their jobs and organizations; employees' personalities and emotions (Morrison, 2014; Ng & Lucianetti, 2018); leader-employee interaction and leader behaviour or influence (Fuller et al., 2007; Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2015); and organizational climate, culture and structure (Bennett, 2011; Frazier & Bowler, 2015; Klaas et al., 2012). By examining the job factor of standardization requirements, I hope to offer a new job-related perspective on employee voice and extend the literature on employee voice antecedents. This study is consistent with calls for more research into employee voice and for broader research that encompasses other variables, as well as the underlying processes that foster employee voice in organizational settings (Morrison, 2014).

Notably, there have been calls for more precision in employee voice research (Detert et al., 2013), for investigation into the role of line management in encouraging employee voice at the individual level (Kwon et al., 2016) and for investigation into the relationship between organizational functioning and expression of employee voice to superiors, since some issues can be addressed only by those who actually control the resources or the access to them (Detert et al., 2013). In this study, "employee voice" means verbal behaviour that employees direct at their supervisors with a view to improving organizational performance.

A job is standardized by prescribing the procedures, steps, rules or methods that a worker must carry out to do the job and fulfill its responsibilities (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003). The aim is to perform the tasks repeatedly and identically in order to achieve consistency in output through a given process (De Treville et al., 2005; Luoh et al., 2014; Shalley & Gilson, 2017). A job is thus standardized to increase efficiency (Alfes et al., 2013). The effect on individual employees has received extensive attention from both academics and practitioners. Job standardization has been shown to affect employees positively by increasing their performance, job knowledge, coordination and citizenship behaviours while decreasing their uncertainty and role ambiguity; however, its negative effects include, for example, increased job stress, boredom and burnout and reduced autonomy, creativity and responsibility (e.g., Chen et al., 2009; De Treville et al., 2005; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Luoh et al., 2014; Madsen, 2011; Shalley & Gilson, 2017).

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Previous research on job standardization has focused on employees' attitudes and behaviours toward their job, rather than on employees' attitudes and behaviours toward their organization and its management. This is a void that the present study aims to fill, with a view to charting a new direction for job standardization, which is currently directed toward the job outcomes of individual employees, and to showing managers how they can keep employee voice from being stifled or ignored.

1.1. Theoretical Background and Working Hypotheses

This study examines the relationship between job standardization and employee voice.

1.2. Employee Voice

Employee voice is not the only way for employees to initiate workplace change. First, there is employee participation in decision making (e.g., formal voice mechanisms). By this means, managers initiate employee communication for constructive changes, and employees speak discretionarily and informally (Ng & Feldman, 2012). Second, there is principled dissent. By this means, employees protest against or seek to change the status quo because they conscientiously object to organizational policy or practice, often irrespectively of whether the change will be organizationally functional (Kennedy & Anderson, 2017). Here, employee voice is aimed at organizational improvement and does not involve employee objections. Third, there is constructive action. By this means, employees take charge without articulating their actions (Cai et al., 2019). Employee voice, however, necessarily means speaking up.

1.3. Job Standardization

Job standardization is a matter of degree (Shalley & Gilson, 2017). In the management and organization literature, the concepts of standardization, formalization and routinization are related but distinct. Formalization is the degree to which an organization has official definitions for and written documentation on its protocols and operations (Daft, 2010). Standardization is the degree to which job activities are performed in a uniform manner (Krasman, 2011), specifically how the processes or methods are performed according to prescribed steps and rules (De Treville et al., 2005). Formalization can facilitate standardization (Juillerat, 2010). Nonetheless, one concept does not necessarily imply the other. For example, policies, systems and job descriptions may be formalized, i.e., officially defined and written, but the way of performing a job may not be standardized, and vice versa. Routinization is the degree to which a job is repetitive (Krasman, 2011). It likewise does not necessarily imply standardization. An employee may perform the same set of job tasks every day (i.e., highly routine), but the way the tasks are performed is not standardized, and vice versa.

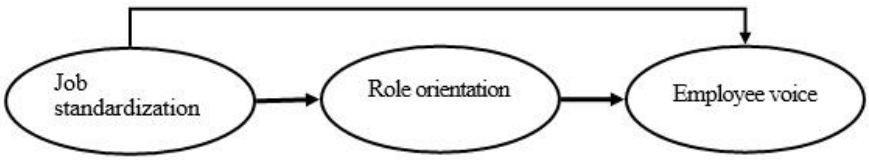
To explain the effects of job characteristics, many authors have used job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). I will use conservation of resources theory, specifically to explain how job standardization affects employee voice. In sum, with job characteristics theory, the explanation is from the job's perspective; with conservation of resources theory, it is from the employee's perspective (Hobfoll, 1989).

1.4. Conservation of Resources Theory

To understand the relationship between job standardization and employee voice, I will use conservation of resources (COR) theory, my argument being that job standardization can be resource-depleting or resource-providing (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). I will also argue that the relationship between job standardization and employee voice is mediated by employee role orientation (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Proposed model



COR theory posits that an individual's resources are those which the individual values in their own right or by means of which the individual gains or protects other resources that he or she values. Resources can have instrumental or symbolic value, and their loss can be real or perceived. In both cases, the loss is harmful (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002), and such losses, whether realized or anticipated, will accumulate.

COR theory posits that people have limited resources (e.g., time, physical, cognitive and emotional energy, attention) and strive to gather, protect and maintain them. Thus, people carefully expend their resources ("resource conservation") and try to gain more for future use ("resource acquisition") (Ng & Feldman, 2012, p. 219). People conserve as a consequence of resource loss; they become more cautious, they protect what they still have and they avoid situations that can lead to resource consumption. However, fear of resource loss can also lead to resource acquisition, as a hedge against potential future losses (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

Job standardization can either deplete or provide resources. If it depletes resources, it will reduce employee voice (Hypotheses 1a and 2a). If it provides resources, it will increase employee voice (Hypothesis 1b and 2b). This approach of competing hypotheses is taken when there is no a priori reason for expecting either hypothesis to be valid (Dunnette, 1966; Anseel & Lievens, 2007; Ng & Feldman, 2012). It has the advantage of enriching theory with more insights (Rousseau, 1995, p. 160); it also prevents an overly narrow research focus and increases the odds of identifying interpretable effects (Twenty et al., 1981).

Job standardization is resource-depleting because employees have to perform the prescribed procedures or steps, rules and methods to perform their jobs and fulfill their responsibilities (De Treville et al., 2005; Madsen, 2011). This requirement taxes their personal capacities by demanding sustained physical, cognitive and emotional efforts (i.e., resources) and therefore incurs certain physiological or psychological costs, such as burnout, boredom and stress (Chen et al., 2009; De Treville et al., 2005; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Madsen, 2011; Shalley & Gilson, 2017). Their physical, cognitive and emotional resources are thus depleted. In sum, job standardization causes employees to lose or consume their resources. It is resource-depleting.

According to the "resource conservation" argument of COR theory, job standardization causes resource losses, which in turn cause employees to be more cautious in consuming their scarce resources. Employees will thus protect their resources by using them carefully and will avoid situations that may lead them to consume resources. To voice opinions, suggestions or information to improve the status quo, employees need to consume the requisite resources of time and energy to observe inside and/or outside their workplace or organization and conceive, elucidate and

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defend their opinions, suggestions or information (Ng & Feldman, 2012). They also need to endure possible relationship losses due to conflict with others who disagree (Ng & Feldman, 2012); that is, employee voice causes consumption and loss of resources. Therefore, job standardization will discourage employees from using their voice in order to protect their remaining resources. Thus, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 1a. Job standardization is negatively related to employee voice.

On the other hand, job resources help an employee achieve job goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, stimulate personal growth and development and/or fulfill basic human needs (Balducci et al., 2011). Therefore, job standardization can be considered a job resource. By providing clear, accurate and detailed descriptions of the procedures, steps, rules or methods (De Treville et al., 2005), it reduces the ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity of a job, thus helping an employee do a better job, know what to expect (Agarwal & Ramaswami, 1993), make fewer mistakes, be less wasteful and know how well or poorly the job is being done (Dopson & Neumann, 1998). In addition, it helps one feel less anxious about job completion, learn more at work, be more efficient and achieve goals and tasks (Beyea, 2002; Chen et al., 2009; De Treville et al., 2005; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Madsen, 2011). Finally, it increases perceptions of oneself as being more capable (De Treville et al., 2005; Delgado et al., 2018), thereby meeting a basic human need for competence (Balducci et al., 2011). In short, job standardization can provide an employee with temporal, physical, cognitive and/or emotional resources.

According to the "resource acquisition" argument of COR theory, people tend to expend their resources on behaviours that will increase the resources they need as a hedge against potential future losses (Ng & Feldman, 2012). COR theory also posits that people are less affected by resource loss if they have more resources (Hobfoll, 2002) and that, consequently, a gain in resources will minimize the impact of a future loss (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, with the resources preserved by job standardization, an employee can expend more resources on voice, which taxes the employee's resources. Voice can be used to gain more resources to hedge against future losses, such as problems at work. Specifically, an employee can use voice self-servingly to define problems and manage impressions (Fuller et al., 2007) and to undermine the position of another employee (Bolino et al., 2004). Thus, by using voice, one may obtain more resources to mitigate one's job problems or to increase one's respect and status to facilitate survival or advancement within the organization. In sum, job standardization can provide employees with opportunities to use voice to benefit themselves. Accordingly, I propose the following:

Hypothesis 1b. Job standardization is positively related to employee voice.

As proposed above, the aim here is to examine how job standardization affects how an employee sees a job and, hence, how that person uses voice, as indicated by the employee's role orientation in that job (Ohly & Fritz, 2007). Role orientation is the degree to which employees incorporate certain responsibilities or activities into their role in a job (Parker et al., 1997). They may simply perceive that role as one of performing certain defined tasks (i.e., a narrow role orientation) or they may perceive it more broadly, as one where they must use their judgment to contribute to organizational performance and development (Parker et al., 1997). Given the use of employee voice to improve organizational functioning, I define role orientation here as the degree to which the employees feel their role includes workplace improvement, which is nonetheless beyond the formal requirements of their job (Ohly & Fritz, 2007).

Job standardization causes employees to deplete their resources to implement correct "ways of doing things," thus leaving them no room to experiment (Choi et al., 2009; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). Similarly, it leaves them little room for discretion by imposing the use of procedure manuals or service scripts (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). Employees thus perceive job-related ideas or

suggestions as unnecessary or unwelcome and prefer limited flexibility in their tasks (Cohen, 1995). They may in turn perceive their tasks as being beyond their control and direct their attention to complying with dictates and doing their job (Cohen, 1995). In sum, the more a job is standardized, the more the employee will focus on implementing prescribed standards and performing defined tasks. Employees consequently incorporate fewer responsibilities or activities that exceed their core duties (job performance) and are less likely to see job improvement as part of their role. Thus, job standardization leads to a narrow role orientation; i.e., it is negatively related to role orientation.

Accordingly, employees with a narrow role orientation will focus on consuming their limited resources to perform defined tasks. According to the "resource conservation" argument of COR theory (Ng & Feldman, 2012), employees with a narrow role orientation will more cautiously consume and defend their resources and avoid situations that will induce consumption. They will thus limit resource consumption by limiting their voice. Therefore, I propose the following:

> **Hypothesis 2a**. Role orientation mediates the negative relationship between job standardization and employee voice (i.e., job standardization is negatively related to role orientation, which in turn is negatively related to employee voice).

On the other hand, job standardization can provide resources, as noted above. It induces employees to do their job independently and efficiently, thus enhancing their belief in their capability and competence to perform their tasks (De Treville et al., 2005; Delgado et al., 2018). When employees believe they can do their job well, they also believe they can control its outcome. It is thus easier for them to confront anticipated changes (Frese & Fay, 2001). They are therefore more motivated (Delgado et al., 2018) to approach their work in an active and self-starting way and will exceed their job performance requirements (Frese & Fay, 2001; Bledow & Frese, 2009; Ohly et al., 2006; Ohly & Fritz, 2007; De Treville et al., 2005).

In short, the more a job is standardized, the more the employee will be a self-starter who will produce positive outcomes for the organization. In such a situation, the employee may take on additional duties beyond the core ones. Hence, job standardization leads to a broader role orientation; i.e., it is positively related to role orientation.

If employees have a broader role orientation because of job standardization, their behaviour will be more consistent with the "resource acquisition" argument of COR theory. They will thus expend their resources on voice, in order to gain other resources that will help them survive and develop in the organization. Thus, I propose the following:

> **Hypothesis 2b**. Role orientation mediates the positive relationship between job standardization and employee voice (i.e., job standardization is positively related to role orientation, which in turn is positively related to employee voice).

2. Methods

2.1. Sample and Data Collection

The data were collected through a three-wave panel survey over a seven-week period. In the first week of the period (time 1 measures), the respondents completed the items on job standardization, on their demographics and on the other two control variables, as depicted below. In the fourth and seventh weeks of the period (time 2 and 3 measures), they completed the items on role orientation and employee voice, respectively. The English measurement scales were translated into Chinese and back-translated into English to ensure equivalence of meaning. The responses for all items

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were scored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) “strongly disagree” to (5) “strongly agree.” Higher total scores indicated higher values for the variables measured. The presentation of the questionnaire was adjusted according to comments and suggestions from a pretest completed by thirty full-time employees who attended evening classes at a university in Taiwan. These full-time employees had at least one year of job experience; consequently, they were familiar with the variables under study. They also helped distribute the questionnaire.

A total of 280 employees completed the three questionnaires, and 232 employees provided complete answers, for a final response rate of 42.2%. The respondents were 65.5% female, 76.7% of them were under the age of 39, and 65.1% held a bachelor’s degree. The employee positions in the participants’ organizations were divided into 5 levels, with level 1 and level 5 being the lowest and highest ones respectively. The lower levels accounted for 73.7% of the respondents (41.4% at level 1 and 32.3% at level 2), and the higher levels accounted for 26.3% (level 3: 18.1%, level 4: 4.3%, level 5: 3.9%). Employees at lower-level positions were more likely to experience job standardization and more likely to perceive themselves as having insufficient or inadequate employee voice at work (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). Thus, the issue of job standardization and employee voice was highly relevant to them. In addition, 62.5% of the respondents worked in services and 37.5% in manufacturing. Given that some job standardization is now required in most jobs, although it originated in manufacturing (Shalley & Gilson, 2017), and given that it is now emphasized in services to achieve the goal of minimizing costs and maximizing volume (Deery & Kinnie, 2002; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003), we feel that the sample size was adequate to understand the effects of job standardization. A profile of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Variable		(N=232) n	%	Mean	SD
Gender					
	Male	80	34.5%		
	Female	152	65.5%		
Age				34.26	7.66
	Under 29	53	22.8%		
	30-39	125	53.9%		
	40-49	43	18.5%		
	50-62	11	4.8%		
Education					
	High school diploma	8	3.4%		
	Junior college	58	25.0%		
	College degree	151	65.1%		
	Graduate degree	15	6.5%		
Organizational level					
	Level 1 (lowest level)	96	41.4%		
	Level 2	75	32.3%		
	Level 3	42	18.1%		
	Level 4	10	4.3%		
	Level 5 (highest level)	9	3.9%		
Organization					
	services	145	62.5%		
	manufacturing	87	37.5%		

Note: Organizations were in manufacturing, banking and finance, retail, marketing and trading, transportation and utilities, vhealth care, computing, consulting, education, and various services.

2.2. Time 1 Measures

Job standardization was assessed on Hsieh and Hsieh's 5-item scale for job standardization (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003. The scale had been originally used to measure the overall degree of job standardization in a respondent's company. In this study, we focused on the degree of job standardization in a respondent's own job. We deleted one item about the degree of automation of the respondent's company, and we changed the wording of the other four items to refer clearly to the respondent's job. All four items had factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.68 to 0.89). Sample items: "I am to follow strict operating procedures at all times" and "I have specific operating procedures to follow." The internal consistency coefficient of the 4 items was 0.86, and the average value of the respondents' job standardization was 9.92 (SD = 2.8).

2.3. Control Variables

I controlled for employee perception of supportive organizational context and for psychological safety because both can affect employee voice (Morrison, 2014). Supportive organizational context was measured on a 5-item scale (Edmondson, 1999) and sample items included "In my work

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organization, it is easy for me to obtain expert assistance when something comes up that I do not know how to handle" and "I am kept in the dark about current developments and future plans that may affect my work" (reverse-coded). All the factor loadings (ranging from 0.50 to 0.78) of the 5 items exceeded the acceptable value of 0.50. The internal consistency coefficient of the 5 items was 0.72, and the average value of the respondents' supportive organizational context was 18.83 (SD = 2.13). Psychological safety was measured on a 4-item scale (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006), and sample items included "In my work organization, I am able to bring up problems and tough issues" and "It is difficult to ask other members for help" (reverse-coded). All the factor loadings (ranging from 0.55 to 0.86) of the 4 items exceeded the acceptable value of 0.50. The internal consistency coefficient of the 4 items was 0.82, and the average value of the respondents' psychological safety was 13.29 (SD = 3.12).

The demographics included age, education, gender and industry. They were used as control variables because they can reasonably account for the variance in employee voice. In addition, employees in lower-level positions may feel that their expertise or authority is insufficient or inadequate to voice ideas or suggestions that challenge the status quo (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). Therefore, organizational level may affect employee voice and was one of the control variables in this study. Organizational level was measured by a single item, similar to those of previous studies (Bell et al., 1990; Dillard, 1987): "If the hierarchy of your firm is divided into five levels from low to high, e.g., low-, near middle-, middle-, upper-, and high-levels (coded as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, respectively), which level are you working in?" The distribution of the demographics and organizational levels in the sample is shown in Table 1.

2.4. Time 2 Measures

Role orientation was measured on a 3-item scale developed by Ohly and Fritz (2007). All three items had factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.72 to 0.84). Sample items: "It is my job to develop new ideas for improvement at work" and "It is my task to be innovative for improvement at work." The internal consistency coefficient of the three items was 0.81, and the average value of the respondents' role orientation was 12.46 (SD = 1.82).

2.5. Time 3 Measures

To measure employee voice, I used Van Dyne and LePine's 6-item scale (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). All the items had factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.63 to 0.78). Sample items: "I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this organization" and "I speak up with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures." The internal consistency coefficient of the 6 items was 0.86, and the average value of the respondents' employee voice was 21.59 (SD = 4.30).

2.6. Data Analyses

In addition to the three-wave panel survey design, I controlled for common biases linked to self-reporting through procedural and statistical techniques (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Respondents were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality to limit the biases of social desirability and leniency, and the possibility of common method bias was tested using Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). A principal component analysis of the items revealed five factors with eigenvalues that were higher than 1.0 and which accounted for 63.6% of the variance. Five factors, rather than one, were identified, and the leading factor did not account for a high percentage of the variance (16.5%). Thus, common method bias did not appear to undermine the findings. Additionally, using AMOS, I completed a confirmatory factor analysis to test the fit of a one-factor model (all items were loaded on a common factor) and a five-factor model (job standardization, role orientation, employee voice, supportive organizational context, psychological safety). The five-factor model had

a better fit (X^2[209]=517.52; X^2/df=2.48; GFI=.83; CFI=.85; RMSEA=.08 [CI=.71, .89]) than the one-factor model (X^2[209]=1349.75; X^2/df=6.46, GFI=.46, CFI=.59, RMSEA=.15 [CI=.15, .16]). There thus seems to be a low probability of common method bias.

As indicated above, the factor loadings for all items exceeded the acceptable value of .050. The composite reliabilities (shown in Table 2) for the scales of job standardization, role orientation, employee voice, supportive organizational context and psychological safety exceeded the threshold value of 0.60 (Fornell, 1982) with a range of 0.78 to 0.86. The average variances extracted (shown in Table 2) for those scales exceeded the benchmark of 0.50 (Fornell, 1982) with a range of 0.56 to 0.80 and thus were acceptable. Altogether, the scales of those constructs had satisfactory convergence reliability. The squared correlations among the constructs, ranging from 0.00 to 0.20, were less than the average variances extracted for the constructs, ranging from 0.56 to 0.80. The squared correlations are shown in Table 2. The constructs were therefore empirically distinct (Fornell, 1982). Thus, the convergent and discriminant validity measures were satisfactory.

Table 2

Discriminant Validity

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
	(0.86)				
1.Job standardization	0.80	(0.80)			
2.Role orientation	0.19	0.71	(0.82)		
3.Psychological safety	0.03	0.01	0.72	(0.78)	
4.Supportive organizational context	0.06	0.01	0.01	0.56	(0.86)
5.Employee voice	0.16	0.20	0.01	0.00	0.80

Note: Diagonals with parentheses display the composite reliabilities, and diagonals without parentheses display the average variances extracted, while the other matrix entries display the squared correlations.

3. Results

Table 3 presents the intercorrelations among the variables. It shows that job standardization was related to narrower role orientation, as well as to less employee voice, a less supportive organizational context and less psychological safety. Employee voice was related to less job standardization and broader role orientation. To assess the fit of the proposed models, the significance tests were done using IBM SPSS Amos 25.0. These tests included the chi square test, GFI, CFI, RMSEA and SRMR. An acceptable fit was found with a chi square less than 5 and with GFI and CFI values in the 0.80s and 0.90s or higher. A reasonable fit was found in the case of SRMR and RMSEA with values up to 0.10 (Bollen, 1989; Wu, 2009). Lower chi-square goodness-of-fit values indicate a better model fit, and higher values indicate no fit (Hillhouse & Adler, 1996).

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Table 3

Intercorrelations of Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1.Job standardization	1				
2.Role orientation	-0.43**	1			
3.Psychological safety	-0.16*	0.11	1		
4. Supportive organi-zational context	-0.24**	0.11	-0.09	1	
5. Employee voice	-0.40**	0.45**	-0.10	-0.03	1

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01

To test whether role orientation partially or fully mediates the effect of job standardization on employee voice, I used two competing models: a fully mediated model (Model 1) and a partially mediated one (Model 2). Model 2 differed from Model 1 in that it had a direct path from job standardization to employee voice. Both models included the seven control variables: age, education, gender, industry, organizational level, supportive organizational context and psychological safety. The results indicated that Model 2 (X^2[319] =602.545; X^2/df=1.889; GFI=0.842; CFI=0.871; SRMR=0.087; RMSEA=0.062 [CI=0.054, 0.070]) had a better fit, ΔX^2[1]=8.227, p<0.01, than Model 1 (X^2[320]=610.772; X^2/df=1.909; GFI=0.841; CFI=0.867; SRMR=0.090; RMSEA=0.063 [CI=0.055, 0.070]). I thus retained Model 2, i.e., the partially mediated model, and used it to examine the proposed hypotheses.

As shown in Figure 2, the standardized path coefficient is -0.24 (p<0.01) for the direct effects of job standardization on employee voice. For the indirect effects, it is -0.50 (p<0.01) from job standardization to role orientation and 0.39 (p<0.01), from role orientation to employee voice. These paths accounted for approximately 38.5% of the observed variance in employee voice. Job standardization had statistically significant effects on employee voice, with coefficients of -0.435 for total effects [p<0.01, 95%CI=(-0.582, -0.265)], -0.239 for direct effects [p<0.05, 95%CI=(-0.468, -0.041)] and -0.196 for indirect effects [p<0.01, 95%CI=(-0.295, -0.090)]. In addition, Table 4 presents regression analysis to show the coefficient and significance of each variable, including control variables. Accordingly, the empirical results indicate that the relationship between job standardization and employee voice is partially mediated by the employees' role orientation and offer support for Hypotheses 1a and 2a, i.e., job standardization reduces the employees' role orientation, which in turn reduces their voice at work.

Figure 2

Standardized Path Coefficients for the Final Model

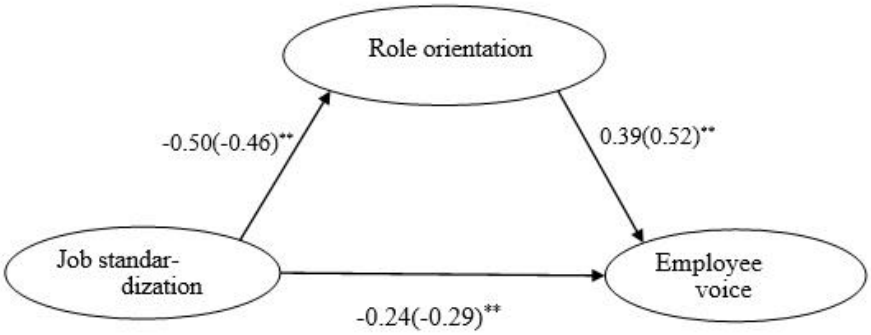

Table 4

Regression Analysis

Variables		B		S.E.	t	P
gender	---> voice	0.06	(0.09)	0.09	1.01	0.31
age	---> voice	0.01	(0.00)	0.01	0.14	0.89
education	---> voice	0.00	(0.00)	0.07	0.07	0.95
organizational level	---> voice	-0.04	(-0.03)	0.04	-0.65	0.52
industry	---> voice	0.22	(0.31)	0.09	3.55	0.00
psychological safety	---> voice	-0.14	(-0.14)	0.07	-2.07	0.04
supportive organizational context	---> voice	-0.10	(-0.18)	0.13	-1.41	0.16
job standardization	---> role orientation	-0.50	(-0.46)	0.08	-5.94	0.00
role orientation	---> voice	0.39	(0.52)	0.11	4.58	0.00
job standardization	---> voice	-0.24	(-0.29)	0.10	-3.00	0.00

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3.1. Discussion

I developed and tested a theoretical model that specifies how and why job standardization is associated with employee voice. I found evidence that job standardization leads to a narrower role orientation for employees, which in turn reduces employee voice. The use of a three-wave, time-lagged design strengthens the validity of my conclusions.

Generally, the results support the resource conservation argument of COR theory. Job standardization seems to deplete employee resources, thus causing the employee to adopt a narrow role orientation and limit resources to defined tasks. The employee is therefore less likely to expend resources on voicing ideas and suggestions. The resource conservation argument (H1a and H2a) was better than the resource acquisition argument (H1b and H2b) at explaining how job standardization affects employee voice. This finding sheds light on the relevance of job characteristics in reducing employee voice for organizational improvement. Given that most jobs now require some standardization (Shalley & Gilson, 2017), and given the rapid change in business environments, it is important to understand how and why job standardization affects the willingness of employees to voice their ideas and suggestions (Pasmore, 2011).

3.2. Theoretical Contributions and Implications

This study goes against the strong tendency to seek explanations in the job's characteristics, i.e., job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Instead, I use an alternative approach of examining the employee's characteristics, i.e., resource theory. Here, job characteristics theory and resource theory seem to lead to the same prediction. According to job characteristics theory, the more a job is standardized, the more the employee will follow prescribed procedures or rules, i.e., a narrower role orientation, and the less the employee will voice suggestions and ideas. In this study, resource theory seems to be the underlying explanation. Job standardization also seems to deplete the employee's resources, thus causing him or her to confine use of resources to defined tasks and to expend fewer resources on voicing suggestions and ideas. Resource theory thus seems as relevant for explaining how the employee behaves as job characteristics theory is for explaining how the job functions.

Voice is a form of OCB (Morrison, 2014). Being discretionary and not listed in formal job duties, voice is not a job requirement, whereas job standardization is. Research on voice and discretionary behaviours at workplaces has been grounded in social exchange theory (Ng & Feldman, 2012) and organizational constraints on employee discretion (e.g., policy, culture) (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2003). Social exchange theory posits that employees are more likely to exercise voice when their organization treats them favourably with trust, respect and satisfaction (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). Such favourable treatment facilitates job performance (Sungu et al., 2019) and, thus, is a job resource. Organizational constraints deprive employees of their discretion, which likewise is a resource that facilitates job performance (Ortega, 2009). Accordingly, social exchange theory explains how an organization provides its employees with resources and thus promotes employee voice, whereas organizational constraints explain how an organization deprives its employees of resources and thus reduces employee voice. These two explanations are covered by resource theory, which therefore offers a more parsimonious means to understand employee voice.

From a broader perspective, this study may enrich our understanding of Taylorism (Littler, 1978), employment/labour relations (Johnstone & Ackers, 2015) and QWL (Cunningham & White, 1984). For Taylorism, my findings suggest that an increase in the division of labour through job standardization may, by reducing employee voice, inadvertently cause the employment relationship to fall below its implicit minimum for interaction. For employment/labour relations and QWL, my findings suggest that employee voice is a component of job quality and that, consequently, job standardization may reduce job quality and affect labour relations (Hickland,

2017). To understand how job characteristics relate to QWL, researchers should focus on job quality (Hannif et al., 2008; Shrestha et al., 2019). Little research has been done to date on this factor as an antecedent and mechanism of QWL.

Job standardization has been linked to desirable and undesirable outcomes, primarily at the individual level. This study provides evidence that employee voice should be added to the negative correlates of job standardization. Furthermore, few studies have examined the mediating processes and mechanisms of job standardization effects, notably in the realm of psychological factors, such as intrinsic motivation, psychological empowerment, role stress components and satisfaction (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Karatepe et al., 2004; Luoh et al., 2014; Madsen, 2011) and the contextual factor of workplace support (Chiang & Wu, 2014). This study has focused on the mediating factor of how employees view their jobs, i.e., their role orientation. This factor is an unexplored consequence of job standardization. By understanding how the latter relates to role orientation, we can better understand how it affects employees. In addition, the mediating process and its mechanism have been scarcely identified, and the task of identifying them should be the next step in advancing the literature on job standardization.

The findings here add to the literature on the contextual antecedents of employee voice, which can vary from one workplace to another (e.g., organizational climate, culture, structure). Job standardization can likewise vary from one employee to another because most jobs are now standardized to varying extents (Shalley & Gilson, 2017), and it may be a more malleable predictor for managers who wish to encourage employee voice in today's rapidly changing work environments.

Finally, to explain how role orientation affects job performance, researchers have turned to role identity theory and goal-setting theory (Parker, 2007, p.408). Specifically, when employees have a broader role orientation, they are more likely to perceive emergent tasks or behaviours, i.e., those beyond their established job tasks or behaviours, as being congruent with their self-concept (role identity theory) or as part of their goals (goal-setting theory). Thus, they become more likely to expend effort on emergent tasks or behaviours. Role identity theory and goal-setting theory could therefore be subsumed under resource theory, which would then provide a more parsimonious means to understand how role orientation affects employee behaviour, including employee voice.

3.3. Practical Implications

An organization standardizes its jobs so that its production will be more consistent and more efficient. Job standardization, however, reduces organizational self-improvement by discouraging employees from voicing their concerns, suggestions and ideas for better organizational functioning. To resolve this dilemma, I suggest two approaches. First, the organization should evaluate, for each job position, the relative importance of employee voice to organizational improvement. Jobs should be less standardized in cases where employee voice is more important (e.g., R&D, jobs with irregular or changing internal or external circumstances), while job standardization can go farther in those cases where employee voice is less important (e.g., jobs with steady or consistent circumstances, jobs with mandatory production consistency or efficiency). Second, job standardization should be classified in terms of two goals: standardize employee rules or standardize job content. In the first case, the goal is to standardize the rules that an employee must follow to belong to an organization. This kind of standardization should apply to all jobs regardless of job position or content. It concerns the attitudes and behaviours that an organization requires of all its employees. In the second case, the goal is to standardize the content of a job, specifically the prescribed procedures, steps, rules and methods that an employee must follow (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003). This standardization should vary across jobs, being reduced for jobs where employee voice has more importance and not reduced for those where employee voice has less importance. The above two approaches will minimize the dilemma of reduced employee

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feedback due to job standardization (e.g., Alfes et al., 2013) and encourage employee voice (e.g., Kwon et al., 2016) as a means to improve organizational performance by increasing consistency and efficiency.

3.4 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

My findings failed to support either Hypothesis 1b or Hypothesis 2b, which predicted that job standardization would increase the resources available to employees and thus broaden their role orientation and increase their voice. These hypotheses may nonetheless be supported for some employees and in some cases. For example, job standardization may have a positive, resource-providing effect on employees: 1) when excessive job complexity or ambiguity can be reduced through job standardization when: 2) an excessive rate of errors at work can be prevented through job standardization; 3) employees have lower job proficiency (in the first three situations, job standardization helps employees achieve job goals more effectively and efficiently); or 4) job standardization helps employees perceive themselves as being more capable and competent (Balducci et al., 2011). Future researchers may determine whether job standardization is more likely to be resource-providing in such situations.

My findings present the unexpected finding that, even after controlling for role orientation, job standardization remains a significant predictor of employee voice (see Figure 2). Hence, job standardization has both direct and indirect effects on employee voice. This finding is consistent with the argument, proposed above, that job standardization influences employee job behaviour, and it suggests that future researchers should examine other possible mediating mechanisms to increase our understanding of how a job can be designed and standardized to increase employee voice and thus improve organizational performance and advancement.

This study has other limitations. First, as mentioned above, it encompasses the experiences of employees from all organizational levels and from services and manufacturing. Given the importance of context (Kaufman, 2015), future researchers should examine the relationship between job standardization and employee voice, and its mediation by role orientation, for different types and levels of work. Second, this study was carried out in a Taiwanese context; thus, its findings should be replicated in other cultures because employee attitudes and behaviours vary from one culture to another (Haar & Brougham, 2016). Taiwanese people, like Chinese people in general, are inclined toward the cultural value of collectivism (Wong et al., 2010) and “see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation); [and] are primarily motivated by the norms of … those collectives; ...” (Triandis, 1995, p. 2). Thus, Taiwanese employees tend to be more reluctant to be known as outspoken people who challenge a status quo of established thoughts and routines. This reluctance could reduce employee voice. Finally, as proposed above, job standardization may serve to standardize either employee discipline or job content. Future researchers may seek to understand whether these two standardizations are a meaningful distinction and whether they have different impacts on employee voice.

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