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Unfair, uncertain, and unwilling: How decision-making unfairness and unclear job tasks reduce problem-focused voice behavior, unless there is task conflict

Abstract

In an attempt to expand extant literature devoted to employees' voice behavior, the current research unpacks the connection between their experience of procedural unfairness, such that organizational decision-making lacks transparency, and their problem-focused voice behavior. In this link, the authors predict that job ambiguity functions as a mediator, and coworker task conflict takes a moderating role. Survey data, collected among employees in a large Portuguese retail organization, affirm that perceptions about unfair decision policies can curtail employees' propensities to raise their voice about organizational failures, because they develop the belief that their employer is failing to provide sufficient job-related information. If they can exchange conflicting viewpoints with others though, this detrimental process might not proceed. Organizations should take care to avoid accusations of unclear job roles, because they create a route by which frustrations about opaque decision-making can escalate into employee complacency; they also should encourage productive idea clashes within their ranks to help block that route.

Introduction

Management research acknowledges the instrumental role of voice behavior for organizations, whereby employees openly express their opinions and speak up about how the current organizational situation can be improved (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020; Huang et al., 2021). A relevant distinction in this respect highlights prohibitive versus promotive voice: The former voice type captures opinions about the presence of organizational failures, whereas the latter entails suggestions about how to resolve those failures (Dedahanov et al., 2019; Li et al., 2020). For the current study, the focus is on predicting why some employees may be more likely than others to undertake prohibitive voice behavior, which we label *problem-focused* voice, consistent with prior studies (Starzyk et al., 2018). Such problem-driven voice typically precedes its solution-driven counterpart (Liang et al., 2012), yet employees who engage in problem-focused voice tend to encounter hurdles when they seek to get their points across, to the extent that their efforts to report problem areas threaten to tarnish the organization's market reputation (Wæraas & Dahle, 2020) and are met with internal skepticism or even rejection (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017a).

In light of these challenges, it is pertinent to investigate whether some employees, who already have been exposed to adverse work conditions, might avoid problem-focused voice behaviors. One notable and underexplored determinant is the experience of procedural unfairness, such that employees come to believe that their organization lacks transparency in its decision-making (Michel & Hargis, 2017). Our interest in this specific determinant is guided by the recognition that employees who observe secretive organizational decision-making ideally would address the problem by raising their concerns. But we advance the complementary argument that unfair decision-making practices instead may *curtail* employees' problem-focused

voice behaviors, because the practices engender negative impressions about how the organization functions (De Clercq et al., 2019; Eatough et al., 2011). This focus on procedural unfairness also extends prior studies that cite its harmful role in generating other negative work outcomes such as distancing behavior (Lavelle et al., 2016), absenteeism (De Boer et al., 2002), retaliation (Brebels et al., 2008), or deviance (Khattak et al., 2021).

In addition to examining this overlooked inhibitor of problem-focused voice, the focal research questions that underpin this study pertain to *why* and *when* this process might unfold. First, the negative procedural unfairness–problem-focused voice link might stem from employees' sense that their organization provides them with insufficient job-related information (De Clercq, 2019; Fried & Tiegs, 1995). When they suffer such job ambiguity, employees grow frustrated; they do not know what is expected of them (Poon, 2003). Consistent with conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001), uncertainty due to unfair organizational decision-making may compromise employees' self-esteem (De Cremer, 2006; Kim & Beehr, 2020), so to *protect* themselves and this critical resource, they might make allegations of job ambiguity and also express reluctance to help their organization with dedicated problem-focused voice efforts (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Second, we draw from COR theory to postulate that these self-protective responses to unfavorable decision-making depend on the level of relational resources that employees possess, obtained through interactions with coworkers (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017b; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). An important resource in this regard is coworker task conflict, defined as the extent to which colleagues engage in productive idea clashes (Mitchell et al., 2019; Puck & Pregernig, 2014; Xie et al., 2014). We propose that such task conflict may function as a *buffer* against the self-depreciating thoughts that employees develop in the presence of unfair decision-

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making and subsequent beliefs about job-related information gaps (Bowling et al., 2010). If employees can exchange viewpoints with coworkers, they likely gain novel insights into how to cope with the resource-depleting experiences of procedural unfairness and job ambiguity (Campbell et al., 2013; De Clercq, 2019).

From these foundations, we aim to address several gaps in extant voice literature. First, we propose and empirically show that procedural unfairness, a significant threat to employees' self-image (Kim & Beehr, 2020), diminishes the probability that they undertake the effort to identify problem areas, because they are convinced their employer prefers to remain vague about job tasks (Eatough et al., 2011). With this focus on convictions about insufficient role clarity as critical mechanisms that *link* procedural unfairness with tarnished problem-focused voice behavior, we integrate research on how unfair decision-making processes infuse significant uncertainty into employees' work functioning (De Boer et al., 2002; Khattak et al., 2021) with parallel research on how ambiguous role descriptions reduce employees' propensity to undertake positive work behaviors, such as creativity (Coelho et al., 2011) or organizational citizenship behavior (Ladebo, 2006). Extant research also pinpoints job ambiguity as an intermediate mechanism that connects *other* unfavorable work situations, such as poor leadership (Koveshnikov & Ehrnrooth, 2018) or limited participation in budgeting decisions (Jermias & Yigit, 2013), with negative work outcomes. We add to this conversation by proposing that when they are uncertain about how organizational decisions are made, employees' frustrations about job-related information deficiencies may leave them unwilling to help the unfair organization by providing it with their valuable opinions (Chênevert et al., 2019). With this novel perspective, we detail the risk of a downward *spiral:* Employees suffer from exposure to unfair, secretive

decision-making, and their resulting negative beliefs about unclear job expectations escalate into apathy about explaining the source of their frustrations.

Second, recognizing that the harmful outcomes of unfair work situations reflect various contingencies (Jahanzeb et al., 2020; Reknes et al., 2020), we offer novel insights into how organizations can *contain* the risk of a diminished likelihood of problem-focused voice behavior, in response to procedural unfairness and resulting convictions about job ambiguity, by encouraging task conflict among coworkers (De Clercq et al., 2017). Some studies point to the detrimental effects of persistent clashes of different viewpoints on employees, such that the clashes spur emotion-based fights (Pluut & Curseu, 2013) or lower job satisfaction (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017c) or group performance (Kammerhoff et al., 2019). But coworker task conflict also can encourage productive work activities, such as creativity (De Clercq et al., 2017) or innovation (Lu et al., 2011), by generating novel insights. In line with COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), we adopt this second, functional perspective and seek to pinpoint an *indirect* beneficial role of coworker task conflict—that is, such conflict may provide a protective shield against the escalation of procedural unfairness into accusations of job ambiguity and then tarnished problem-focused voice behavior.

Theoretical background

Value and challenges of problem-focused voice behavior

Every organization suffers problem areas, and employees are uniquely well-qualified to find them. Employees who are willing to look for, identify, and raise concerns about features that could be improved are critical to the organization's success and functioning. Yet encouraging such problem-focused voice is an ongoing challenge. Efforts to identify internal shortcomings, failures, operational inefficiencies, and competitive gaps might benefit the employer (Liang et

al., 2012; MacMillan et al., 2020). But they also tend to evoke resistance. Some colleagues might disagree about the problems, perceive a threat if they feel blamed for them, or worry that any resulting changes in the organization would undermine their status (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Morrison, 2011; Takeuchi et al., 2012). For example, voice behaviors can increase team innovation (Ye et al., 2019), labor productivity (Della Torre, 2019), effective change implementation (Morrison & Milliken, 2000), and firm-level competitive advantage (Royer et al., 2008), but the associated changes also can prompt substantial shifts in the role and tasks of various members of the organization (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016).

The people engaged in voice behaviors similarly might anticipate both benefits and risks. The extent to which employees speak up can increase their own psychological well-being (Avey et al., 2012), generate a sense of personal accomplishment (Parker, 1993), and give a boost to their work performance (Ng & Feldman, 2012) or creativity (Song et al., 2017). But they run a reputational risk if they only seem to be complaining, trying to create a positive impression on others, or engaging in self-serving rather than genuine efforts (Liang et al., 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Considering these contradictory outcomes at both organizational and individual levels, it is instrumental to identify pertinent factors that determine whether employees ultimately decide to voice their opinions about problem areas.

Studies that seek to uncover positive factors that *encourage* employees to engage in voice behaviors draw from a multitude of theories. For example, social exchange theory has been applied to explain the influence of idiosyncratic deals (Ng & Feldman, 2015), organizational career growth (Wang et al., 2014), supervisor–subordinate guanxi (Wang et al., 2019), and positive management attitudes (Unler & Caliskan, 2019) in spurring employee voice; affective events theory offers insights into favorable pay systems (Tenhiälä & Lount, 2013); social

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determination theory can explain the role of decent work perceptions (Huang et al., 2021); social learning and social information processing theories provide evidence about the effects of supervisor voice (Son, 2019); goal orientation theory serves to explain the impacts of leaders' trait learning goal orientation (Zhu & Akhtar, 2019); role identity theory helps clarify the role of organizational socialization (Wu et al., 2015); and the theory of planned behavior has been used to explain the influence of high-commitment work systems (Zhang et al., 2019). A parallel stream of research, drawing from conservation of resources (COR) theory, shows how employee voice can be *discouraged* in the presence of negative, resource-draining conditions, such as dysfunctional organizational politics (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020), leader–member exchange differentiation (Dong et al., 2020), leader narcissism (Huang et al., 2020), or counterproductive meeting behaviors (Allen et al., 2015).

We leverage COR theory to focus on another resource-draining situation that may halt problem-focused voice behavior: procedural unfairness, or the extent to which employees perceive insufficient openness in decision-making processes (Khattak et al., 2021). An interesting facet here is that procedural unfairness implies an organizational failure, such that an organization that evokes this perception could benefit from dedicated employee behaviors to pinpoint the failure. Yet we propose instead that procedural unfairness may have a critical *counterproductive* role. As noted in prior research, secretive decision-making processes tend to make it difficult for employees to appeal or challenge decisions, such that they may see no reason to go out of their way to raise concerns (Masterson, 2001; Ng & Feldman, 2012). With this study, we aim to unravel such an effect and examine two factors that might *explain* or *influence* the possible escalation of procedural unfairness into diminished voice behavior. We specifically propose (1) a mediating role of job ambiguity in the translation of procedural

unfairness into tarnished problem-focused voice and (2) mitigation of this mediated link by coworker task conflict. The resulting insights can help organizations predict when employees might be more or less likely to respond to unfair decision-making with complacency and, inadvertently, prevent organizational leaders from becoming aware of the problem and finding solutions to this negative dynamic.

Conservation of resources (COR) theory

The arguments for the mediating role of job ambiguity and moderating role of coworker task conflict are grounded in two core principles of COR theory, related to the general notion that employees' convictions and actions are informed by their desire to protect their existing resource bases in the presence of resource-depleting work conditions (Hobfoll et al., 2018). First, COR theory predicts that resource depletion due to uncertainty-inducing work situations steers employees toward thoughts and behaviors that allow them to *undo* the depletion and safeguard their remaining resources. A critical resource in this regard, which employees forcefully seek to protect, according to Hobfoll (1989, 2001), is their self-esteem or sense of self-worth. Second, COR theory maintains that employees' access to valuable resources embedded in their work relationships *mitigates* the probability that they formulate negative responses to adverse work conditions, as a means to protect their sense of self-worth. That is, their relational resources make it less likely that organizational hardships actually drain their resource reservoirs and prompt them to generate self-depreciating thoughts (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Wu & Lee, 2016).

The application of the first COR principle acknowledges that unfair decision-making processes (De Cremer et al., 2005; Kim & Beehr, 2020) and vague job descriptions (Bowling et al., 2010; Graham & Messner, 1998) can generate self-damaging ruminations in employees, because the negative situations undermine their ability to perform their job tasks. In turn, and

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consistent with COR theory, accusations of job ambiguity and a subsequent reluctance to undertake dedicated voice behaviors are two self-protective responses employees may adopt when they perceive procedural unfairness and seek to avoid self-damaging contemplations about their work (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). In a sense, these responses are coping tactics that enable employees to avoid negative views of themselves (Ng & Feldman, 2012). The proposed *mediating* role of job ambiguity in this process specifically reflects a notable reason that the experience of procedural unfairness may translate into diminished problem-focused voice: Employees react to this threatening work situation by venting their frustrations with the limited clarity of their job descriptions (Zhou et al., 2016).

The second COR principle then suggests that employees' self-protective responses to negative work situations vary with the extent to which they can draw from relevant relational resources (Choi, 2019; Hobfoll, 2001). For example, if employees engage in productive idea clashes, it may reduce the probabilities that (1) they undertake coping efforts and criticize the employer for its unclear job descriptions in response to an experience of procedural unfairness, and (2) these criticisms translate into work-related complacency in the form of diminished problem-focused voice. As previous studies show, intensive coworker interactions make it easier for employees to cope with various resource-depleting work conditions, such as work overload (Pooja et al., 2016) or self-serving political climates (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017b). We propose a similar buffering effect, in relation to the self-depreciating thoughts that stem from procedural unfairness and job ambiguity. To the extent that employees can rely on productive task-related disputes with coworkers, the adverse effect of procedural unfairness in reducing their propensity to speak up about problem areas, through accusations about job ambiguity,

should be subdued, because they experience a lower need to shield their self-esteem resources in this way.

Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The proposed theoretical model is summarized in Figure 1. Employees' convictions about the presence of ambiguous job roles are key factors that explain how their exposure to procedural unfairness can escalate into diminished problem-focused voice behavior. Their coworker task conflict then serves as a buffer, such that the translation of procedural unfairness into tarnished employee voice, through job ambiguity, becomes less likely among employees who can draw from the novel insights generated through productive idea clashes. The constitutive hypotheses of the model are detailed next.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Mediating role of job ambiguity

We predict a positive link between employees' experience of procedural unfairness and accusations about job ambiguity. According to COR theory, the nature of employees' work-related beliefs is guided by their desire to safeguard their current resource bases and avoid additional resource drainage when they face adverse work situations (Hobfoll et al., 2018). We similarly propose that the uncertainty experienced due to secretive decision-making likely threatens employees' self-esteem resources, to the point that they seek a culprit and criticize their employer for providing insufficient information about how to do their jobs (Khattak et al., 2019). In particular, if organizational decision makers do not disclose the process they used to arrive at certain conclusions, employees likely develop self-depreciating thoughts about their ability to meet organization-set performance targets (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Wan et al., 2012). Accusing their employer of failing to clarify what it expects from them, in terms of job responsibilities

(Heck et al., 2005), allows them to protect their sense of self-worth when they anticipate their own underperformance (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). The experience of procedural unfairness becomes less painful if they can transfer accountability for these anticipated failures from themselves to the organization (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Employees who experience organizational decision-making processes as lacking transparency similarly may relate this negative situation to the limited concern that their employer exhibits for their *future* in the organization (Wan et al., 2012). That is, these experiences may compromise their sense of self-worth, because they doubt the availability of adequate career prospects (Jawahar & Stone, 2017). As a result, and consistent with COR theory, they seek to avoid further resource losses and protect their self-image by venting their disappointment about procedural unfairness with accusations of vague job descriptions (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Because unfair decision-making processes can undermine their long-term professional development and growth, these employees search for a scapegoat for their tarnished organizational future and accuse their employer of depriving them of pertinent job-related information (Jermias & Yigit, 2013). Conversely, open organizational decision-making can help employees thrive at work and develop favorable opinions about their employer and its interest in their current and future professional well-being (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Wan et al., 2012). These employees likely lack any compelling reason to develop self-damaging thoughts about their work situation (Kim & Beehr, 2020) or complain that they do not know what their job tasks entail (Bowling et al., 2010). We accordingly propose:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between employees' experience of procedural unfairness and their accusations of job ambiguity.

We apply a similar logic to predict a negative relationship between employees' accusations of job ambiguity and their engagement in problem-focused voice behavior. If

employees believe the organization deprives them of pertinent information about their job responsibilities, they may be less likely to contribute to its success with devoted voice efforts that pinpoint organizational failures. Highlighting the issues that come with underspecified job roles could be helpful in this regard, but this mechanism likely is superseded by their need to protect their resources, as predicted by COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018). In particular, if they avoid productive voice behaviors, employees can protect their sense of self-worth, despite high levels of job-related uncertainty (Bowling et al., 2010; Takeuchi et al., 2012), because they find a way to avoid "wasting" their valuable energy on an undeserving employer that makes them feel bad about themselves by refusing to provide detailed information about their job roles (De Clercq, 2019; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). By halting their problem-focused voice activities, in accordance with their accusations of job ambiguity, employees also may generate resource *gains*, in the form of personal satisfaction (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2000). That is, it can be satisfying to refuse to help an organization that seemingly does not find it worthwhile to explain job roles and thus does not deserve constructive voice efforts (Coelho et al., 2011; Morrison, 2011).

Similarly, if the employer appears responsible for the hardships created by underspecified job tasks, employees may sense no motivation to report problem areas that otherwise could change and improve the organizational status quo (Chênevert et al., 2019). In particular, unclear job roles tend to evoke negative attitudes in employees, such as diminished organizational commitment (Ackfeldt & Malhotra, 2013) and work engagement (Kunte & RungRuang, 2019), reflecting their lack of interest in spending significant energy resources on helping their employer (Hobfoll, 2001; Morrison, 2011). In contrast, if employees develop favorable perceptions about the amount of detailed information they receive about their job roles, it may motivate them to *leverage* the associated positive energy resources into productive work

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activities, in line with COR theory, because they seek additional resource gains from organizational leaders (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Yadav & Rangnekar, 2016). One way to achieve this favorable outcome is by impressing those leaders with dedicated voice efforts that pinpoint problem areas (Liang & Gong, 2013; Ng & Feldman, 2012). Formally:

> **Hypothesis 2:** There is a negative relationship between employees' accusations of job ambiguity and their problem-focused voice behavior.

The combination of the preceding arguments implies a pertinent mediating role of job ambiguity. The sense that their employer is secretive enhances the probability that employees avoid constructive problem-focused voice behavior, because they develop the additional belief that the job-related information shortages they suffer are the fault of that employer (Eatough et al., 2011). To the extent that they are disappointed about the lack of decision-making transparency, the likelihood that employees expend their energy on discretionary work activities, including voicing opinions about problems, is low and critically informed by their criticisms of unclear job roles, developed to shield their self-esteem resources (Bowling et al., 2010; Kim & Beehr, 2020). Our theoretical logic specifically predicts the presence of a *full* mediation effect, such that criticisms about insufficient job-related information offer unique conduits through which experienced procedural unfairness escalates into diminished problem-focused voice.

> **Hypothesis 3:** Employees' accusations of job ambiguity fully mediate the relationship between their experience of procedural unfairness and their problem-focused voice behavior.

Moderating role of coworker task conflict

We leverage COR theory further, in proposing a relevant moderator in these links. The resource-depleting effect of unfavorable work conditions may be subdued if employees can draw from useful relational resources (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000). We specifically posit that employees' task conflict with coworkers moderates the relationships between the experience of procedural

unfairness and accusations of job ambiguity (Hypothesis 1) and between those accusations and employees' problem-focused voice behavior (Hypothesis 2), because these idea clashes help employees shield themselves against frustrations due to unfair organizational decision-making, as well as beliefs about job-related information shortages.

First, unfair decision-making might lead to accusations about job ambiguity to a lesser extent if employees can draw from the valuable insights that emerge out of task-related disputes. Because the confrontational nature of such interactions tends to increase the creativity of coworker exchanges (De Clercq et al., 2017; Jehn, 1995), employees likely can identify *innovative* ways to deal with work-related challenges, including opaque decision-making policies that undermine the quality of their current and future professional functioning (Neveu & Kakavand, 2019). They accordingly experience a lower need to protect their sense of self-worth with criticisms about the limited information that their organization offers with respect to job responsibilities (Hobfoll et al., 2018). When employees can bounce conflicting ideas off one another, they also tend to develop more positive views about the quality of their surrounding work environment in general, because their interpersonal relationships with organizational colleagues seem to welcome different approaches and opinions (Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jungst & Janssens, 2020). With these positive views, employees are less likely to develop self-depreciating thoughts about unfair decision-making (Kim & Beehr, 2020), with beneficial consequences for the probability that they complain about ill-defined job roles (Heck et al., 2005). Task conflict even might reveal some options for *benefiting* from opaque decision-making processes, in that they leave room for flexibility, so employees might feel less disheartened about the lack of procedural fairness (Jehn, 1995; Xie et al., 2014) and less driven to levy accusations

about job-related information deficiencies to conserve their self-esteem resources (Hobfoll, 2001). We hypothesize:

> **Hypothesis 4:** The positive relationship between employees' experience of procedural unfairness and accusations of job ambiguity is moderated by coworker task conflict, such that this relationship is weaker at higher levels of such task conflict.

Second, the probability that employees' allegations about unclear job descriptions translate into thwarted problem-focused voice behavior should be lower among employees who have access to valuable resources embedded in their coworker relationships (De Clercq, 2019). Prior research indicates that access to different opinions can reveal better ways to complete their job tasks, as well as potentially boost their work energy (Jungst & Janssens, 2020). In turn, employees likely can leverage these insights and energy to avoid self-damaging ruminations about job-related information deficiencies and thus reluctance to undertake problem-focused voice behaviors (Quinn et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2016). Collective insights gained from task-related quarrels also might prompt a realization that their accusations about job-related information shortages are unjustified or clouded by work-related insecurities (Eatough et al., 2011), which diminishes the chances that they halt problem-focused voice behavior. Conversely, employees who cannot rely on productive coworker interactions likely continue to see resource-draining job ambiguity as a reason to halt their undertaking of dedicated voice behaviors (Hobfoll et al., 2018). They feel isolated (Jehn & Mannix, 2001) and seek to find ways to avoid wasting their precious time, such as on problem-focused voice behaviors that primarily benefit an organization that seemingly does not care about detailing their job responsibilities (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

> **Hypothesis 5:** The negative relationship between employees' accusations of job ambiguity and their problem-focused voice behavior is moderated by coworker task conflict, such that this relationship is weaker at higher levels of such task conflict.

Integrating all these arguments culminates in predictions of a moderated mediation effect (Hayes & Rockwood, 2020). This effect is a logical consequence of the preceding mediation and moderation hypotheses, but it offers the additional insight that coworker task conflict may serve as a pertinent contingency that buffers the *indirect,* negative relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior, through job ambiguity (Hayes, 2018). In particular, we postulate that for employees who can draw from insights generated by productive idea clashes (Xie et al., 2014), the *explanatory* role of job ambiguity in the escalation of procedural unfairness into diminished problem-focused voice behavior is less prominent. This relational resource counters the self-depreciation that arises with organizational decision-making practices that lack transparency (Kim & Beehr, 2020) and the sense that there is insufficient information available to perform their job tasks (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). In contrast, if employees cannot draw on productive coworker exchanges, their criticism about the absence of clear job roles provides a more salient explanation for how their beliefs about unfair decision-making lead to complacency in pinpointing problem areas.

> **Hypothesis 6:** The indirect negative relationship between employees' experience of procedural unfairness and their voice behavior, through their accusations of job ambiguity, is moderated by coworker task conflict, such that this indirect relationship is weaker at higher levels of such task conflict.

Research method

Data collection and sample

A large retail organization that operates in Portugal was selected as the empirical setting. This organization was established more than 20 years ago, employs about 500 people, and sells a variety of products—including chemicals, construction materials, electrical components, and workshop equipment—to business professionals. By examining a single organization in one industry, we reduce the likelihood of unobserved differences with respect to how external market

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factors (e.g., competitive intensity) or organization-level characteristics (e.g., organizational culture), not included in our theoretical framework, might affect employees' propensities to raise their voice (Morrison, 2011). That is, our single-organization focus may challenge external validity, but it increases internal validity, because the proposed relationships are not clouded by alternative explanations for the presence of problem-focused voice behavior (Lattin et al., 2003). In addition, the retail sector in Portugal is highly competitive, marked by a multitude of local and international players who vigorously compete for market share (Reigadinha et al., 2017; Xavier et al., 2015), so employees likely sense pressure to find ways to contribute to their employer's competitive positioning, such as by identifying organizational issues that might undermine it. From this perspective, this empirical context is highly appropriate for addressing questions of how and when negative perceptions of organizational decision-making may steer employees away from desirable voice activities and how this harmful process can be avoided by employees' access to valuable coworker resources.

The survey, developed using the recommended translation–back-translation method (Brislin, 1986), was converted into Portuguese by a bilingual translator, then back-translated into English by another bilingual professional. After addressing some discrepancies, the final survey instrument was administered in Portuguese. The sample frame consisted of all of the retailer's employees, from which we randomly selected 400 people. The participants were ensured complete confidentiality and told that they could complete the surveys without mentioning their names. We also underscored the voluntary basis of their participation, the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time, and a reassurance that only aggregated results would be reported. Further explanations reassured them that different respondents likely would give different answers for specific questions but that it was critical for them to offer honest and truthful

opinions. These clarifications reduced the risk of acquiescence and social desirability biases (Spector, 2006). Of the 400 employees initially contacted, we received 225 responses, a response rate of 56%. The final sample included 82% men and 18% women—reflecting the male-dominated nature of this business sector in Portugal. Yet the sample included wide variation in terms of organizational tenure (38% with 5 or fewer years of organizational experience, 42% with 6–15 years, and 20% with more than 15 years), job level (46% had no supervisory responsibilities, 36% had some supervisory responsibilities, and 18% had significant supervisory responsibilities), and job function (82% in sales, 18% in administration).

Measures

The four focal constructs were measured with items drawn from prior research, with seven-point Likert anchors (ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree").

Procedural unfairness. To measure employees' perceptions that organizational decision-making lacks transparency, we applied a reverse-coded, five-item scale of procedural justice (Masterson, 2001). Two sample items were "My organization's procedures are transparent so that decisions can be made with consistency" and "My organization's procedures are constructed to hear the concerns of all those who are affected by a decision" (Cronbach's alpha = .91).

Job ambiguity. We assessed employees' beliefs about the presence of information deficiencies in their job role descriptions with a reverse-coded, six-item scale of role clarity (Fried & Tiegs, 1995). In light of our theoretical focus on employees' accusations that their employer is responsible for unclear job descriptions, the wording of the original items was slightly adapted, to prompt assessments of the consequences of how their organization functions. That is, respondents indicated whether "The way that my organization operates means that I

know what my responsibilities are" and "The way that my organization operates means that I know exactly what is expected from me" (Cronbach's alpha = .80).

Problem-focused voice behavior. We assessed employees' propensity to speak up about problem areas with a five-item scale of prohibitive voice (Liang et al., 2012). Two example items were "I speak up honestly about problems that might cause serious loss to my organization, even when dissenting opinions exist" and "I dare to voice opinions on things that might affect efficiency in my organization, even if that would embarrass others" (Cronbach's alpha = .85). Our focus on self-assessments of voice behavior is consistent with previous studies (e.g., Lin et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2019) and the argument that employees tend to have in-depth knowledge about the specific voice efforts that they undertake, whereas other assessors may have only a limited perspective of how much energy their colleagues dedicate (Dutton et al., 2001; Morrison, 2011). Prior studies similarly note that employees provide valuable assessments of their own creative (Sijbom et al., 2018) or championing (Kissi et al., 2013) behaviors. Preoccupations about common source bias also tend to be weaker when self-assessments are acceptable and appropriate (Conway & Lance, 2010), as is the case in this study.

Coworker task conflict. To measure the extent to which employees engage in productive idea clashes with their coworkers, we relied on a four-item scale of task conflict (De Clercq et al., 2009). The participants indicated, for example, whether "My coworkers and I often have disagreements about task-related issues" and "My colleagues and I often have conflicting ideas" (Cronbach's alpha = .85).

Control variables. The statistical models accounted for the roles of four characteristics: gender (0 = male, 1 = female), organizational tenure (1 = 5 years or less, 2 = 6–10 years, 3 = 11–15 years, 4 = 16–20 years, 5 = more than 20 years), job level (1 = lower level or no supervisory

responsibilities, 2 = intermediate level or some supervisory responsibilities, 3 = upper level or significant supervisory responsibilities), and job function (0 = administrative, 1 = sales). Men tend to express more voice than women (Detert & Burris, 2007), and more experienced or higher ranked employees may feel more confident about their ability to engage in voice (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008).

Construct validity. To test the validity of the study's central constructs, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis of a four-factor measurement model (Lattin et al., 2003). The fit of this model was adequate: $\chi^2(164) = 382.09$, confirmatory fit index = .90, incremental fit index = .90, Tucker-Lewis index = .87, and root mean squared error of approximation = .08. Evidence of convergent validity appeared in the strongly significant factor loadings of each item on its respective construct ($p < .001$); the average variance extracted (AVE) also exceeded the benchmark of. 50 in all cases but one, such that the AVE for job ambiguity equaled .43. The presence of discriminant validity was affirmed, because each AVE value was greater than the squared correlation coefficient between corresponding construct pairs. Finally, the statistical fit of six models with constrained construct pairs (in which the correlation coefficients between two constructs were fixed to 1) was significantly worse than that of the unconstrained versions (in which the correlation coefficients were free to vary) ($\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} > 3.84$, $p < .05$).

Statistical analysis

With the Process macro, developed for SPSS (Hayes et al., 2017), we could estimate individual paths, as well as assess the overall mediation and moderated mediation effects, using a bootstrapping procedure that accounts for the possibility that the sampling distributions of these effects might be skewed and not follow normal distributions (MacKinnon et al., 2004). To check for mediation, we estimated the indirect relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-

focused voice behavior through job ambiguity, along with its corresponding confidence interval

(CI), with Model 4 in the Process macro (Hayes, 2018). In this first stage, we also assessed the

signs and significance of the corresponding direct paths between procedural unfairness and job

ambiguity and between job ambiguity and problem-focused voice behavior. For the test of

moderated mediation, the CIs were calculated for the conditional indirect effects of procedural

unfairness at different levels of coworker task conflict. Consistent with our conceptual

framework, the model estimation (using Model 58, Process macro; Hayes, 2018) includes a

moderating effect of coworker conflict on the relationships of procedural unfairness with job

ambiguity *and* job ambiguity with problem-focused voice behavior.

Results

Focal analysis

The correlation coefficients and descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1; the mediation

results obtained from the Process macro are in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 stated that employees who

perceive limited transparency in organizational decision-making should be more likely to accuse

their organization of providing insufficient job-related information. We found support for this

hypothesis in the positive relationship between procedural unfairness and job ambiguity (β =

.140, p < .001). Hypothesis 2 predicted that these accusations would steer employees away from

raising their voice about organizational problem areas. Evidence in support of this prediction

emerged from the negative relationship between job ambiguity and problem-focused voice

behavior (β = -.344, p < .001). We also observed an effect size of -.048 for the *indirect*

relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior, through job

ambiguity; importantly, the associated CI did *not* include 0 [-.103, -.014]. Moreover, the direct

relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice was not significant (β = -

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.087, *ns*), with a corresponding CI that included 0 [-.195, .021]. These findings provided support

for the presence of full mediation, as we predicted in Hypothesis 3.

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

In our theoretical predictions, we also anticipated that productive idea clashes with

coworkers would mitigate the hardships created by unfair decision-making (Hypothesis 4), as

well as by their resulting convictions about ambiguous job roles (Hypothesis 5). Table 3 reveals

a negative, significant effect of the procedural unfairness × coworker task conflict interaction

term (β = -.083, *p* < .01) for predicting job ambiguity, along with a positive, significant effect of

the job ambiguity × coworker task conflict interaction term (β = .106, *p* < .05) for predicting

problem-focused voice behavior. According to the output of the Process macro, the relationship

between procedural unfairness and job ambiguity is weaker at higher levels of coworker task

conflict (.258 at one standard deviation [SD] below the mean, .154 at the mean, .029 at one SD

above the mean), in support of Hypothesis 4. Similarly, decreasing effect sizes emerged from the

relationship between job ambiguity and problem-focused voice behavior at higher levels of

coworker task conflict (-.582 at one SD below the mean, -.449 at the mean, -.290 at one SD

above the mean), consistent with Hypothesis 5.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

As a formal test of the proposed moderated mediation effect (Hypothesis 6)—which

explicated coworker task conflict as a buffer of the explanatory role of job ambiguity in the

connection between procedural unfairness and employee voice (Hayes, 2018)—we compared the

strength of the conditional *indirect* relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-

focused voice behavior through job ambiguity at different levels of coworker task conflict.

According to the results in Table 3, diminishing effect sizes occurred at higher levels of the

moderator: from -.150 at one SD below the mean, to -.069 at the mean, to -.008 at one SD above

the mean. The CIs did not span 0 at the two lower levels of the moderator ([-.251; -.048] and [-

.121; -.032], respectively) but did so at the highest level ([-.067; .024]). Coworker task conflict

thus buffered the negative indirect relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-

focused voice behavior, through job ambiguity, in line with Hypothesis 6 and our general

theoretical model.

Post hoc analysis

Considering that the preceding results emerge from data about a single organization,

which raises some questions about generalizability, we collected further data for a post hoc test

of their robustness. In particular, we undertook a quasi-replication (Bettis et al., 2016) in which

we administered a survey among 200 employees who worked in a construction company in

Portugal, using the same data collection procedure as applied to the main study. Consistent with

recommendations by Bettis and colleagues (2016), this replication differed from the focal study

on only two dimensions, that is, industry sector (construction versus business-to-business retail)

and time period (there was a time gap of six months between the focal study and the quasi-

replication). It was not expected that these differences would have an impact on the nature of the

proposed relationships. Notably, company size (about 500 employees) and country setting

(Portugal) were similar or identical in the two studies, and the measures of the four focal

constructs were also identical. The survey in the quasi-replication gauged the four focal

constructs, gender, and organizational tenure, as well as employees' perceptions of the presence

of an informal organizational culture, using a four-item scale of relationship informality, adapted

slightly to reflect organizational support for such informality (e.g., "My organization functions in

such a way that my colleagues and I maintain close social relationships with one another"; Pooja

et al., 2016). We received 125 completed surveys; among the respondents, 33% were women, and 45% had worked for the organization for more than five years.

The results in Table 4 are consistent with those we found in the focal analysis. In Process Model 4, procedural unfairness related positively to job ambiguity ($\beta = .332$, $p < .001$), job ambiguity related negatively to problem-focused voice behavior ($\beta = -.439$; $p < .001$), and the effect size of the indirect relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused behavior equaled -.146, with a CI that did not span 0 ([-.241; -.058]). Notably, these significant results were robust to the inclusion of perceived informal organizational culture, which itself related positively to problem-focused voice behavior ($\beta = .269$, $p < .001$). In Process Model 58, the procedural unfairness × coworker task conflict interaction term was negative and significant ($\beta = -.097$, $p < .01$) with regard to the prediction of job ambiguity, and the job ambiguity × coworker task conflict interaction term was positive and significant ($\beta = .133$, $p < .01$) for predicting problem-focused voice behavior. In support of moderated mediation, we found decreasing effect sizes of the indirect relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior at higher levels of coworker task conflict (-.236 at one SD below, -.082 at the mean, -.020 at one SD above). The corresponding CIs did not include 0 at the two lower levels of the moderator ([-.367; -.119] and [-.154; -.022], respectively) but did at its most elevated level ([-.070; .029]). These results of the quasi-replication reflect just one additional organization, yet the strong consistency with the focal results alleviates concerns about external validity (Bettis et al., 2016).

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Discussion

Theoretical implications

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This research offers novel insights by pinpointing how perceived unfairness in organizational decision-making can escalate into diminished problem-focused voice behavior, with a specific focus on factors that explain or influence this process. Unfavorable organizational treatments clearly can direct employees away from constructive work activities that otherwise would enhance organizational effectiveness (Bergeron & Thompson, 2020; Dong et al., 2020). But why does procedural unfairness specifically undermine employees' propensities to speak up about organizational problems? And in which relational circumstances is such a harmful process more or less likely? To answer these pertinent research questions, we have leveraged COR theory (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2000) to predict that (1) employees stop offering their helpful voice behaviors when they develop beliefs about limited transparency in decision-making, because they are critical of the limited information they receive about their job roles, and (2) their exposure to coworker task conflict mitigates this process. The empirical results affirm these conceptual expectations.

A first theoretical implication of this study is that it reveals an unexplored reason that procedural unfairness, a resource-depleting work condition (Ng & Feldman, 2012), tarnishes problem-focused voice behavior: Employees criticize the presence of information shortages in their job role descriptions (Zhou et al., 2016). Our conceptual focus (and empirical approach) relates to employees' *accusations* that hold their organization accountable for ambiguous job descriptions, instead of the standard research approach that captures the mere presence of unclear roles (Eatough et al., 2011). This nuance is important. In an alternative perspective, problem-focused voice could be a means to alleviate concerns about procedural unfairness (Morrison, 2011). Our study instead offers the novel insight that this uncertainty-inducing work situation curtails employees' problem-focused voice behaviors, because it prompts them to *blame* their

organization for offering limited job-related information (De Clercq et al., 2019). Consistent with the logic of COR theory, employees respond to resource-depleting organizational treatments with negative accusations and behavioral complacency (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

This finding makes a meaningful theoretical contribution, in that it reveals how employees may generate a negative spiral that makes them suffer a *double* whammy. In particular, the negative responses we have discussed may seem legitimate to employees, because they provide a way to avoid self-depreciating thoughts about not being able to complete their job tasks effectively, due to secretive organizational decision-making (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Kim & Beehr, 2020). But this adverse organizational situation could escalate into yet another adverse situation, to the extent that accusations about job ambiguity and complacent responses prevent the organization from learning about the issue. Future research could explicitly assess the salience of such dual harms: If complacent responses evoke negative receptions from organizational authorities, employees might find themselves excluded from organizational decision-making processes even more (Ng & Feldman, 2012).

A second conceptual insight that arises from this investigation pertains to how the dysfunctional dynamic can be *disrupted* if employees can draw from productive coworker relationships (Wu & Lee, 2016). As we predicted, employees' accusations that their employer is responsible for providing inadequate information about their job responsibilities become less powerful channels through which unfair organizational decision-making converts into a refusal to undertake voice behaviors when employees participate in productive idea clashes with colleagues (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). This buffering role of coworker task conflict is somewhat counterintuitive, as well as insightful. Persistent task-related disputes can be upsetting for employees and undermine the quality of their professional functioning (Kammerhoff et al.,

2019; Pluut & Curseu, 2013). Yet as our study indicates, self-damaging reflections about unfavorable decision-making processes and resulting beliefs about job ambiguity (Bowling et al., 2010; Kim & Beehr, 2020) are *less* likely among employees who engage in such disputes and thus gain some novel solutions to the experienced hardships (De Clercq et al., 2017). The chances that employees criticize their organization for being insufficiently clear about their job duties in the presence of unfairness in its decision-making, such that they grow reluctant to devote their precious time to constructive problem-focused voice behaviors, are lower if they are inspired by productive confrontations about the best ways forward (Xie et al., 2014). The accompanying insights encourage employees, upset by secretive decision-making, to maintain their motivation to speak up about organizational problems, rather than revert to allegations of unclear job roles.

Taken together, this buffering effect of coworker task conflict represents a novel contribution to extant voice literature, in that we detail the beneficial role of productive idea contestations in shielding employees against frustration due to negative beliefs about how their organization makes decisions. In particular, the results extend investigations of the *direct* beneficial function of task conflict in stimulating similar positive work activities, such as creative (De Clercq et al., 2017), innovative (Lu et al., 2011), or citizenship (Choi & Sy, 2010) behaviors. As set out in the explanation of the study's contributions in the Introduction, we reveal an *indirect* beneficial effect and offer the critical insight that dysfunctional accusations of job ambiguity and a subsequent reluctance to engage in problem-focused voice, in response to procedural unfairness, are subdued among employees who embrace productive fights with coworkers. Future research could leverage this insight by formally investigating pertinent relational boundary conditions that may reduce the danger of entering the aforementioned

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downward loop. In particular, the mitigating role of coworker task conflict, as found herein, should inform continued investigations of how high-quality coworker interactions may reduce the probability that opaque decision-making processes translate into complacent responses, which might compromise employees' organizational standing and also undermine adequate organizational solutions to these negative processes.

Practical implications

As our empirical findings suggest, senior managers must be cognizant that work-related frustrations arise among employees when organizational decision-making lacks transparency and deprives them of relevant information about their job tasks. These convictions can be detrimental for the employer, as well as for employees themselves, to the extent that they feel discouraged from undertaking efforts to voice their opinions about their organization's malfunctioning— which then prevents the identification of possible solutions and may undermine their own organizational reputation (Ng & Feldman, 2012). If employees are keeping their frustrations to themselves, rather than complaining helpfully, senior managers should work to stimulate more constructive voice, as well as avoid impressions of secrecy surrounding decisions in the first place, by being perfectly clear in their communication about procedures and encouraging suggestions for improving procedures. For example, in company-wide forums, top management might explain the ins and outs of corporate decision-making, and then in targeted sessions, immediate supervisors might ask for feedback from employees (Kuvaas et al., 2017).

Avoiding perceptions of unfair decision-making may be ideal, but it is not feasible for all companies, such as those with highly complex internal operations or that justifiably worry about information leakages (Ibnugraha et al., 2021). When these extraordinary circumstances arise, employees should be aware of the risks associated with letting their self-damaging ruminations

escalate into complacency about reporting problem situations (Morrison, 2011), and managers should help them realize and avoid that situation. In particular, they should promote healthy discussions and debates among coworkers, particularly in exchanges that include conflicting opinions. Of course, they need to take care that content-based interactions do not escalate into emotion-based quarrels, in which employees feel offended by constant challenges to their ideas (Pluut & Curseu, 2013). But if organizations and their members can avoid such negative escalation and leverage confrontations of different viewpoints in beneficial ways, they might be better positioned to learn about internal shortcomings from employees who are willing to voice their concerns, even when they feel upset by unfair organizational treatments. Ultimately, if employees enjoy productive idea clashes with colleagues, they likely hold less negative views about unfair decision-making or ambiguous job situations, so they remain dedicated to their helpful voice efforts.

Limitations and future research

In terms of the study limitations and paths for additional examinations, we acknowledge that we cannot completely rule out reverse causality. In the well-established COR framework, resource-draining decision-making processes produce pessimistic job-related beliefs and counterproductive actions, as employees attempt to circumvent additional resource losses (Hobfoll et al., 2018). But it may be possible that solutions generated from dedicated voice efforts generate positive perceptions about the organization's internal functioning in general, including beliefs about job role clarity and decision-making fairness (Bhal & Ansari, 2007). Longitudinal studies that assess each construct at different points in time could provide a more formal test of causality. In a related sense, we leveraged the COR logic that states that employees want to shield their self-esteem resources when they confront upsetting work situations (Bentein

et al., 2017; Hobfoll et al., 2018); further studies could explicitly assess these resources, including changes over time, using sequential mediation models. Another valuable extension would be to examine how the process that underpins the translation of procedural unfairness into diminished voice behavior compares with similar processes that explain other forms of work-related complacency, such as employee silence (Whiteside & Barclay, 2013) or submission (Fatima et al., 2020).

Our choice to study coworker task conflict as a buffer was informed by prior research that underscores the instrumental role of intra-firm knowledge exchanges in mitigating frustrations about unfavorable organizational treatments (De Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017b; Wang & Noe, 2010). It would be useful to examine other relational resources that may play similar buffering roles, such as social interaction (Pooja et al., 2016), goal alignment (Bouckenooghe et al., 2015), or emotion sharing (Stephens et al., 2013). Moreover, resource-boosting *personal* resources may shield employees from the danger that their irritations with secretive decision-making processes translate into accusations of job ambiguity or thwarted voice behavior, such as their optimism (Li et al., 2019), innovation propensity (Tierney et al., 1999), or resilience (Zhou et al., 2021). A related extension could assess the relative influence of each distinct relational or personal resource, then establish if the buffering role of coworker task conflict, as advanced herein, holds after accounting for their influences.

We investigated one organization that competes in one industry (retail). As mentioned, the single-firm design may raise some external validity concerns, but it also increases internal validity by diminishing the risks that arise in the presence of unobserved, firm-level determinants of job ambiguity and problem-focused voice in multiple-firm studies (Hair et al., 2006; Morrison, 2011). Moreover, the post hoc analysis addresses some concerns about the

generalizability of the findings; that investigation involves an organization that operates in a different sector (construction) but still generated results consistent with those obtained in the main analysis. Furthermore, our conceptual arguments are not industry-specific, so we anticipate that the *signs* of the tested relationships should not change, even if we included organizations from a broad set of different industries. Nonetheless, multi-industry designs might attempt to detail the possible influence of pertinent industry characteristics. One relevant factor in this regard could be the degree to which an organization faces significant competitive pressures in its external markets (Cui et al., 2005). In this scenario, employees may be more understanding of their employer's inability to guarantee complete transparency in its decision-making and thus respond less vigorously to experiences of procedural unfairness by accusing it of role ambiguity or exhibiting diminished problem-focused voice behavior. The value of such behavior also may be perceived as greater in challenging external environments (Morrison, 2011). In a related vein, continued studies could account for the role of relevant firm-level factors—such as change-oriented organizational structures or climates (Sarros et al., 2011)—and investigate whether the hypothesized relationships prevail beyond those effects.

Although the country context of this study is Portugal, the arguments we used to derive the research hypotheses are not specific to any country, so similar to the case of industry, we expect that the theorized relationships might vary in strength, but not in nature, in other country settings. Portugal notably scores high on both uncertainty avoidance and collectivism (Hofstede et al., 2010), so the study respondents might find unfair decision making and unclear job descriptions particularly threatening, but they also might not want to stand out from the collective by voicing those concerns. Cross-country *comparative* studies could explicitly consider whether and how relevant cultural features might alter the strength of the proposed

theoretical relationships. Another option would be to investigate the roles of corresponding

personal characteristics, such as employees' individual risk propensities (Chow et al., 2012) or

collectivistic orientations (De Clercq et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This study highlights the unexplored influences of job ambiguity and coworker task

conflict on the escalation of procedural unfairness into thwarted problem-focused voice behavior.

Accusations of unclear job descriptions are notable conduits through which secretive decision-

making leaves employees hesitant to add to their organization's success with efforts that pinpoint

pertinent shortcomings. We also detail how this detrimental transformation can be halted among

employees who engage in back-and-forth exchanges of conflicting viewpoints. In turn, we hope

this study functions as a source of encouragement for additional examinations of how the

detrimental role of unfavorable decision-making dynamics in spurring work-related complacency

can be attenuated by productive discussions and debates among employees.

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Figure 1: Conceptual model
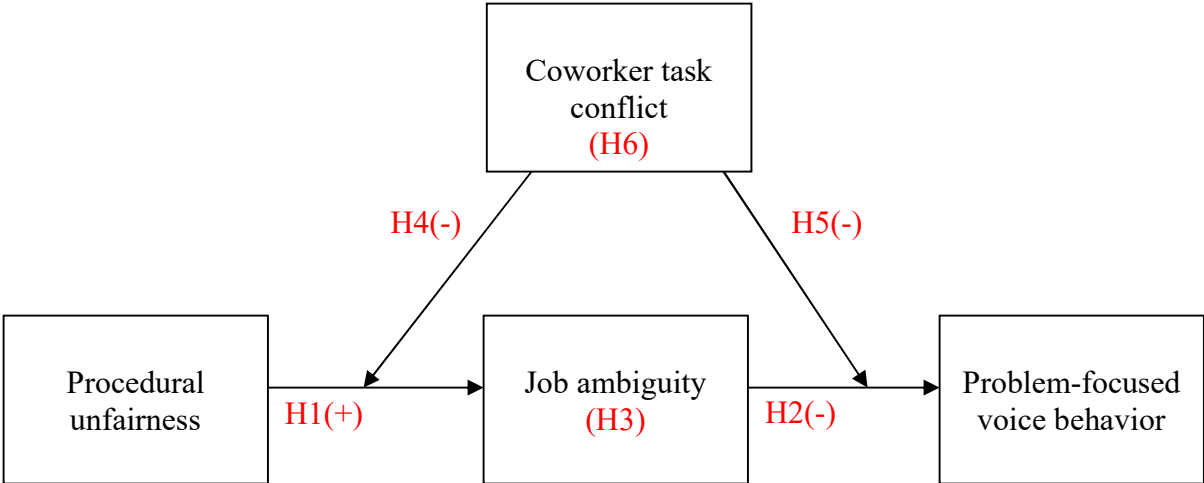
Notes: H3 and H6 reflect mediation and moderated mediation hypotheses, respectively.

Table 1: Correlation table and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Procedural unfairness								
2. Job ambiguity	.260**							
3. Problem-focused voice behavior	-.144*	-.245**						
4. Coworker task conflict	.096	.212**	.036					
5. Gender (1 = female)	.128	.047	-.083	.046				
6. Organizational tenure	.145*	.025	.142*	.104	.028			
7. Job level	-.046	.038	.020	.026	-.005	.335**		
8. Job function (1= sales)	.009	-.071	.007	.008	-.353**	-.203**	-.146*	
Mean	3.229	1.936	5.427	2.709	.182	2.338	1.716	.822
Standard deviation	1.327	.724	1.063	1.204	.387	1.293	.749	.383

Notes: n = 225.
*p < .05; **p < .01.

Table 2. Mediation results (Process macro Model 4)

	Job ambiguity	Problem-focused voice behavior
Gender (1 = female)	-.045	-.189
Organizational tenure	-.038	.138*
Job level	.052	-.050
Job function (1 = sales)	-.169	-.013
Procedural unfairness	.140***	-.087
Coworker task conflict	.117**	.073
Job ambiguity		-.344***
R^2	.114	.105

Indirect relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior

Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-.048	.023	-.103	-.014

Direct relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior

Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-.087	.055	-.195	.021

Notes: n = 225; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; UCLI = upper limit confidence interval.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Moderated mediation results (Process macro Model 58)

	Job ambiguity	Problem-focused voice behavior
Gender (1 = female)	-.038	-.165
Organizational tenure	-.042	.148**
Job level	.057	-.045
Job function (1 = sales)	-.161	-.005
Procedural unfairness	.136***	-.062
Coworker task conflict	.103**	.066
Procedural unfairness × Coworker task conflict	-.083**	
Job ambiguity		-.427***
Job ambiguity × Coworker task conflict		.106*
R^2	.144	.124

Conditional *direct* relationship between procedural unfairness and job ambiguity				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	.258	.055	.149	.366
Mean	.154	.036	.083	.224
+1SD	.029	.053	-.076	.134

Conditional *direct* relationship between job ambiguity and problem-focused voice behavior				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	-.582	.148	-.873	-.290
Mean	-.449	.111	-.667	-.231
+1SD	-.290	.102	-.492	-.089

Conditional *indirect* relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	-.150	.051	-.251	-.048
Mean	-.069	.022	-.121	-.032
+1SD	-.008	.023	-.067	.024

Notes: n = 225; SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; UCLI = upper limit confidence interval.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Mediation and moderated mediation results (post hoc analysis)

Mediation results (Process macro Model 4)		
	Job ambiguity	Problem-focused voice behavior
Gender (1 = female)	-.391*	.304
Organizational tenure	.091	.112
Informal organizational culture	-.065	.269***
Procedural unfairness	.332***	-.228**
Coworker task conflict	-.393***	.016
Job ambiguity		-.439***
R^2	.544	.553

Indirect relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior			
Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-.146	.047	-.241	-.058

Moderated mediation results (Process macro Model 58)		
	Job ambiguity	Problem-focused voice behavior
Gender (1 = female)	-.444**	.380*
Organizational tenure	.061	.158
Informal organizational culture	-.115[+]	.294***
Procedural unfairness	.306***	-.226**
Coworker task conflict	-.357***	.023
Procedural unfairness × Coworker task conflict	-.097**	
Job ambiguity		-.317**
Job ambiguity × Coworker task conflict		.133**
R^2	.575	.591

Conditional *indirect* relationship between procedural unfairness and problem-focused voice behavior			
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	-.236	.063	-.367	-.119
Mean	-.082	.034	-.154	-.022
+1SD	-.020	.024	-.070	.029

Notes: n = 125; SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; UCLI = upper limit confidence interval.
[+] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.