The role of first-line managers in implementing direct employee voice processes formally and informally in the banking sector of the Sultanate of Oman

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of first-line managers (FLMs) in implementing direct employee voice in the private sector, focusing on how FLMs encourage and manage both formal and informal forms of employee participation. Direct voice is defined as a two-way communication between management and individual employees without the mediation of a third party, such as unions or collective bargaining processes.

The study is situated in a private sector organisation, where employee voice is progressively recognised as crucial for improving workplace efficiency, productivity, and general involvement. It examines the interactions between FLMs, human resources (HR) managers, and employees to shed light on how employees are encouraged to express ideas, suggestions, and concerns, and how these contributions affect individual and organisational performance.

The study's key findings reflect a variety of organisational dynamics. While some FLMs successfully implement HR policies regarding employee voice, others struggle due to lacking resources, training, and managerial skills. A noticeable finding is that employee participation and suggestion result in enhanced engagement, satisfaction, and productivity. However, variations in managerial approaches to employee suggestions can have a negative impact on employee attitudes and satisfaction. The study also recognises challenges among FLMs, such as role ambiguity and insufficient people management skills, which impede effective HR implementation.

This study improves the understanding of employee voice by applying ability, motivation, and opportunity theory to the roles of FLMs and their employees. It demonstrates that, for FLMs to effectively manage employee voice, they must have the necessary abilities and motivation, and the right opportunities to facilitate it. The

findings add to the expanding literature on employee voice by emphasising FLMs' vital role as key facilitators of employee voice. Furthermore, this study finds that, while FLMs are supported by their managers or department heads, they frequently lack support from HR, highlighting critical areas for improvement in HR practices and training.

Additionally, this thesis adopted a qualitative single case study design to investigate how FLMs implement direct employee voice processes. Exploring multiple viewpoints allows the researcher to grasp a greater understanding of the subject, and therefore qualitative data was gathering from all three levels (HR managers, FLMs, and employees) from different occupational groups at one of the leading banks in Oman. In this study, manual thematic analysis is adopted to analyse the responses presented by interviewees. Moreover, a combined discussion of the empirical findings of all parties is utilised to obtain an overview of the emerging themes from the interview questions at the three levels described.

Furthermore, the theoretical background associated with qualitative data analyses and the adoption of the manual thematic analysis is explained. Following this, the process of generating the initial themes is detailed. The findings derived from the open-ended questions of the semi-structured interviews are reported. Finally, in the conclusion of this study, the contributions to academic knowledge, suggested actions for organisations to pursue to better facilitate their business model and practice, and ideas for future research are provided.

ABBREVIATIONS

AMO   Ability, motivation, and opportunity

EIP   Employee involvement and participation

ER   Employment relations

FLM   First-line manager

GCC   Gulf Cooperation Council

GFOTU   General Federation of Oman Trade Unions

HQ   Headquarters

HR   Human resources

HRD   Human resources department

HRM   Human resource management

IR   Industrial relations

JCC   Joint consultative committee

KPI   Key performance indicator

LMX   Leader–member exchange

MNEs   Multinational enterprises

OB   Organisational behaviours

PIRK   Power, information, rewards, and knowledge

SMEs   Small and medium-sized enterprises

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter defines the study's background and aims, which focus on the employee voice process. The concept of employee voice has been utilised in various employment-related research studies, and encompasses direct voice, in which employees express their views, ideas, and concerns directly to their managers, and indirect voice, in which employee representatives, such as trade unions, express employee views, ideas, and concerns to management. It embodies the notion of dual voice, where both direct and indirect voice may function in combination. This thesis will focus on the role of first-line managers (FLMs) in implementing the direct employee voice process through both formal and informal mechanisms.

In this context, Valverde et al. (2006) argued that human resource management (HRM) is not restricted to human resources (HR) departments only but that other internal agents are also involved in the management of HR, such as FLMs. Additionally, Papalexandris & Panayotopoulou (2005) argued that HR activities have always been a part of an FLM's function.

Moreover, this thesis examines how organisations may support FLMs to facilitate the employee voice process. According to Bos-Nehles (2013), several factors hinder FLMs in implementing HRM practices effectively, including lack of competence, desire, capacity, and support, and the existence of ambiguous policies and procedures (Nehles et al., 2006).

In this thesis, the definitions and measures utilised by Bos-Nehles (2010), Bos-Nehles et al. (2013), Appelbaum et al. (2000), Kellner et al. (2019), and Jiang et al. (2012)

will be adopted to encompass the five factors discussed by Nehles et al. (2006) – desire, capacity, competencies, support, and clear policy and procedures – under the ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) rubric. This will be applied to explain factors that impact FLMs' HRM (direct employee voice) implementation effectiveness in the private sector. Ability refers to FLMs being afforded the necessary skills, knowledge, and training to implement the direct employee voice process. Motivation refers to FLMs' desire and willingness to accomplish HRM tasks, such as the facilitation of the direct employee voice process. Opportunity refers to FLMs' perception of how they manage the direct employee voice process, and if they have the necessary support, avenues, and motivation to enable them to embrace and implement it (Nehles et al., 2006). In addition, this has the potential to strengthen FLMs' own ability, motivation, and opportunities.

However, based on AMO theory, Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) argue that only ability has an independent and direct positive effect on the effectiveness of HRM implementation by FLMs, and this effect can be positively or negatively influenced by motivation and opportunity. In addition, AMO enhances employees' ability, motivation, and opportunity to express their voice through communicating their ideas, opinions, and suggestions in their organisation.

In the context of AMO, concerning employees, ability refers to employees' capacity and willingness to use their voice to enable them to participate and express their ideas, opinions, and suggestions. As noted by Jiang et al. (2012), this is enhanced by effective employee training and development practices leading not only to increased employee skills and abilities but also to improved employee morale within organisations.

Motivation relates to employees exercising their voice. It also correlates to employees' willingness to utilise their abilities creatively (Purcell et al., 2003). Opportunity in the context of employee participation can be provided by introducing self-directed teams, suggestion schemes, participation in decision-making, information sharing, and flexible work assignments (Kellner et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2012; Boselie, 2010; Ujma and Ingram, 2019). The chapter begins by describing the aims of the research study and the research questions as they play a crucial role in framing the research methodology.

The research questions aim to investigate direct employee voice from several perspectives, and specifically applying the AMO framework, particularly to FLMs and employees. The first research question explores how organisational mechanisms are endorsed by management and HR professionals in facilitating employee voice. This question evaluates how organisational policies and structures determine the efficacy of employee voice channels; however, it does not utilise the AMO framework.

The second research question includes the AMO framework to explore how the use of this framework as applied to FLMs influences their ability in facilitating employee voice. The third research question also incorporates the AMO framework to evaluate how employees utilise these mechanisms to express their work-related issues, suggest improvements, and expand their influence in the workplace. This method confirms a noticeable difference between the emphasis on organisational mechanisms, FLMs, and employees, offering an in-depth insight into how employee voice mechanisms are implemented and supported across various levels in the organisation.

Furthermore, the usage of the AMO theory improves the researcher's understanding of how FLMs and employees might collaborate to implement direct employee voice, with each having their own focus. The AMO framework provides a useful lens for studying the relationship between FLMs and employees in the context of direct employee voice. Finally, it contributes to the theoretical discussion on employee voice in HRM. It investigates how both parties engage in voice processes by evaluating their abilities, motivations, and opportunities. For FLMs, this involves setting conditions that encourage employees to have a say. This encouragement is enhanced by FLMs receiving suitable training, while employees benefit from these opportunities to express their views. Although frameworks such as psychological safety and job demands–resources theory may seem significant, they were not explored during this research. AMO was adopted as it offers a well-defined and focused approach to analysing how FLMs and employees engage with voice mechanisms, identifying it as the most effective framework for this thesis.

1.2 Background

The thesis aims to focus on the direct employee voice process. Trade unions previously predominantly expressed employee voice, but their density has declined significantly in many countries (Visser, 2007 Wilkinson et al., 2014). Historically, there has been tension between employers and unions, which has long been the case in developed economies (Gunnigle et al., 2015).

Some firms have adopted a coherent strategy of union resistance and avoidance, especially among multinational enterprises (MNEs), supported by HRM strategy, which is recognised as being typically aggressive towards unions (Machin & Wood, 2005). According to Gall (2004), forms of repression and intimidation in firms have

been identified as aggressive types of union avoidance. Collings (2008) argues that, concerning large MNEs, trade union voice mechanisms are substituted by direct employee voice mechanisms. In this context, Dundon & Gollan (2007) identified the significance of direct employee voice mechanisms, which have been increasingly developed in many organisations. Individualised voice mechanisms also encourage employee voice, which is the pathway to enhanced employee commitment and performance (Harley, 2014). As non-union voice mechanisms have grown, academics' and researchers' attention on employment relations has encouraged them to examine alternative voice forms (Lavelle et al., 2010).

In this regard, researchers have established more themes for better reflection on what happens daily in a new workplace; for example, formalised non-union participation (Dundon et al., 2005; Gollan, 2006), informal participation (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013), and multiple channels of participation (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011).

Trade union declines have resulted from the shift of the responsibility for designing employee voice to the HR department and senior management of organisations, which allows employees to have "a say and potentially influence organisational affairs relating to issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners" (Wilkinson et al., 2014, p.5). There has also been motivation for designing voice mechanisms to enhance and sustain competitive advantage (Holland, 2014).

FLMs are a linchpin around which everything revolves. They are central characters; their role is crucial in designing employee voice. They are categorised as the link between employees and management to escalate voice when needed throughout the organisation and to implement voice mechanisms effectively (Wright & Kehoe,

2008). Despite their role in designing, implementing, and escalating direct employee voice informally throughout the organisation, FLMs also face some barriers that hinder them.

The following section will shed light on the problem statement, which has been extruded from reviewing the employee voice literature.

1.2.1 Problem statement

There is no doubt that FLMs implement informal voice mechanisms, particularly through informal discussions and one-to-one meetings. However, it is essential to acknowledge that FLMs not only are informal voice champions, but also could implement formal voice mechanisms in a combination form. Marchington & Suter (2013, p.284) noted that "informal EIP [employee involvement and participation] needs to be combined with the formal process to operate effectively". Cox et al. (2006) also described how a combination of employee voice mechanisms allows employees to be involved in different ways.

Several academics have identified the barriers FLMs face that hinder them in effectively implementing and managing employee voice. However, the question remains regarding how FLMs overcome these barriers. Fundamentally, FLMs may encounter difficulties on two sides: firstly, they face pressure from the organisation's hierarchy, and, secondly, they may lack sufficient comprehension, experience, and people management training. This view has been confirmed by senior managers and HR departments, who perceive that a lack of requisite skills hinders FLMs in implementing HR practices and employee voice mechanisms. There is evidence to suggest that the training and skills of FLMs greatly influence their performance in becoming effective employee voice managers at the workplace level.

This study will focus on the Omani private banking sector and how the application of AMO theory in that context, as discussed in the introductory section, may reveal whether and to what degree FLMs are effective managers of employee voice. It will also attempt to understand the barriers that exist that prevent the successful implementation of employee voice mechanisms by FLMs. Moreover, this research reveals that to fully overcome such barriers, organisations must invest significant time and resources to train and motivate FLMs to become effective employee voice managers.

The study will focus on the Omani private banking sector and how the application of AMO theory in that context affects ability and motivates FLMs to be effective voice managers for better overall organisational performance. Consequently, embracing the three AMO elements, FLMs contribute to enhancements in the voice practices across the organisation. How individual FLMs manage the overall employee voice process will be explored. Concerning employees, the application of the AMO elements will address how they have a say in their organisation regarding their ideas, opinions, and suggestions, which is perceived as the manifestation of employee motivation, and allows them to be more effective in participating in managerial decision-making processes.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

This study aims to explore in depth how FLMs formally and informally implement the direct employee voice process in the private sector. It explores how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say through expressing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions regarding the effectiveness of both employees and FLMs. The thesis will adopt AMO theory as an analytical framework to explore the influence of its

three elements on FLMs' implementation of employee voice in their organisation. It will thus reveal the necessary training and support required to enable and motivate FLMs to execute their HR roles and functions effectively, which should improve employees' abilities, motivation, and opportunities to have a say. Concerning these aims and objectives, the research questions are presented.

1.3.1 Research questions

1. What is the impact and effectiveness of the direct employee voice process in organisations?
2. To what extent does the role of FLMs facilitate the direct employee voice process?
3. From the employees' perspective, what might enable them to express their voice and have a greater say in their workplace?

Due to the gaps in the literature, the following study aims and research questions are addressed (Figure 1.1).

Aim 1

Examine how employees and FLMs are encouraged to use direct voice to influence change in the workplace.

Aim 2

Explore in depth how the direct employee voice process is formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector.

Aim 3

Evaluate how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say through expressing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions.

Research Question 1

What is the impact and effectiveness of the direct employee voice process in organisations?

Research Question 2

To what extent does the role of FLMs facilitate the direct employee voice process?

Research Question 3

From the employees' perspective, what might enable them to express their voice and have a greater say in their workplace?

Figure 1.1: Research aims and questions

Table 1.1 summarises the research questions, data collection methods, and participant groups.

Table 1.1: Research questions, data collection methods, and participant groups

Research questions	Research methods	Participant groups
1. What is the impact and effectiveness of the direct employee voice process in organisations?	Qualitative: semi-structured interview	HR assistant manager HR manager Heads of department Branch managers FLMs Team leaders Department employees Branch employees
2. To what extent does the role of FLMs facilitate the direct employee voice process?	Qualitative: semi-structured interview	HR assistant manager HR manager Heads of department Branch managers FLMs Team leaders
3. From the employees' perspective, what might enable them to express their voice and have a greater say in their workplace?	Qualitative: semi-structured interview	Heads of department Branch managers FLMs Team leaders Department employees Branch employees

The qualitative single case study design is adopted to answer the three research questions outlined in Table 1.1 above. Consequently, semi-structured interview questions are established to assist in attaining the objectives of this thesis. Table 1.1 details the researcher's aim to interview HR managers, FLMs, and employees. The use of semi-structured interviews will allow for the expression of different views and

opinions of those three parties and reveal employees' perceptions of FLMs' capability in implementing employee voice in the organisation and whether employees consider this to be adequate.

1.4 Omani context

Oman is located in the extreme south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula (Omaninfo, 2020) (Figure 1.2). It has borders with three countries: the United Arab Emirates and the Strait of Hormuz to the north, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the west, and the Republic of Yemen to the south-west.

Oman is one of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, along with Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (Secretariat General of GCC, 2020). Moideenkutty et al. (2011) affirm that the GCC countries are considered the leading producers and exporters of oil and gas in the world, and are considered to be oil-wealth countries. GCC countries still rely entirely on oil-related revenues (Angel-Urdinola & Kuddo, 2010).

Figure 1.2: Map of Oman

1.4.1 Public and private sectors in Oman

The GCC countries' labour markets have been divided into two segments: the public sector and the private sector (Cammett & Posusney, 2010). According to Mina (2020), the public sector is preferred for national labour due to high wages, job security, and well-developed retirement schemes for the employees. On the other hand, the private sector is mainly dominated by the expatriate workforce from Asia and other Arab countries, and firms are owned by nationals but managed by expatriates. Therefore, national labour reluctance to join the private sector means that there are low wages and unprotected employment.

Budhwar et al. (2002) postulated that employment relations in Oman are not as well established as they are in Western countries. However, in Oman, the state plays a vital role in governing the work system. Budhwar et al. (2002) further stated that the employment relations in Oman do not encompass the main actors, such as employers' councils, trade unions, and government representatives. Therefore, different techniques have been utilised by employees to share their voice, as cited by the authors: "[T]he most common method adopted to communicate with employees was through an immediate or direct supervisor, followed by direct document, regular workforce meeting and then by 'non-formal' methods that may include personal relations, mentoring, personal consultation" (Budhwar et al., 2002, p.209).

1.5 Background of the banking sector

In the Sultanate of Oman, the banking sector is one of the oldest business sectors. A branch of the British Bank of the Middle East was first established in 1948 in the

capital city of Muscat (HSBC Oman, 2021). Since then, the banking sector has shown tremendous growth, consistent with national economic development, which has led to additional local and international banks operating in Oman.

The banking sector of Oman is the industry that continues to fund the country's most effective and profitable ventures. For many years, economic experts have recognised that banks play a vital role in the efficient functioning and development of any economy. Therefore, in the context of developing countries, the type and shape of a banking system may also reflect the importance a country gives to this vital sector, which may be largely relied upon to achieve the desired growth in the national economy. As a result, banks play several important roles in the economy, including intermediation, payment, guarantor, risk management, savings and investment advisor, safekeeping and certification of value, agency, and policy. The role of banks can also be seen in the area of economic development. In society, banks are the key for providing funds to different institutions to start up or expand their various economic activities (Al-Muharrami, 2017). The banking sector continues to play a supportive role in promoting economic diversification initiatives by meeting the credit needs of all segments in the economy.

Despite a highly challenging environment, the banking sector in Oman has shown remarkable strength and resilience and has continued to be well capitalised. Strong capital and liquidity buffers have enabled banks to continue lending to the economy and they remain critical in preserving banks' resilience as well as public and investor confidence (CBO, 2022).

The Oman banking sector encompasses 16 banks. There are seven local banks, namely Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman, HSBC Bank Oman, Oman Arab Bank,

Bank Dhofar, Bank Sohar, and Al Ahli Bank, and nine international banks, including Standard Chartered Bank, Habib Bank, Bank Melli Iran, Bank Saderat Iran, Bank of Baroda, State Bank of India, National Bank of Abu Dhabi, Bank of Beirut, and Qatar National Bank (Singh & Fida, 2015) (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Licensed banks in the Sultanate of Oman (as of 31 December 2022)

Name of bank	Date of establishment	Operating offices
Local banks		
National Bank of Oman	1973	61
Oman Arab Bank	1973	58
HSBC Bank Oman	1975	47
Bank Muscat	1981	145
Bank Dhofar	1990	61
Al Ahli bank	1997	16
Bank Sohar	2007	31
Foreign banks		
Standard Chartered Bank	1968	1
Habib Bank Ltd	1972	7
Bank Melli Iran	1974	1
First Abu Dhabi Bank	1976	7
Bank Saderat Iran	1976	1
Bank of Baroda	1976	3
State Bank of India	2004	1
Bank of Beirut	2006	5
Qatar National Bank	2007	6
Specialised banks		
Oman Housing Bank	1977	9
Oman Development Bank	1977	19
Islamic banks and windows		
Bank Nizwa	2012	19

Al Izz Islamic Bank	2013	16
BM-Meethaq	2013	24
NBO – Muzn	2013	6
BD – Misara	2013	10
OAB – Al yusr	2013	7
AHB – Al hilal	2013	19
BS – Sohar Islamic	2013	8

Source: Central Bank Oman Annual Report (2021).

1.5.1 The rationale for the sector selected

The banking sector in Oman has always dominated Oman's financial system, and in 2009, almost 90 per cent of financial system assets were restrained by commercial banks with a total asset value of OMR 15 billion (Bologna & Prasad, 2010). Recently the growth in both deposits and credit disbursed from the commercial banks remains positive (Miah et al., 2020). Historically, the banking sector has played a critical role in developing the economy in all countries, "not without spectacular disasters even in recent times", and therefore Oman, as a developing country, needs an efficient banking sector (Al Zadjali & Ibrahim, 2021, p.23). In Oman, in general terms, the banks perform positively, and by the end of 2013, the total value of assets, credit disbursement, and the aggregate deposit achieved OMR 22.4 billion, OMR 15.2 billion, and OMR 15.6 billion, respectively (Miah et al., 2020). Therefore, the banking sector in Oman is considered one of the dominating stable sectors.

In countries such as Oman, where the state plays a dominant role in national development, the state must develop effective human resources department (HRD) strategies. The state model governs all work systems and HRD functions in Oman. It does not consist of the common industrial relations (IR) actors suggested by John Dunlop, i.e. Trade unions, employers, councils, and government representatives

(Poole et al., 2005). The most common method adopted to communicate with employees is through an immediate or direct supervisor, followed by direct document and regular workforce meetings, and then by 'non-formal' methods that may include personal relations, mentoring, personal consultation, and informal sub-groups inside the workplace (Budhwar et al., 2002).

For example, an analysis by Al-Jahwari and Budhwar (2016) highlights that HRM is a growing phenomenon in Oman but its practices are still largely traditional and reactive. The various HR processes are often designed with Western practices in mind, but when carried out, the practices are often not well aligned to business strategies – they are implemented for narrow administrative purposes and remain loosely connected to each other. It seems that a mixture of Islamic principles and Western approaches to management of HR is influencing HRM in Oman. This is further evidenced by Aycan et al.'s (2007) analysis, which perceives, on the one hand, that there is an increased emphasis on Omanisation and adherence to Islamic principles and yet, on the other hand, that globalisation imposes pressures to adopt global standardised HRM practices and policies (Budhwar et al., 2019).

According to Moideenkutty et al. (2011), because Oman is also high on power distance and uncertainty avoidance, like the other Arab Muslim countries, empowerment practices are unlikely to affect performance. This is because in high-power distance cultures, employees may not assertively express their ideas to their supervisors (Bae & Lawler, 2000). Similarly, because of high uncertainty avoidance, employees may not be comfortable with the lack of structure created by broad job descriptions. In such situations, some high-involvement HRM practices, such as

opportunities to participate in decision-making and flexible job descriptions, may not impact organisational performance.

Al-Hamadi et al. (2007) found that the major factors influencing HRM in Oman are religion (Islam), civil service laws, the expatriate workforce, and social elites (Omanis who were educated abroad). Omani employees emphasise the influence of religion on HRM, as religion plays a major role in people's daily lives. In an Islamic country like Oman, when the government decides on designing HRM policies, it has to take into consideration the effects of religion on top of other factors, such as national culture, political ideology, economic conditions, and the legal system. Also, social elites influence HRM. Of the common institutional determinants, the relative impact of civil law in Oman is much more apparent than would be the case within a Western context.

In addition to these aspects of national culture, Omani HRM is also determined by the influence of the expatriate workforce. Given that Omani civil service law was established during the 1970s by a group of foreign expatriate consultants from Egypt and other Arab countries, this finding is not surprising. However, it is possible that these laws were made to suit the expatriates more than the locals, as expatriates made up the majority of the workforce at that time. The social elites (i.e. people who are educated abroad) had most of their education in Western countries such as the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) and in some Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, and came back to Oman during the early 1970s and some years later. They were the first people to become ministers and policymakers in Oman. In the Arab world, management policies and practices frequently serve the interests of powerful elites (Al-Hamadi et al., 2007). Expanding on the argument of

power and hierarchy, it is crucial to reflect these dynamics in the context of Oman. Therefore, leadership is likely to be controlling and authoritarian and embrace a strict hierarchy in its structures. For instance, Budhwar et al. (2002) discovered that the main method of communication for managers in Omani organisations is via their direct supervisors. Employees assume that managers are there to oversee and are uncomfortable if decision-making is devolved to them. Limited evidence suggests that organisations in Oman (both public and private sectors) are taking HRD seriously (Budhwar et al., 2002). Considerable barriers remain to leadership development in countries such as Oman (Common, 2011).

The influences on the leadership style are indicated as a "sheikocracy", which is characterised by hierarchical authority, an emphasis on interpersonal relations, and low observance of formal rules and regulations (Dorfman & House, 2004, p.62). Al-Hamadi et al. (2007) revealed that the hierarchy of the tribe still plays a significant role in contemporary Oman. Furthermore, they found that in the Omani context employees feel that factors that are rarely studied within a Western context substantially influence HRM policies and practices. Therefore, embracing Western paradigms with Western-centric values in developing countries in the absence of any modification and consideration of local culture may be unsuitable. Consequently, international managers need to know which factors within the national and institutional framework might impact preferences for HRM practices. This method will assist international managers operating in a particular country to design management policies and practices to match a particular context.

According to Mellahi & Wood (2001), it is anticipated that managers and directors are manipulated by their tribal leader in particular, and by the tribe in general. Also,

the collectivism in Omani society and other GCC societies is reinforced by the tribe, which calls on its members to strengthen tribal solidity, reflected by in-group attitudes and behaviours, and long-term obligation to members (Elbanna et al., 2011). At the same time, tribal unity, nepotism, and cronyism are still common in Oman, and, predictably, those inhabiting high positions in government or private organisations will employ members of their tribe with less emphasis on their qualifications for the available position (Common, 2011). Therefore, although several types of Western management and institutional practice have been embraced, the tribal culture controls attitudes and behaviours in corporate enterprise as well as in individuals' personal lives.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Swailes et al. (2011) shed light on the development of the Omanisation process by engaging with ministerial officials and private sector employers. Thus, they found that the Omanisation policy faces difficulties because of both the quality of local job seekers and the employers' inclinations towards expatriate employees. Furthermore, they argued that there is a divergence between the knowledge and skills possessed by graduates and those needed by the market. On the other hand, employers in the private sector prefer hiring expatriate employees because they are considered to have a greater work ethic.

In his study, Al Nahdi (2016) revealed factors that maintain the domination of expatriates in managerial roles and unveiled some sensitive issues that individuals usually refrain from disclosing for fear of disappointing policymakers. Al Nahdi's (2016) study discovered that a report published by the Shura Council shows that expatriates dominate the senior positions in the private sector, with 29,000 HR and

administrative managers, 48,000 high-income technical jobs, and another 130,000 professional roles. More seriously, various Omani managers in the private sector, specifically in the automotive sector, were hesitant to take Al Nahdi's (2016) survey during business hours and chose to hold a meeting in the evening so that they could forward it to their staff outside the workplace. This indicates the extent to which expat managers dominate the work in the sector. Al Nahdi (2016) further argued that this approach added some challenges to acquiring access to more participants. Therefore, when comparing other HR policies internationally, for instance comparing affirmative action in the US with HR policy in Oman, concerning Omanisation, one cannot fail to recognise the lack of corporate rules and regulations that can protect employees in the private sector from being overpowered or exploited by expatriate managers.

This outcome is consistent with Milliken et al.'s (2003) results, which revealed the views of 40 employees concerning how secure they felt in discussing concerns or issues with their managers. There are several conceivable explanations for this phenomenon. Milliken et al. (2003) found that several employees continued to be silent since they could not afford to risk their jobs due to being viewed or labelled negatively by those superior to them in an organisational hierarchy.

Another potential situation is that in high-power distance cultures, employees are more likely to believe that the manager is right simply because he or she is the boss and the unity assumption is intensely reinforced when, in a collectivist culture, members of the executive team share similar cultural backgrounds (Escandon-Barbosa et al., 2021). Morrison & Milliken (2000, p.711) noted that "the combination of high-power distance and collectivism among members of the top management

team is particularly likely to associate with silence-fostering beliefs". In the high-power distance culture of Arab countries, including Oman, in most organisations employees fear speaking up in case they are perceived as guests in their own country. All of this belies the danger of importing Western paradigms and assumptions wholesale into Omani culture without taking cognisance of the power distance and tribal nature of that culture.

Because of the high-power distance and other cultural and tribal factors in Oman discussed in the literature review, some employees are reluctant to be honest in their responses for fear of being labelled as troublemakers or as potentially undermining the overall tribal/expatriate culture dominating the organisation and the private sector. This has impacted the quality of the empirical data obtained from such employees. Moreover, this situation adds to the silence culture among some employees, especially if good personal relationships are not built up with line managers. Furthermore, employees in non-city branches share similar traits with FLMs in that they are unaware of the existence of employee voice, essentially failing to understand what it is. It is something about which they have no prior knowledge. Thus, the researcher had to explain the concept of voice to such employees. Also, some employees perceive that their FLMs are very close to higher management, so they may fear speaking out and thus remain silent (Van Dyne et al. 2003).

Analysing the impact of institutional and cultural contexts on HRM and employment relations practices in Oman sheds light on how these elements shape expectations about voice practices and behaviours, particularly given the prevalence of literature from the US, Europe, and Australia. The insufficient research on employee voice in Oman raises both obstacles and opportunities. Although few studies are focused

especially on this subject in Oman, this gap makes the current research even more significant. It intends to investigate how existing suggestions, ideas, and work-related issues regarding employee voice can apply in a non-Western culture like Oman, potentially leading to new understandings and modifications required for the Omani workplace.

This thesis provides an exploratory method for investigating employee voice in Oman. It will examine current Western literature for pertinent topics while taking care not to make direct assumptions, ensuring that any adaptation is tailored to the Omani context. This method will help to better understand employee voice by highlighting both what can be adapted from Western theories and what is distinctive to Oman. In achieving this, the study not only contributes to the scholarly discussion on employee voice but also fills a key gap in the literature, providing useful insights into how these concepts may be interpreted in Oman.

Building on the insights of Brewster et al. (2007), Townsend & Mowbray (2020), and Morrison (2023), the prevalence of Western ideas, such as open communication and voice mechanisms, raises questions about their applicability in non-Western locations like Oman. Their research underscores the importance of rigorously evaluating how these concepts are utilised in various cultural and organisational contexts. Oman has its own particular cultural and economic context, and thus it is important to carefully evaluate how these notions fit within the Omani setting (Al-Hamadi et al., 2007). While Oman has adopted some Western practices, it still has different cultural, legal, and organisational standards that influence how employee voice is articulated.

1.5.1.1 Understanding the regulatory framework of Oman

The Oman Labour Law (Royal Decree No. 53/2023) is the country's primary legal framework for labour relations. This law establishes various rights and obligations for employers and employees, as well as formal methods for dealing with workplace concerns such as grievances and dispute resolution. It stresses fair treatment and allows employees to express their views. However, the actual application of these rights may differ among organisations due to numerous cultural factors and distinctive regional management practices. According to Artus (2013), while legislative frameworks guarantee certain rights, the efficiency of their implementation is frequently affected by local customs and management's attitudes towards employee voice.

This emphasises the significance of understanding both the legal context and the cultural variables that determine how employee rights are exercised in practice. In addition to the Labour Law and other rules, including Ministerial Decision No. 286/2008, topics such as health and safety, employment contracts, and working hours are discussed. While these legislations aim to protect employee rights, their efficacy is typically determined by how organisations manage these laws and management's commitment to following them.

This regulatory structure, while designed to protect employee rights, interacts with Oman's hierarchical character of management practices. Hofstede's (2001) research on power distance demonstrates that in cultures with high-power distance, such as Oman, decision-making tends to be hierarchical, with less input from lower-level employees, in contrast with Western management methods that favour participative approaches and appreciate employee feedback. In many Omani

companies, employees may be hesitant to speak up or challenge authority, thinking that they may be perceived as troublemakers or disruptive. This cultural factor might create barriers to effective employee voice since employees are concerned about the implications of communicating their ideas.

The issue with trade unions in Oman complicates matters even more. While trade unions exist, their ability to advocate employee concerns is limited compared with more-established labour groups in Western countries (Dorigatti, 2017). This integration of regulatory factors and common management practices needs a better understanding of how Oman's employee voice is expressed and perceived.

This study's findings identify many challenges to employee voice in Oman. Employees are typically afraid to offer their ideas due to cultural norms that emphasise respect for authority. This might lead to anxiety about being perceived as rude if employees question management. Furthermore, many employees are unaware of their rights under the Oman Labour Law and the grievance procedures accessible to them, which can discourage them from reporting issues.

Employees may be discouraged from speaking up due to fear of retaliation, such as concerns about job security or damage to professional relationships. The lack of formal mechanisms for addressing concerns leads to employee discontent and silence. If FLMs appear unapproachable or unconcerned, employees may believe their contributions are not important, discouraging them from sharing their suggestions and ideas. Furthermore, trade unions in Oman have limited authority to represent employees on work-related issues, which might make employees feel helpless. Finally, divergent perspectives on what is considered appropriate

communication can cause misunderstandings and impede productive dialogue. Addressing these concerns is critical to building a more open working atmosphere.

1.6 Plan of the thesis

This thesis is structured into seven further chapters commencing with an introduction as follows.

Chapter 1 discusses the background of the study and the aims and objectives of the thesis. In addition, the chapter addresses the problem statement of the study.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the context of the study by undertaking an extensive analysis of the literature on the conceptualisation of employee voice, particularly direct EIP, including through formal and informal mechanisms.

Chapter 3 focuses on the devolvement of HRM practices to FLMs and more specifically on the role of FLMs in facilitating and implementing direct voice mechanisms formally and informally in their organisations. However, the review also investigates the barriers that FLMs face in implementing HR practices and managing employee voice within their department and teams.

Chapter 4 evaluates the AMO model and how it operates in relation to HR practices, and how it might be applied to the analysis of employee voice.

Chapter 5 explores the methodology designed to answer the research questions, including the rationale for the data collection methodology and analysis, utilising a single case study approach. This will be achieved by adopting qualitative methods through semi-structured interviews for HR managers, FLMs, and employees from different occupational groups in one organisation in the banking sector in Oman.

Furthermore, the paradigm of this thesis is discussed in the methodology chapter, which is categorised by an interpretive ontological viewpoint and constructivist epistemology.

Exploring a single case study, consisting of semi-structured interviews with senior managers, FLMs, and employees in the private banking sector, will potentially deliver an overview of forms of AMO resources that may play a role in encouraging both FLMs and employees each in their own field.

Chapter 6 analyses the findings, which provide some theoretical and practical implications, such as revealing that FLMs have diverse motivations in implementing HR practices concerning direct employee voice.

Chapter 7 discusses the critical findings from the qualitative data in light of the research questions.

Chapter 8 offers the conclusions of the study and provides a summary of the present study, key contributions discussed to identify the gap in the literature, suggested actions for the organisation, limitations and reflections, and provided suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature review – Employee Voice

2.1 Introduction

The principal focus of this thesis is to investigate direct employee voice through FLMs' implementation of voice mechanisms and channels in organisations. In recent academic work, the concept of employee voice has been utilised to manage the challenges of the use of employee voice, employee involvement, and employee participation. Various researchers (e.g. Wilkinson et al., 2014; Marchington, 2015; Dundon & Wilkinson; 2018; Kwon & Farndale; 2020) have utilised the terms employee voice, employee involvement, and employee participation synonymously to explore employee incorporation in organisational decision-making. Nevertheless, employee voice has become a commonly used term in professional and academic publications on HRM and employee relations (Farndale et al., 2011; Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Nechanska et al., 2020; Eibl et al., 2020; Morrison, 2023).

Moreover, this thesis explores the reasons employees voice their concerns to their FLMs directly, either formally or informally, and the methods used to do so, and determines to what extent HR issues in voice management have been adequately devolved to FLMs. The thesis will not focus on indirect voice, with trade union presence, but rather on direct voice combining both formal and informal mechanisms and channels, which are intrinsically linked.

Furthermore, in this thesis, the AMO theory developed by Appelbaum et al. (2000) will be applied to conceptualising employee voice and thus examining how FLMs implement a direct employee voice process and how employees are encouraged and

motivated to express their voice through this process. However, it can be argued that the relationship between HRM and AMO does not happen in a vacuum or in isolation. Various organisational and task characteristics influence the effectiveness of HRM practices. Moreover, the AMO model illustrates how employees can be motivated by their FLMs implementing HRM practices to enhance performance and well-being effectively, since this requires the interaction and cooperation of both FLMs and employees.

Scholars have applied the AMO framework to different subjects or areas of study; for instance, high-performance work systems referring to employee capability (Macky & Boxall, 2007); implementing HRM practices with enhanced organisational performance (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Boxall et al., 2016); FLMs' AMO for effective HRM practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013); FLMs' AMO to manage employees' performance (Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018); and enhancing HR practices and firm performance (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2018).

This study seeks to apply AMO theory to the field of direct employee voice in the context of a developing country such as Oman, utilising formal and informal mechanisms and channels in the organisation as implemented by FLMs. It is thus dissimilar to other comparative studies in the field of direct employee voice and provides a particular contribution to knowledge. The contribution results from the uniqueness of this study and has a three-fold purpose. Firstly, it aims to test empirically the application of AMO theory in exploring FLMs' role in effectively implementing direct employee voice processes using both formal and informal mechanisms and enabling employees to express their views. It takes the view of AMO theory, where abilities, motivations, and opportunities serve as resources for

FLMs to implement the voice process. Secondly, utilising AMO theory, this study examines how employees have a say in their organisation concerning their ideas, opinions, and suggestions, to become effective in participating in managerial decision-making processes. Thirdly, the study will be conducted qualitatively, i.e. interviewing HR managers, FLMs, and employees from different occupational levels, which will provide a broader understanding of the employee voice process and the relationship between employees and FLMs, and how this interaction functions between them and potentially advances better outcomes.

Exploring a single case study will potentially deliver an overview of forms of AMO resources that play a role in encouraging both FLMs and employees in their fields. The findings of this study will provide some theoretical and practical implications, such as revealing that FLMs have diverse motivations in implementing HR practices concerning direct employee voice.

This chapter begins with an examination of the conceptualisation of employee voice and how direct employee voice is managed along with the mechanisms and channels deployed. Literature from the field of human resource management/employment relations (HRM/ER) disciplines about the employee voice process will be reviewed. Following this, the chapter will discuss the roles of FLMs within HRM and ER (Townsend, 2014; Townsend & Loudoun, 2015). The literature has provided comprehensive models for viewing how FLMs play a crucial role in managing different aspects of organisations, including people management, and how AMO affects both FLMs' managerial role and employees' voice in organisations. Thus, the following section will focus on the key themes of the employee voice process.

2.2 Conceptualisations of employee voice

The framework that Hirshman (1970) conceptualised has been adapted and used by different voice scholars. This conceptualisation acknowledged the mechanisms of employee voice and considered their creation and implementation as a solution to alleviating dissatisfaction in the workplace. Hirshman (1970) defined voice as "any attempt at all to change, rather than escape from an objectionable state of affairs" (p.30). Freeman and Medoff (1984) developed Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty model. In the context of work relations, employees who are dissatisfied can choose to exit the relationship with an official resignation and search for another suitable job. If they are loyal to their organisation, they will stay and raise their dissatisfaction with management to improve the situation (Hatipoglu & Inelmen, 2018). This illustrates that voice could be perceived as an alternative to exit if employees feel that the organisation pays attention to their views, resulting in employee loyalty and reducing employee turnover rate.

Employee voice can be seen at societal (macro), organisational along with departmental (meso), and individual (micro) levels (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al. 2018). The macro level comprises the regulatory framework; it influences and occasionally regulates organisational policy. The meso level, where much HRM research takes place, is related to how organisations adopt the voice process and the extent to which it is utilised and practised, empowering leadership and participation. The micro level, the field of organisational behaviour (OB), examines the individual-level motivators and inhibitors to voice, such as dispositions, attitudes and perceptions, emotions and beliefs, and relationship quality between employee

and supervisor i.e. leader–member exchange (LMX) (Morrison, 2014; Kwon et al., 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Macro and meso levels focus on voice systems. In contrast, the micro level focuses on voice behaviours. These different analysis levels are complementary, and to fully understand the voice requires a perspective that takes each of these levels into account (Wilkinson et al., 2019). As noted by Townsend et al. (2020), these three levels overlap. By combining these levels of employee voice, a logic on how society, organisations, and individuals perceive and enact better workplaces has been established.

In their six case studies on developing the concept of voice pathways, Townsend et al. (2020) found that, when employees seek to resolve issues that are concerning them, they consider a range of factors to determine which mechanisms to utilise or consider either within the first stage or the following stages. Voice mechanisms can be utilised at different levels. At the micro level, for example, work level or department pathways typically begin with employees referring to managers and then escalating via the hierarchy more formally. At the organisational level, voice mechanisms are based on a more formal structure, for instance, a works council or joint consultative committee (JCC).

Employees may choose not to participate in expressing their voice and instead remain silent or may feel neglected, although these reactions were not mentioned in the studies of voice by Hirschman (1970) or Freeman & Medoff (1984). They claimed that both employers and employees were highly supportive of delivering a mechanism allowing employees to have a voice and that it should be embraced to benefit the organisation (Rees et al., 2013; Knoll & Redman; 2016; Park &

Nawakitphaitoon, 2018). Furthermore, Kwon & Farndale (2020) stated that employee voice is being reshaped in various ways that overstep the exit-voice in union membership, opportunities for alternative voice mechanisms have been opened alongside eliciting new discussions over the need for non-union voice and encouraging public policies. The extent of research on employee voice and participation in organisations has been expanded drastically by these developments (Rees et al., 2013; Morrison, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Knoll & Redman 2016; Kwon & Farndale; 2020; Nechanska et al., 2020). As union voice declines, direct employee voice seeks to fill that vacuum.

According to Benson (2000), Wilkinson & Fay (2011), and Wilkinson et al. (2018), since the 1980s, the concept of employee voice has gained significant attention and is widely used by academics in research mainly in the fields of HRM/ER and OB. Moreover, there has been an increasing interest in the concept of employee voice in recent years, from those who see voice as a possible route to higher levels of organisational performance and those seeking better environments/experiences for employees (Dundon et al. 2004). The term voice relating to employees having a voice at the workplace gained prominence through the writings of both Freeman and Medoff in the 1970s and 1980s (Dundon & Gollan, 2007).

The purpose of employee voice has been extensively debated in the literature, with two key viewpoints emerging: first, emphasis on promoting organisational improvement, and, second, the drive to improve working conditions. This thesis identifies the importance of both perspectives and aims to verify their stances from the research findings. Several academics suggest that when FLMs are given greater HR responsibilities, particularly for matters relating to daily activities with their

teams, it is fundamental for organisational learning and ongoing improvement (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). By allowing employees to express their work-related issues and suggest improvements, firms can recognise and address weaknesses, which will result in enhanced overall performance.

Morrison & Milliken (2000) emphasised the importance of upward voice for more effective organisational decision-making and better error recognition. Likewise, other scholars have highlighted the importance of employees voluntarily contributing ideas and information for organisational learning and improvement, considering the unlikelihood that those at the senior management level will have all of the information they need about work processes and problems (Detert & Burris, 2007). Similarly, other scholars have identified the importance of employee voice mechanisms as being essential in organisational improvements. These mechanisms facilitate a voluntary communication of ideas, suggestions, and concerns regarding work-related issues, aiming at organisational improvement or unit functioning (Burris et al., 2008; Detert & Burris, 2007; Detert & Treviño, 2010).

In Morrison's (2011) work on employee voice behaviour, the objective of voice "is to bring about improvement and positive change, not simply to vent or complain" (p.375). Voice functions as a mechanism not only for dissent but also for advancement. In their work on two types of change-orientated leadership (transformational leadership and managerial openness), Detert & Burris (2007) focused on the role that specific leadership behaviours play in impacting employees' decisions to voluntarily offer comments or suggestions intended to trigger organisational improvement. The nature and personality of FLMs will influence the

extent to which employees feel at ease in expressing their voice for either complaint or improvement.

Detert & Burris (2007) further elaborate that transformational leader behaviours should motivate employees to believe that their superiors are orientated towards the future rather than the preservation of the status quo. Accordingly, employees should be more willing to express their comments aimed at organisational improvement. However, not all FLMs are transformational. Some are distrustful of change, including the devolution of responsibility, and will not therefore be open to encouraging employees to express their opinions and bring suggestions for improvement.

Similarly, Dundon et al. (2004) recommend that organisations should develop strategies to increase trust between managers and employees. With trust established, employees can express their views with their FLMs and participate in organisational improvement measures in collaboration with managers. When teams solve problems not directly related to productivity, such as quality and safety issues, they can assist in accommodating employees' preferences for improvements on these metrics, and in the process build individual commitment to the team's activities in a wider context (Hunter et al., 2002).

Wilkinson et al. (2020) affirm that management that allows employees to contribute mainly on small matters within the work environment minimises the influence employees have on major organisational decisions, which in turn impacts negatively on organisational improvement. Conversely, another stream of literature highlights the role of employee voice in enhancing job satisfaction, employee well-being, and

working conditions (Artus, 2013). When employees feel heard and valued, it fosters a positive work environment, reduces turnover, and boosts morale.

The foundational theory of improving working conditions is articulated by Rusbult et al. (1988). Their work on the impact of exchange variables on exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect has provided an important basis for understanding voice definition to include efforts by employees to improve working conditions. They conceptualised voice as "actively and constructively trying to improve conditions through discussing problems with a supervisor or coworkers, taking action to solve problems, suggesting solutions, seeking help from an outside agency like a union, or whistle-blowing" (1988, p.601). This theory has been further validated and extended by subsequent research.

Notably, Landau (2009) supported this theory with various theories articulated by different academics, that four conditions need to exist for employees to express their concerns or make suggestions for change: firstly, employees must have something to say (Morrison & Phelps, 1999); secondly, employees ought to perceive that it is their responsibility to have a say (Fuller et al., 2006); thirdly, they have to be confident that the benefits of having a say will outweigh the costs (Fuller et al., 2007); and, lastly, they must believe that their suggestions will be taken seriously and will have some effect on the organisation and/or its employees (Parker, 1993). Whether these conditions are met will depend on both individual characteristics and the organisational context (Landau, 2009).

Similarly, Wilkinson et al. (2020, p.3) outlined that the IR literature has widely adhered to this conceptualisation, as "an attempt to change rather than escape from

an objectionable state of affairs", focusing on voice as a means of expressing grievances and aiming for better impacts for working conditions.

The degree to which employees feel engaged and confident in their work can also be influenced by variations in their working conditions. Therefore, as noted by Mullins (2008) and Lai et al. (2017), the involvement and perspectives of each employee in the organisation are affected by acknowledging their opinions and concerns, potentially leading to improvement in their working conditions. Accordingly, their development can enhance their approach and engagement. Essentially, when FLMs and senior managers listen to their employees and implement suitable improvements to their working environment based on their feedback, it can enhance their involvement and overall approach concerning their work. Therefore, this thesis outlines that employee voice serves both to promote organisational improvement and to improve working conditions for employees, as evidenced by the findings. For instance, applying suitable voice mechanisms and channels for employees to express work-related issues has improved organisational processes and working conditions through listening attentively to and acting upon the voices of employees.

2.3 Defining employee voice

The term voice has been utilised in different situations and can be interpreted differently depending on the situation for example, there is personal voice, family voice, student voice, citizen voice, patient voice, and political voice. The term employee voice can have different meanings relating to policy, academia, and practitioner actors (Budd et al., 2010). Employee voice is often sought so that employees might generally have positive involvement in their organisations by

having some role in decision-making or power-sharing (Wang & Yang, 2015). The benefits of having employee voice in an organisation may arise from its positive impacts on organisational commitment, interpersonal relations (especially between FLMs and their employees), and trust relations in the workplace (Farndale et al., 2011).

This echoes Morrison's (2014, pp.179–180) statement that "the primary intent [of voice] is to bring about positive change, improvement, or redress, and not to merely complain or get a positive outcome for oneself". Tangirala & Ramanujam (2008) contend that employees who are not independently free to work use employee voice as a means of expressing themselves and speaking out. However, the authors regard employee voice not primarily as a channel for expressing grievances or registering complaints but as a means for employees to provide ideas and suggest new ways of operating within the workplace.

Pyman et al. (2006, p.543) described employee voice as the way in which "employees raise concerns, express and advance their interests, solve problems and contribute to and participate in workplace decision making". A more comprehensive definition including the existence of structure required for employees to express concerns was articulated by Boxall & Purcell (2003, p.162), who described voice as the term "increasingly used to cover a whole variety of processes and structures which at times enable, and at times empower employees, directly and indirectly, to contribute to decision making in the firm".

Lavelle et al. (2010) defined employee voice in the context of employees and organisations as "any type of mechanism, structure or practice, which provides an

employee with an opportunity to express an opinion or participate in decision-making within their organisation" (p.396).

Boxall & Purcell's (2007) definition is too broad a definition of voice to be applicable to this study. Rather, the definition of voice as defined by Morrison (2014, p.80) is better aligned with this study – she described employee voice as the "informal and discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, problems, or opinions about work-related issues, with the intent to bring about improvement or change". Employee voice is concerned with the conveyance of ideas, suggestions, opinions, and complaints from workplace employees to management with the express purpose of bringing about change or improvement.

Boxall & Purcell (2007) are concerned with describing voice as encompassing a whole variety of processes whereas this study's findings revealed that employees approach their managers directly through mechanisms such as one-to-one meetings, which enable employees to communicate their ideas and concerns to management with the purpose of bringing about positive change. Line managers are the first point of contact for employees, where they can directly express their voice in flexible ways through different channels and mechanisms.

Detert et al. (2013) suggested that employee voice may produce negative results when the supervisor receiving the communication is not particularly effective in the organisation. Conversely, if the supervisor is effective in their work, employee voice produces positive effects within the organisation. The implementation of employee voice enables employees to engage in productive interaction with employers resulting in a clearer understanding of what is expected from each party, and what consequential benefits may flow for either side (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020).

Employees use their voices to express their opinions regarding decisions that are or have to be taken within the workplace, and also to attempt to safeguard their welfare and security, as these are often understood to conflict with the demands of management (Wilkinson et al., 2020). According to Mowbray et al. (2022), voice can also play a significant role in employees having a say regarding employee interests. The argument emphasises the role of employee voice in addressing, and harmonising with, employee interests. While this may result in improved involvement and problem-solving, it also introduces challenges, including the possible undermining of voice and conflict between employee and organisational goals. Successful implementation requires a favourable organisational climate and robust mechanisms to ensure that employee feedback is implicitly integrated into decision-making processes.

Employee voice can also be referred to as the involvement of employees in impacting a firm's decision-making, which can be via direct and indirect means. Employees have an opportunity to use their voice to improve communication, reduce disputes, and promote employee retention through motivation and equitable treatment (Purcell, 2014; Morrison, 2014, Mowbray et al., 2015). Furthermore, employee voice refers to the ability of employees to participate in decision-making matters and work-related issues in the organisation (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2018). Wilkinson et al. (2020) suggested that employee voice refers to all mechanisms, structures, and practices by which employees attempt to express their views about their tasks and influence the operation of their organisation.

2.4 Employee voice stakeholders

The facilitation of employee voice is a comprehensive process involving various stakeholders, each playing a different and crucial role in determining how effective exchange of communication is achieved within a given organisation. From employees expressing their concerns and ideas, FLMs facilitating this voice dialogue, senior management developing policy around feedback, and unions engaged in collective bargaining, each group contributes uniquely to the employee voice process. Understanding the perspectives, roles, and concerns of these interested parties is essential for promoting a workplace environment where open communication flourishes, leading to improved organisational effectiveness and a more dedicated workforce. As indicated by Wilkinson et al. (2020) in their research on integrating studies on employee voice, acknowledging the relationship between these various parties is critical for forming an inclusive and effective voice strategy in the workplace. The following sections will introduce the various stakeholders involved in the employee voice process and their impact on organisational dynamics.

2.4.1 Employees: Key actors in the voice process

Employees are the major stakeholders in the employee voice process. They are the individuals who directly and indirectly express their work-related concerns and suggestions. Their participation in the voice process involves finding ways to express their needs, guaranteeing equal treatment, and participating in decision-making processes. Employee viewpoints on voice are generally based on the need for fairness and justice, feeling valued, and the opportunity to create a more harmonious working environment. They are interested in areas such as job security,

fair wages, opportunities for promotion, and a more conducive working environment.

2.4.2 Line managers as employee voice facilitators

FLMs play an important role in the employee voice process by acting as the immediate point of contact for employees. Effective HRM implementation involves FLMs and HR managers working together. According to Townsend & Loudoun (2015), FLMs play a significant role in managing several areas within organisations, including people management, and this role might be interpreted as encompassing both HRM and ER. FLMs play an important role in employee voice since they serve as a link between employees and management, escalating voice as necessary throughout the organisation and effectively implementing voice mechanisms (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). HRM responsibilities are increasingly being delegated to FLMs, who have taken on a more active role in managing their employees' work-related concerns (Ozcelik & Uyargil, 2015). This is further supported by Bos-Nehles et al. (2013), who state that line managers are increasingly implementing HRM to address employment concerns for their employees.

2.4.3 Senior management

Executive management has a more strategic role in the employee voice process: they are responsible for designing and endorsing formal voice mechanisms, including an open-door policy, upward problem-solving groups, team briefing strategy, employee survey suggestion schemes, and town hall meetings. Senior management's perception of employee voice is usually focused on its ability to influence organisational change, increase overall productivity, and promote a

culture of innovation. Detert & Burris (2007) emphasised the importance of employees voluntarily contributing ideas and information for organisational learning and improvement, given the unlikelihood that senior management will have all of the information they require about work processes and problems. Their interests include connecting employee feedback with organisational goals, increasing efficiency, and preserving a positive business image.

2.4.4 Trade unions

Unions defend workers' interests through collective bargaining and play an important part in the employee voice process, supporting employees' rights and ensuring that their ideas are listened to at the organisational level. Unions' relationship with employee voice is generally focused on defending workers from exploitation, bargaining for better terms and conditions, and ensuring that management is responsible. Millward et al. (2000) underlined the conventional deployment of employee voice, which was primarily linked to trade unions and other types of collective engagement. In this concept, trade unions developed as essential enablers of voice, providing the primary tool for employees to influence the workplace. Rather than depending on direct employee engagement, in which individual workers may voice their concerns separately, the union provided a collective platform to escalate the voices of its members.

These numerous stakeholders provide unique views, positions, and interests relating to the employee voice process, resulting in a complex interaction that influences the way the organisation functions.

2.5 Forms of employee voice

Within the scope of employee voice literature, voice is conceptualised as how employees express their opinions, voice their work-related complaints, offer suggestions for improvements, and receive feedback from management. Millward et al. (2000) identified three useful types of voice channels: direct employee communication, indirect or representative participation mechanisms such as joint consultation, and trade union membership recognition and representation. Employee voice can function through different mechanisms (Mowbray et al., 2015). There are two types of employee voice: indirect and direct.

Indirect voice happens when employees express their opinions through representatives or intermediaries, such as trade union officials, employee representatives on internal committees, or feedback systems such as externally managed surveys. The conventional deployment of indirect voice was generally associated with unions and other types of involvement, and this was the principal mechanism through which workers obtained influence at work, rather than through direct employee participation (Millward et al., 2000).The use of indirect voice is usually in a context whereby a third party, such as a trade union, creates the mechanism by which employees' work-related issues and suggestions for improvements are escalated to management (Wilkinson et al., 2020; Della et al., 2021).

Direct voice, as suggested by different authors, is a two-way communication between management and individual or collective employees that occurs directly, without the mediation of a third party (Marchington & Suter; 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020). As stated by Mowbray et al. (2015) and Wilkinson et

al. (2020), on one hand, indirect voice entails the involvement of employees in either trade unions or, in non-union structures, collective representations including work councils and consultative committees. On the other hand, as noted by Klaas et al. (2012), direct voice has no precise voice mechanism and indicates concerns, opinions, and suggestions that have been vocalised directly and without a formal procedure (Klaas et al., 2012, p.324). Furthermore, direct employee voice refers to the direct interaction between employees and managers through structures, in person or via any mechanism. This encompasses individual or collective engagement through surveys, social media, and representative committees, or a hybrid of these (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Mowbray et al., 2015; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). Indirect employee voice mechanisms are frequently linked with pluralism, which highlights in theory supporting labour unions. Conversely, direct employee voice is commonly connected with modern HRM practices or unitarianism, which focuses on a shared goal for employees and management (Klaas et al., 2012; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

In addition, employee voice is a mechanism that offers an opportunity for employees to potentially influence organisational concerns regarding issues that impact not just their job roles but the interests of employees and managers (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). Therefore, employee voice is involved with the well-being not only of employees but also of management (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Kwon & Farndale, 2020), and in OB, the purpose of voice is for employees to communicate information and ideas to the management, which will allow both employees and the organisation to benefit (Knoll & Redman, 2016; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). Consequently, this provides for direct employee voice mechanisms to become a significant attribute of any firm because, without communication, no organisation

can be successful (Morrison et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Nechanska, 2020; Della et al., 2021).

The direct voice mechanism is an important means of addressing communication in a strategic manner that benefits both employees and management in the firm (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Furthermore, gathering information from customers is the objective of a majority of organisations, noting that junior employees at the lowest levels of the hierarchy have more contact with customers than senior employees or top management (Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). As a result, direct employee voice influences the communication between managers and employees to convey the concerns of customers to executive management (Morrison, 2014; Knoll & Redman, 2016, Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). This can primarily be attained via direct employee voice mechanisms, including participative and consultative committees, employee surveys, regular briefings, and social media platforms (Mowbray et al., 2015; Okpu & Kpakol, 2018; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018; Della et al., 2021).

Two-way communication promotes interpersonal interactions with employees and management, which encourages employees to engage with, and remain within, the organisation and to set aside any consideration given to exiting the organisation (Kim et al., 2010; Mallett & Wapshott, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2020). These two-way voice mechanisms are a means of communication that enables employees to seek information and clarification, thereby fostering shared understanding in the organisation.

Employee voice refers to all possible methods by which employees attempt to express their views about and influence their work, and their organisation's performance (Bashshur & Oc, 2016; Wilkinson et al. 2014; Morrison, 2014). Voice

can cover various fields and topics, such as working conditions, compensation, policies, and work procedures, and may happen via a variety of mechanisms, for example formal and informal, direct and indirect, and individual and collective. Employee voice is a topic of central interest to scholars in HRM, IR, and OB (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

2.5.1 Indirect employee voice

This occurs when employees express their views via representatives or intermediaries, including trade union representatives, employee representatives on committees within the organisation, or feedback mechanisms such as surveys managed by an external party. The traditional deployment of voice was primarily related to the union and wider forms of participation, and this was the primary mechanism through which workers gained influence at work rather than through direct employee participation (Millward et al., 2000). However, employers gain substantial advantages by providing voice mechanisms to their employees (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011).

In organisations where employees enjoy the opportunities associated with having a voice, they might not be interested in supporting union recruitment drives (Lewin & Mitchell, 1992), because they have approachable managers, and good relationships between employees and managers have already been built. According to Marchington (2008), it is assumed that employees only remain in their jobs if their voices heard as this is considered to enhance loyalty to their organisation. Otherwise, they will search for a better opportunity in a different organisation, or they will simply leave (exit). It can be argued that managers who listen sensibly to employees and react to the issues that directly affect them in their workplace

encourage employees to remain with a company; the alternative is that employees may feel they have been neglected by their managers and may choose to exit from the company because of their dissatisfaction.

Mainstream scholars of work make much of the potential for common interest between employers and employees (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020) and view conflict between the two as a failure of communication. More critical scholars tend to view the employment relationship as, at its heart, antagonistic (Bray et al., 2020), although they do accept that there can be areas where workers and employers have interests in common; for example, both have an interest in a firm or organisation continuing to operate. From quite different theoretical perspectives, conflict is likely to exist in any organisation. Mainstream scholars focus on management–employee communication as the domain for conflict to be resolved. Critical scholars who see conflict as inevitable in the employment relationship often focus on union agreements and collective bargaining as the preferred route to conflict resolution. Many critical theorists argue that trade unions are the legitimate representatives of employees and can persuade a group of workers to influence management decisions (Chidi & Okpala, 2012).

Sisson (2010) has denied that the decline in trade unions and collective bargaining might reduce the role of negotiation because negotiation is the most crucial feature of relations between employers and employees. While collective bargaining within organisations is important across the globe in producing good outcomes for workers, it does not feature prominently in the banking sector in Oman, which is generally not unionised. This study, therefore, does not focus on the role of collective bargaining. Instead, it focuses on the role of direct employee voice, which

does feature prominently in the Omani banking sector. Therefore, we can utilise the concept of direct employee voice within the organisation as it replaces the traditional role of trade unions and collective bargaining structures in Oman.

Having established the foundational ideas, it is now essential to delve into the specific case of trade union establishment in Oman and its main functions. The amendments to the Labour Law issued by Royal Decree No. (74/2006) dated 8 July 2006 authorised the formation of trade unions, and stipulated the establishment of the General Federation of Oman Workers to represent the workers of the Sultanate of Oman before official bodies and in local, regional, and international forums. The General Federation of Oman Trade Unions (GFOTU) seeks to take care of the interests of all workers in the Sultanate of Oman, defend their legally prescribed rights, improve their working conditions, raise the productive efficiency of workers, consolidate work values, and promote social dialogue between the tripartite parties to production.

The GFOTU exercises a number of competencies, including: (1) representing workers before government and private agencies, and in councils and committees concerned with their affairs; (2) consolidating the values of work and promoting its concepts; (3) representing the workers of the Sultanate of Oman locally, regionally, and internationally; (4) considering topics related to the work of the governing bodies of trade unions; (5) developing the skills of workers, growing their capabilities, raising their professional level, and improving their working conditions; (6) supporting efforts to raise awareness of the importance of adhering to Omanisation measures for jobs and professions, and occupational safety and health requirements; (7) participating in the development of labour plans and programmes

with the competent authorities; (8) coordinating between trade unions and supporting them in achieving their goals; and (9) promoting social dialogue between the tripartite parties (GFOW, 2004).

Nabhan Al Batashi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the GFOTU, stated that the grouping now includes 324 labour unions and seven sectoral federations distributed across various economic activities and sectors (Oman Observer, 2023). The federation mandate is to engage in meaningful dialogue through collective bargaining to boost productivity and improve performance. The above statements contradict the core responsibilities as drawn previously. The GFOTU's key function is to support and advocate for employees' rights, such as facilitating collective bargaining processes. However, the following issues undermine this mandate.

The GFOTU reports widespread abuses of workers' rights, as well as significant difficulties in exercising freedom of association and collective bargaining. It claims that many employees endure anti-union discrimination in the workplace because of their union membership, including dismissals, transfers, and harassment. The union also condemns unwarranted interference of employers in union election processes: employers frequently choose to transfer the chair and/or members of the preparatory committee to a different workplace; advance verbal and direct threats towards the president or the members of the preparatory committee; and impose disciplinary penalties including warnings and deduction of wages (Oman Observer, 2023).

Employers also hamper collective bargaining processes by refusing to attend scheduled negotiation meetings or excessively postponing such meetings, disregarding the demands of unions and sending representatives who are not

entrusted with any bargaining or decision power solely to delay the negotiations. Finally, the GFOTU emphasises that while strikes are authorised in the legislation, some groups of workers are banned from striking, including in airports, electricity companies, oil companies and refineries, and ports. Moreover, the arrangement of strikes is overseen by a committee composed of the Ministry of Labour, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the GFOTU. If, within three weeks, the committee cannot come to an agreement, the matter is transferred to the court. While mediation and court procedures are ongoing, strikes are not allowed (Oman Observer, 2023).

Another example of discrimination occurred when Oman's main oil producer, Petroleum Development Oman, terminated the contracts of four hundred workers who had participated in a strike demanding pension contributions and health insurance. Workers were only re-employed after negotiations under the auspices of the A'shura Council. A'shura Council is elected by the people. It is a financially and administratively independent institution. It is the lower house of Oman Council which enjoys legislative and oversight competences. It aims to serve the country and the nation and participate in the development march (Shura, 2024). Furthermore, the GFOTU has documented several common employer practices that undermine collective labour rights in the country. For example, GFOTU recorded several cases where employers tried to manipulate union elections by pushing their candidates or by offering certain monetary advantages to elected workers to influence their decisions and activities. It is also quite common for employers to refuse to negotiate with workers' representatives and to create alternative workers' councils to bypass collective bargaining. The GFOTU also received several complaints from workers' representatives related to anti-union discriminatory measures taken against them,

such as unjustified transfers. Workers participating in strike actions face similar disciplinary measures, such as a lack of career advancement or mandatory transfers.

Therefore, the creation of the GFOTU and its legal right to represent its members and to advance their cause notwithstanding, it is clear that in some instances it is ineffective in achieving its stated aims. Thus, it can be argued that whereas collective bargaining frequently seems to be ineffective in the context of Oman, direct employee voice remains the preferred means of communication for expressing employees' ideas and concerns without fear of retribution from management. This could address a gap in knowledge in the sector as studied thus far. Further academic study is recommended in this field.

Prosser (2001) emphasises the importance of collective voice in addressing significant workplace challenges. However, in numerous daily interactions, individual voice provides a direct and individualised communication route between employees and their FLMs. This can lead to faster understanding and problem resolution, thus increasing employee productivity and organisational performance. However, in some cases, such as negotiating essential workplace changes or resolving collective grievances, individual voice alone may not be sufficient. In such instances, a collective voice is required to ensure that common concerns are addressed fully and equitably. Also, there are circumstances when a collective voice is the only option. According to Dyne & Botero (2003), employees with high levels of education tend to speak up through individual voice instead of collective voice, because they can be autonomous and thus speak up on their own. Employees with lower levels of education will prefer collective voice over individual voice because they are not able to find solutions by themselves. Williams et al. (2012) found that

women often feel unheard in organisations when they act on their own, because of the problems they face with showing their authority. Therefore, it is expected that women have a preference for collective voice instead of individual voice.

Brewster et al. (2007) found that larger organisations prefer more-formal voice mechanisms, such as collective voice mechanisms, and smaller organisations choose less-formal voice mechanisms, such as individual voice mechanisms. Employees in larger organisations are also expected to opt for collective voice mechanisms because of the bureaucratic rules in large organisations and because close interactions between employees and employers are difficult to achieve in large organisations. Therefore, the union voice can be preferred over the individual voice because of its independence. Additionally, some problems in organisations are too complex for individual employees to take care of, for example, a reorganisation that includes multiple departments. Then, a collective voice mechanism is preferred (Pyman et al., 2006).

In the context of this debate, some economies employ the dual voice method (direct and indirect voice), which includes union representation, while others only focus on direct forms of voice. Most organisations and countries have shifted to direct individualised mechanisms (Wilkinson et al., 2014). In this regard, Prosser (2001) argued that, although these are geared towards the direct voice, what the indirect collective voice achieves, the direct individualised voice could never achieve. Therefore, the indirect voice advances more and promotes harmony in the workplace, and is considered the foundation of partnership relationships that create positive benefits for business. Brewster et al. (2007) showed very limited evidence of a directional shift from collective to individual voice models in their study of

practice in Britain, Germany, and Sweden: "collective voice remains significant in larger organisations, and although it takes a wide range of forms that include but go beyond unions and works councils, this is a positive finding for proponents of those institutions" (p.1246).

In contrast, Marchington (2008) stressed that in most developed countries the decline of union density has resulted in the emergence of direct forms of voice, both via upward problem-solving and via new forms of work organisation supported by new HR policies. These new forms have given employees more opportunities to have influence at work than they have experienced previously. Despite the decline in union membership, employee voice's overall occurrence has remained consistent over time, which can be attributed to a greater emphasis on direct voice and non-union representative channels (Wilkinson et al., 2013). Additionally, because of the decline in union membership, employee voice has increased in popularity.

A decline in union membership occurred sharply in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which saw an average drop-off of almost 36 per cent. Much of this resulted from the ending of quasi-obligatory union membership following the breakup of the former Soviet bloc. Unionisation rates in Estonia were down 71 per cent, in the Czech Republic by 50 per cent, in Poland by 45 per cent, in Slovakia by 40 per cent, and in Hungary by 38 per cent. Much of the decline in Germany's unionisation rate (20 per cent versus a 16 per cent average in the EU) is attributable to the drop in union membership in former East Germany (ILO, 1997).

Dundon & Gollan (2007) asserted that the single channel of trade union representation has lost its domination in workplaces, whereas individual employees are enabled to have a say and use their voice to express their concerns. They stress

that a variety of techniques have been implemented to substitute trade unions, including "non-union works councils, JCCs, quality circles, work teams and the application of contingent remuneration systems" (Dundon & Gollan, 2007, p.3). Despite efforts to develop and improve direct voice, in the past, trade unions had a prominent role in mediating and resolving labour disputes and were the ideal alternative to employee voice. At present, the situation has changed in that trade unions no longer exist in most organisations (Kersley et al., 2005). Furthermore, Metcalf (2005) argued that it seems that non-union voice will continue to substitute the more traditional, collectivist, and dominating approach of past employee relations. At the end of the discussion on indirect voice methods, it is crucial to emphasise that this thesis focuses on direct employee voice, in which employees express their opinions through FLMs. As a result, the following sections will further explore direct employee voice by examining elements relevant to this strategy.

2.5.2 Direct employee voice

Given that this thesis is focused on the direct approach of employee voice, this section investigates the additional qualities and dimensions related to direct employee voice. According to Wilkinson et al. (2014), direct voice can be characterised as any method implemented by management to elicit employees' opinions and suggestions. Additionally, direct voice can be described as an upward problem-solving voice mechanism (Klaas et al., 2012; Mowbray et al., 2015; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). Therefore, upward problem-solving motivates two-way communication and enables employees to participate through the arrangement of a communication system (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Kwon & Farndale, 2020). Utilising this type of employee voice, communication is more between employees and

management, instead of through any type of representative (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020). While much of the existing research highlight the significance of direct communication between employees and FLMs, instead of relying on formal representatives. By fostering two-way communication, employees may express their views directly to their FLMs, resulting in faster solutions and a more participative workplace. This study suggests that, organisations should consider more direct methods to engage with their employees, as this can increase both productivity and improve performance. It demonstrates how direct communication with FLMs is becoming an increasingly successful method for employees to be heard and valued.

Direct employee voice includes any mechanism that allows direct employee participation with management in issues impacting their jobs and immediate work conditions (Wilkinson et al., 2014). These mechanisms include formally assigned teams, electronic media platforms, internal employee attitude surveys, quality circles, and meetings between employees and managers as two-way communication and suggestion schemes (Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Mowbray et al. (2015) further noted that to enable direct employee voice, there are several structures and methods that can be implemented within the firm. The benefit of direct employee voice is that it can occur spontaneously in any suitable context, whereas indirect employee voice requires pre-arranged structures and meetings. Thus, direct employee voice should be a more efficient means of opening channels of communication between employees and HR in which FLMs have a crucial role to play. It also facilitates the advancement of practices and innovations that exist for the well-being of both employees and the company.

Direct employee voice arises when employees express their views directly to executives and managers, for instance via one-to-one meetings with FLMs, morning huddles, emails, or direct participation in CEO town halls. Bryson (2004) defined direct voice as a two-way communication between management and individual employees without the mediation of a third party. Managerial responsiveness relates directly to how efficiently and effectively management responds to employees' needs and concerns. There is merit in attempting to categorise direct voice mechanisms in terms of both their forms and their functions.

Marchington & Wilkinson (2000) noted that employee voice could be categorised into three aspects: direct communication, upward problem-solving, and representative participation. The first two are more likely to function directly and individually and are often the basis for face-to-face communication between supervisors or FLMs and their employees. The three dimensions of direct voice are direct participation, direct consultation, and information sharing. Firstly, direct participation comprises problem-solving groups, teamwork and self-managed teams, and quality control circles. Secondly, direct consultation includes attitude surveys, suggestion schemes, and meetings with the workforce. Thirdly, information sharing includes the systematic use of the management chain, notice boards, newsletters, emails, and the intranet. By using these methods, the management attains constant communication with the workforce (Bryson, 2004; Lavelle et al. 2010; Marginson et al. 2010).

Similarly, Marchington (2008, p.2) recognised three comprehensive forms of direct voice mechanisms including formal and informal: firstly, "task-based participation, such as a redesigned business process, team working, and self-managed teams;

secondly, upward problem-solving techniques such as off-line teams, quality control circles, employee suggestion schemes and worker input into briefing groups and thirdly, complaints about fair treatment, such as grievance procedures and speak-up programs". Using these forms of direct voice allows employees to complain, either directly to their managers or through official grievance procedures. Moreover, the first two categories are designed to provide an opportunity for the employees to contribute to managerial decision-making, either in their day-to-day work or through formal and managerially initiated processes that benefit from valuable employee skills, ideas, and interventions, such as teamwork and self-managed teams and employee suggestion schemes (Marchington, 2008).

Emphasising the benefits of direct employee voice, Bryson (2004) identified two common characteristics of these direct employee voice mechanisms. They allow for two-way communication between managers and employees where the latter has an opportunity to voice their demands and concerns and where there is a dependence on communication. The opportunity for voice should happen regularly, and therefore team briefings are considered worthwhile only if they happen at least once a month. There is much evidence to show how organisations switch to direct voice mechanisms. Lavelle et al. (2010) found in examining data from a large-scale survey of multinational companies operating in Ireland that the existence of team briefings was the most common direct voice mechanism with 98 per cent of all multinational companies using them.

As noted by Marchington & Kynighou (2012), direct employee voice is the practice in which employees are involved formally through mechanisms including team briefings, upward problem-solving, and suggestion schemes. These formal practices

have been widely developed by quality enhancement employers whose aim is the provision of high-quality goods, reliable products, and superior levels of customer service, recognising employees as an essential company asset and therefore key to achieving organisational goals (Cabrera et al., 2003). In this respect, Cabrera et al. (2003) note that direct employee voice is widely practised via the aforementioned formal channels in quality enhancement firms across Europe.

Bryson's (2004) study of the union and non-union voice and the impact on managerial responsiveness in the UK introduced Freeman & Medoff's (1984) view that "workers use direct communication to bring actual and desired conditions closer together" (quoted by Bryson, 2004, p.213). Since then, there has been a sharp decline in trade unions and the emergence of a combination of union and non-union voice channels. Nevertheless, the emergence of non-union voice placed more focus on direct voice, i.e. direct two-way communication between managers and employees, for example, through regular meetings between senior management and employees, team briefings, and problem-solving groups (Bryson, 2004).

Additionally, direct voice measures may also be applied to undermine trade unions. For example, Gollan & Wilkinson (2007) affirmed that direct voice represents a significant challenge to the traditional influence of trade unions in the workplace. Furthermore, direct voice is a substitute source of information, ideas, and interpretation of workplace experiences, which provides an alternative to what the unions were contributing. A particularly important aspect of workplace life is the everyday conversations that take place between employees and managers (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020). In the same context, Purcell & Georgiadis (2007) suggest that employers should recognise and value one-to-one exchanges with

employees. Marchington & Suter (2013) articulate that good managers can capitalise on these exchanges to gauge the views and moods of employees and use them to the advantage of both employers and employees.

The rise in non-union voice is the result of a shift towards more direct forms of voice, including regular meetings between management and the whole workforce, briefing groups, and problem-solving groups. As defined, briefing groups are briefings for a workgroup, section, team, or department that could happen at least once a month and in which at least some time is given over to employees for questions (Bryson, 2004).

In Marsden's (2013) work, workplace surveys were conducted in two countries, the UK and France. These were in the form of employee questionnaires that contained a single question. For example, in the UK, employees were asked, "Ideally, who do you think would best represent you in dealing with managers [in this workplace] about the following?" (p.11). They were then offered several possible replies concerning representation including through a union, via fellow employees, or the option "I would be best represented by myself." In France, employees were asked whether or not they agreed with various statements concerning representation in their workplace, including "Employees can defend their own interests directly."

In both nations, substantial numbers of respondents believed that employees can look after their own interests in their workplaces. In the UK, approximately 50 per cent concluded they could best represent themselves regarding getting a pay increase and over matters of discipline, and more than 60 per cent concluded they could do so regarding training and recording complaints. In France, almost 40 per cent concluded that employees can best take care of their interests themselves.

Employee representatives and management respondents in France were asked the same question. Respectively, 51 per cent and 86 per cent responded that employees in their institutions were confident to represent themselves directly.

These statistics suggest that non-union working is becoming commonplace and potentially more popular but also that the use and encouragement of individual employee voice is an essential component in this type of working environment. Likewise, Holland et al. (2012) draw on data from responses to the 2007 Australian Worker Representation and Participation Survey and found that direct voice is associated with job satisfaction and is more important than the existence of trade union indirect or collective voice.

Even in the past, noticeably, when trade unions were dominant, the bargaining process often became a consultation, and even consultation was further downgraded to communication (Millward et al., 2000). In contrast, Benson (2000, p.453) notes, "For some commentators independent unions are the only source of genuine voice." Others have argued that the adoption of the HRM paradigm within an enterprise will provide workers with adequate voice mechanisms. A collective voice is of significance for employees (Benson & Brown, 2010), and a voice through unions may also have an impact on employers (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). The presence of unions does not suppress the development of substitute voice mechanisms, and employees in unionised workplaces are more likely to have more voice mechanisms on the ground than those in non-union workplaces (Benson, 2000).

Data analysis is drawn from the survey, which now contains evidence on HRM policies and practices within private and public sector organisations in 22 European

countries. This analysis has shown that the individual voice is the vehicle by which managers and employees have closer and more direct communication without union intervention in smaller firms, while the collective voice remains significant in larger organisations (Brewster et al., 2007, p.1252). Conversely, Harcourt et al. (2004) found that collective voice is how workers obtain greater freedom to express concerns without fear of victimisation.

It is now apparent that the collective voice could be the method of improving productivity, reducing turnover rates, and providing an enhancement to the collective voice which will mitigate the notion of exit because it replaces ineffective individual voice (Kaufman, 2004). What has been highlighted by collective voice supporters is that, if firms intend to enhance their productivity and competency, they should implement employee collective voice.

A collective voice may boost productivity by lowering turnover: given the enhanced depth of collective voice, employees are less likely to express their dissatisfaction by resigning (Kaufman, 2004). Furthermore, collective voice provides an important mechanism for resolving collective and individual issues originating from a flexible working environment (Singe & Croucher, 2003). Management may limit how much individual voice is conveyed because they are concerned that it will blend into a collective dimension; yet, in a unionised workplace, managers are accustomed to doing so and have adjusted their approach (Kaufman, 2004).

Finally, collective voice mechanisms may boost production directly (Brewster et al., 2007). As a result, Brewster et al. (2007) believe that collective voice is likely to optimise efficiencies. When the collective voice of employees is heard, not only is productivity improved but employee turnover is reduced. Individuals feel valued

when their voices are heard and acted upon appropriately. However, if their voices are silenced, this increases their sense of isolation and lack of value to the organisation. Collective voice is a key factor in preventing silence as even shy or retiring people will feel more able to speak out and contribute positively to the overall or collective good of the organisation.

Geary (2006) argues that employees within non-unionised workplaces are more likely to have used direct voice mechanisms. The predominance of companies that are 'non-union' and the prevalence of employees who have never been union members has resulted in a vacuum regarding conventional representation in the workplace. The rise of non-conventional and sometimes insecure forms of employment, the breakup of traditional barriers between different employment levels in the workplace, and the dearth of effectual employee voice have precipitated the need for the emergence of alternative provisions within the workplace to enable workers to have a greater say in decision-making processes (Heery et al., 2003; Grimshaw et al., 2004; Marchington, 2005). These changes in the workplace raise questions concerning the way employee representation might be studied and researched in the future. Firstly, most research on employee voice has been undertaken on unionised rather than non-unionised organisations. This situation requires to be redressed given that most organisations are now non-unionised. Secondly, employee voice conveyed solely through a union-only channel now represents a minority of employees, with very little prospect of this situation changing anytime soon.

Millward et al. (2000) referred to the Workplace Employment Relations Study 98 finding that trade unions are considered a less critical voice mechanism due to

declining membership levels. This view is supported by clear evidence that the majority of the workforce has never been a member of a trade union; in such organisations, people have never experienced unionisation during their working lives (Bryson & Gomez, 2005).

Alternatively, Freeman & Medoff (1984) stress the importance of voice with union presence and that trade unions are the best vehicle for employees to express their voices. On the other hand, they believe that, at worst, unions jeopardise competitiveness and exacerbate unemployment. In several developed countries, this was the traditional way of expressing employee voice, via union recognition and representation (Pyman et al., 2006). In contrast, Wood (1999) argued that greater workplace effectiveness and efficiency should include a greater focus on a more individualised voice. This argument is more convincing considering different authors' views regarding trade union membership decline and high deployment of direct voice. In this context, it may be argued that individualised voice is the most dominant method by which employees can raise issues and voice their concerns to management. On the other hand, it cannot be said that this approach would undermine the role of trade unions.

Budd (201) argued that because union membership is declining, there has been a necessary resurgence of interest in the importance of employee voice, raising the question of what forms and channels of employee voice might be appropriate and desirable, and what reforms in public policy are required to facilitate such multiple channels for employee voice expression. The spread of voice mechanisms beyond that as articulated by traditional unions has led to consideration given to the value and suitability of replacement voice mechanisms (Gollan, 2006). Recently, in

advanced economies, the decline of union density has caused most organisations and countries to move towards direct and individualised voice mechanisms rather than focusing on unionised and collective methods of representation.

In Zhu et al.'s (2015) project, the data was collected in five major industrial regions of China, including the cities of Beijing, Changsha, Guangzhou, Qingdao, and Shenzhen. In total, nine large car-manufacturing enterprises were selected, all of a similar size and operating under comparable management systems. They found that "employee participation intention plays a positive moderating role between actual participation on decision-making on the one hand, and satisfaction on the other" (p.2407). They also found that firms must concentrate more on enhancing existing systems and implementing new employee involvement systems to encourage employees to participate in higher levels of involvement in management, supervision, and decision-making, and apply more emphasis on encouraging new generation employees to develop a willingness to become involved in these activities.

Direct employee voice refers to influence, control, or autonomy in the performance of tasks and other organisational processes without the intervention of representative functions, most notably through trade unions (Bryson et al., 2006). Kim et al. (2010, p.372) describe how "giving employees greater influence over how they undertake their work and encouraging their input in decision-making is believed to be beneficial for both employees and employers". It can be argued that employees could be involved in the sharing of decision-making responsibilities via direct participation, with employees and employers working mutually. Participation in the decision-making process is more important for the employee, and

consequently their productivity could be enhanced. According to Marchington (2008), voice promotes fairness in the workplace by increasing employee productivity and creativity. This study expands on these principles by investigating how voice processes, mediated by FLMs, might drive problem-solving and customer satisfaction, particularly in high-demand industries with challenging objectives like banking.

Individuals will use different participation methods, with some preferring informal oral or verbal participation, while others prefer to be more formal using written information or suggestions. The third dimension includes interactions where trade union representatives discuss work-related matters with managers, via different mechanisms, including joint consultation, worker directors, and collective bargaining. This is less relevant to this thesis as the focus is on direct employee voice. The relationship between FLMs and their employees is understood as employees affecting their working conditions directly with their FLMs without having third-party intervention, such as a trade union. The notion of direct employee voice either formally or informally is that it encourages employees to have face-to-face communication or use different mechanisms and channels to discuss their work conditions with FLMs. Direct employee voice can be individual or group-orientated (Markey & Townsend, 2013).

2.5.2.1 Formal and informal direct employee voice

Direct employee voice is particularly relevant to both types of voice, formal and informal. As mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, this thesis aims to focus on direct formal and informal voice mechanisms implemented by FLMs in

organisations and to explore the outcomes of employees contributing to management decision-making processes.

Formal and informal EIP can both be found in any organisation; thus, the analysis of both formal and informal EIP and their interactions is of particular interest to both academics and researchers. It is essential for organisations that provide both formal and informal voice mechanisms and channels to enable the free flow of communications. Consideration should be given as to how voice mechanisms and channels can be interlinked to allow FLMs to better facilitate voice.

The significant distinctions between formal and informal employee voice are made by Marchington & Suter (2013, p.286), who noted: "the former relates to codified, pre-arranged, and regular practices/concrete structures whereas the latter refers to the ad hoc or non-programmed interactions between managers and their staff which provide opportunities for information passing, consultation, and the seeking of ideas." This includes "where ideas or concerns were expressed directly and outside a structured process" (Klaas et al., 2012, p.324).

Previously it has been described how employees can utilise both formal and informal voice mechanisms to raise their concerns and voice ideas and opinions and this is also supported in the numerous reviews of employee voice (Strauss, 1998; O'Neill & Martin, 2003; Dundon et al., 2004; Pyman et al., 2006; Zhao & Rosson, 2009; Lavelle et al., 2010; Kwak et al., 2010; Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Townsend et al., 2012; Wilkinson et al., 2013a; Marchington & Suter, 2013; Mowbray et al., 2015; Tucker & Singer, 2015; Brewster et al., 2018; Brooks, 2018). The aforementioned include different types of voice mechanisms identified in the literature. The forms and

categorisation of each type of voice mechanism, both formal and informal, are illustrated in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Formal and informal voice mechanisms and channels

Formal voice mechanisms	Informal voice mechanisms
Grievance procedure	Informal discussions
One-to-one meetings	One-to-one meetings
Speak-up programme	Word-of-mouth
Email	Email
Open-door policy	Open-door policy
Empowerment by supervisor	Empowerment by supervisor
Regular meetings with all staff	Management-by-walking-around
Self-managed teams	
Upward problem-solving groups	
Staff attitude surveys	
Staff meetings	
Team briefings	
Quality circles	
Suggestion schemes	
JCCs	
Works council	
Hotlines	

Adapted from: Dundon et al. (2004); Landau (2009); Boxall & Purcell (2011); Marchington & Suter (2013); Wilkinson et al. (2013a).

According to Dundon & Gollan (2007), voice mechanisms are perceived as channels that organisations use to increase their capability to manage employees, and most organisations have developed individualised employee voice mechanisms, appropriate to their organisation, to encourage employee commitment and contribution to performance. While existing literature, such as Dundon et al. (2004), Landau (2009), Boxall & Purcell (2011), and Marchington & Suter (2013), emphasises

the efficiency of formal communication channels for employee voice, this study presents a different perspective. This study acknowledges many employees prefer to approach their FLMs directly rather than through formal channels. This thesis recognises that both employees and HR managers regard FLMs as the first point of contact for addressing work-related concerns and suggest improvements. This finding provides an alternative view on the role of formal channels and suggests that organisations might find it valuable to consider more direct and informal communication methods.

2.5.2.2 The relationship between formal and informal employee voice

According to Baku et al. (2017), there does not seem to be a consensus among researchers on EIP in terms of formal or informal voice and which should be applied first in an organisational setting, or which will produce the more effective outcomes for employees and organisations. Furthermore, informal EIP is only effective when it is built on the foundation of formal participation. On the other hand, informal EIP is an important prelude to formal participation working well in combination. Marchington & Suter (2013) affirm that informal EIP does not have an audit or paper trail, whereas formal participation does. Organisations implement several voice mechanisms as a way of allowing employees to speak up, enabling employees' dissatisfaction and suggestions to be treated sincerely. This also indicates that organisations are committed to due process and to reducing any concerns among employees about retaliation (Landau, 2009).

However, it has been argued by Marchington & Suter (2013, p.284) that "informal EIP needs to be combined with the formal system to operate effectively". Formal

and informal EIP function in combination within organisations, either in parallel for different issues or in sequence for the same issues. Marchington & Suter (2013) also found both managers and employees were inclined to utilise informal EIP mechanisms. Both formal and informal systems have been utilised for different issues and different degrees of involvement.

The parallel scenario (as mentioned above) arises when different employee voice mechanisms focus on different issues and are not expected to interact. For example, a formal system is used to distribute accurate information where employees have voiced their concerns, with no risk of misunderstanding. Sequencing is beneficial when there are more complex or potentially contentious issues, such as staff rotas or changes in workplace practices. Such scenarios benefit from face-to-face conversations where there may be the possibility of misunderstandings between FLMs and their employees (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2013b). Therefore, the combination of formal and informal mechanisms and channels could be utilised by employees, either in parallel or sequentially, to voice their concerns (Mowbray, 2018).

Cox et al. (2006) argued that EIP might be analysed by its breadth and depth and can be seen in how voice processes are utilised within organisations. Scholars have shown that employee voice is seen as functioning effectively when providing a voice in combination within organisations, for example union and non-union representative voice, as well as individual direct voice (Bryson, 2004; Pyman et al., 2006).

According to various studies, it has been shown that employees are utilising both formal and informal channels when expressing their voice and believe there is a

necessity for both to exist within the workplace (Mowbray et al., 2015). While Detert & Treviño's (2010) study revealed that employees generally preferred to express their voice using informal channels, another study conducted by Olson-Buchanan & Boswell (2002) highlighted that, within one organisation, various employees might utilise formal or informal voice in a variety of ways: the more-dedicated employees appeared to favour the use of less-formal methods to express complaints and concerns, while the less-committed employees were more liable to embrace formal mechanisms to express their grievances.

Based on data obtained from the Workplace Employment Relations Study 98, Cox et al. (2006, pp.254–257) argued that the combination of EIP mechanisms allows employees to be involved in different ways, "e.g., receiving information from and asking questions of their line managers through team briefing"; therefore, the information received through one arena or mechanism could be used in others to influence decision-making. Cox et al. (2006) also proposed that allowing employees to have a variety of formal mechanisms via upward and downward communication illustrates management's willingness to hear employee views and employees' willingness to voice their opinions.

It can be seen that both processes (formal and informal) have *advantages and disadvantages*; thus, to maximise employee voice in a given situation, it is prudent to deploy both processes in combination. For instance, if only an informal voice is deployed in a particular context, but the result is subsequently disputed, there is potentially no paper trail to reference regarding outcomes. This may lead to further disagreement and employee dissatisfaction. However, if the only mechanism deployed is a formal voice, staff may feel intimidated or unable to fully express

themselves such that essential aspects of the EIP process are lost or overlooked (Cox et al., 2006).

In the context of combining both formal and informal voice mechanisms, Strauss (1998) suggested that the existence of formal EIP in organisations might encourage the development of informal EIP, and the success of formal EIP is more likely to occur if it is introduced in informal EIP settings. Moreover, direct EIP efficiency is dependent on how organisations utilise it comprehensively (Bryson, 2004). Also, the interaction between direct and indirect EIP leads to more effective outcomes (Pyman et al., 2006). Wood & Fenton-O'Creevy (2005) suggested that the general pattern is positive when combining multiple channels as an effort to deal with particular issues rather than substituting them. For example, Kessler et al.'s (2004) study on employee perspectives on communication and consultation involving a survey of 3,500 employees in four European countries, France, Germany, Italy, and the UK, argued that to achieve effective outcomes, both formal and informal employee voice mechanisms have to be combined. They indicated that employees may have more confidence in dealing with direct EIP where unions or works councils are present and in such circumstances find a combined approach to be more useful.

The above argument around the preference of combining both formal and informal employee voice is summarised by Pyman et al. (2006, p.556) confirming that "it is the interaction and co-existence of multiple channels that are most effective and legitimate, in employees' minds, in achieving organisational outcomes". Throughout these studies, it is apparent that formal and informal EIP can operate in parallel or sequentially. However, it is also important to acknowledge that where there are no

or few formal voice structures or processes in an organisation, informal voice mechanisms are crucial (Dundon & Gollan, 2007).

Direct voice through formal mechanisms and channels

This occurs when employees voice their opinions directly in established processes, such as employee performance reviews or formal meetings with FLMs or senior management. There is a clear distinction between direct and indirect employee voice. Direct voice mechanisms refer to direct contact between an individual and management about their employment and immediate work environment. This also contains "formally designated teams, problem-solving groups, attitude surveys, suggestion schemes, appraisal systems and meetings between managers and workers" (Lavelle et al., 2010, p.395). This is based on scheduled meetings with FLMs, formal complaint forms, and attendance at town halls. It refers to structured and authorised ways of expressing views, such as through grievance procedures, one-to-one meetings, speak-up programmes, email, open-door policies, empowerment by supervisors, regular meetings with supervisors, suggestion boxes, employee surveys, and employee performance appraisals.

According to Cox et al. (2006), the more employees contribute through team briefings and problem-solving groups, the more they are directly involved in the voice process, the more the exercise is ingrained at the workplace level, and the more positively it relates to employees' perspectives. Direct employee voice, specifically through team briefings, problem-solving groups, town hall meetings, and newsletters that are directed mainly at employees rather than through trade unions, has gained interest in the field of employee voice (Marchington et al., 1994; Bryson, 2004; Marginson et al., 2010).

However, employee voice might be channelled formally, including through suggestion schemes, opportunities to participate in decision-making, and open-door policies (CIPD, 2021). Formal voice mechanisms are necessary to promote voice; however, they empower employees as they guarantee that their voice will be taken into consideration and acted upon (Dibben et al., 2011).

Direct voice through informal mechanisms and channels

When employees voice their opinions directly to FLMs in informal discussions, they may receive immediate responses. This refers to an unstructured and unauthorised manner of expressing opinions, such as informal discussion, one-to-one meetings, word-of-mouth interactions, informal chats with managers, email, open-door policies, management-by-walking-around, and informal group discussions. It has been stated that direct forms of voice are more associated with employees who have positive opinions of managerial responsiveness than both union and non-union forms of indirect representation (Bryson, 2004). However, Bryson (2004) points out that not all direct voice mechanisms, such as regular meetings with senior management and problem-solving groups, boost views of managerial responsiveness. Furthermore, informal mechanisms include casual conversations with peers, supervisors, and managers (Landau, 2009).

Informal voice can be used when required as non-structured communications between FLMs and employees. Utilising an informal voice is also high in interpersonal collaborative situations and can be unexpected and interactive (Marchington & Suter, 2013). This informal communication reinforces the direct voice mechanism, resulting in a flexible and responsive atmosphere in which employees' concerns are heard and valued. For example, Strauss (1998, p.15)

argued that informal EIP is seen as the "day-to-day relations between supervisor and subordinates in which the latter are allowed substantial input into decisions … a process which allows workers to exert some influence over their work and the condition under which they work".

There is also the opportunity for voice to be expressed informally through daily interactions between FLMs and their employees, e.g. through meetings, via interactions in communal spaces, and through various means of communication such as emails and telephone conversations. An exchange of knowledge is naturally facilitated when both FLMs and employees are open to recognising the value of employee voice and are willing to engage in communication beyond what is immediately required from them to perform their designated tasks. Recently, the advancement and significance of informal voice mechanisms has been widely observed.

Moreover, casual interactions between management and employees often facilitate openings for the exchange of information and ideas (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Morrison, 2011). It seems the majority of employees value expressing their voice and thus contribute positively to work-related issues that are of importance to them. In addition, employees prefer to have a choice of channels through which to speak out rather than being restricted to just a few. This has provoked a degree of discussion among authors and academics and has emphasised that there are various facets to employee voice (Morrison, 2011; Mowbray et al., 2015).

Although there is an obvious distinction between formal and informal voice, both are necessary to provide the greatest possible channels of communication and understanding between FLMs and their employees. For some issues, there is a

debate as to which one of these channels should be utilised first, formal or informal, or indeed whether these conversations should take place in parallel.

Mohr & Zoghi (2008) differentiated between formal and informal voice mechanisms, and argued that an open-door policy encourages employees to participate where no formal system exists or where FLMs have not efficiently employed formal practices. Furthermore, in their investigation of employees' preference for either formal or informal methods of expressing discontent, Olson-Buchanan & Boswell (2002) found that more-loyal employees choose and are more satisfied with less-formal voice methods. They also found that employees within the same organisation could utilise formal or informal voices in different ways.

2.6 The impact of formal and informal voice mechanisms on employee engagement and managerial responsiveness

Although according to Townsend et al. (2013) formal participation mechanisms are the essential feature for both employees and managers, formal participation leaves gaps that can be partly addressed by informal voice exchanges between managers and their employees. Therefore, while formal and informal participation are not mutually exclusive, the interaction between both is essential, and they complement each other (Strauss, 1998).

Klaas et al. (2012) clarified that informal voice occurs before employees raise their concerns formally. This should allow FLMs the opportunity to escalate the employee concerns to management, and if the employee escalates the matter to a formal voice forum without informing the FLMs of their concerns, "he or she is announcing and documenting his or her dissatisfaction with the manager" (p.325). Moreover,

when the informal relations between FLMs and employees are not positive, the formal voice might be influential.

Botero & Van Dyne's (2009) study suggested that if managers seek to enhance employee voice, "they should communicate in ways that diminish status differences while enhancing perceptions of trust (i.e., personal relationships and informal communication styles). Examples would include informal socializing, providing participation opportunities, and directly communicating positive regard and high trust" (p.99). This indicates that when employees have a more significant relationship with their FLMs, they are more likely to utilise informal voice. In the same vein, Olson-Buchanan & Boswell (2002) found in their study that more-loyal employees may prefer and use informal methods to voice discontent and that the use of informal voice relates to less job search activity and lower intent to quit.

Marchington & Suter (2013) suggested that a group of hotel employees preferred an informal voice mechanism because they had a good relationship with their FLMs. The managers interviewed by them also confirmed that they utilised informal EIP to target reliable employees in gathering views and information. Therefore, it can be argued that those employees had chosen informal voice mechanisms because they had been engaged with high-quality LMX, but if they had low-quality LMX, would they still prefer informal to formal EIP? This indicates how FLM behaviours might influence the employee's choice between formal and informal EIP. Thus, a good relationship between them would encourage employees to share views more informally, i.e. in work corridors and kitchens.

There is an assumption that LMX is directly associated with informal EIP because FLMs favour informal EIP (Marchington & Suter, 2013). Employees who have high-

quality LMX relationships are likely to have direct communication with supervisors and express their views directly (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009). To some extent, this understanding is expected to be correct, and whenever employees find a comfortable and suitable environment for participation, they will be more likely to communicate informally. Several reasons have been identified by Wang & Yang (2015) regarding the importance of studying informal participative mechanisms. Firstly, informal participation has unique strengths, and, secondly, the flexibility of informal participative mechanisms can be easily employed in the daily (LMX) agendas. Finally, the implementation is inexpensive and does not require wholesale institutional changes.

These views support the idea of voice being more likely to exist where there is a good relationship between employees and managers because employees can trust the managers to represent their interests fairly (Holland et al., 2012). The link between the use of informal voice and good relationships between FLMs and employees was also evidenced by Townsend et al. (2013) in their study of the role of EIP in non-union firms. The case study carried out involved a non-unionised luxury hotel operating in an Australian city. They found that the managers' view was that employees were enthusiastic about being actively involved or speaking up in formal EIP situations. However, all the dialogues taking place in the firm were managerial communication avenues. They also found that the inadequacies of the formal systems were changed by informal communication occurring between employees and managers. It was noted that the preferred mode of communication was an informal voice exchange rather than formal voice, as FLMs' skills and attitudes were seen as a crucial factor in enhancing informal EIP.

Recent studies further focus on more direct and informal voice contributions, with an interest in the interactions of employees and their FLMs addressing issues that have importance to the parties involved, and where the results are not necessarily to be documented (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013). It could be contended that the relationship that employees have with the potential target of voice is important in an employee's decision to use an informal voice channel. Liu et al. (2017) explore the relational antecedents of voice reliance on multiple levels of 'leaders' or managers, whereas Burris et al. (2008) analyse the efficiency of voice dependent on leader–member relationships.

Detert & Treviño (2010) found evidence in their qualitative study of a high-tech multinational corporation that the immediate supervisor, i.e. a single leader, strongly influences employee voice perceptions. Some evidence suggests that both FLMs and employees prefer informal EIP to formal EIP, specifically when they have strong relationships with each other (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013). However, Townsend (2014) claimed that informal EIP might not be effective in dealing with several issues, such as strategic decision-making, workload, and representation in disputes. These are based upon the good relationship between employees and employers. In this regard, Townsend (2014, p.164) noted that "the employment relationship is built around a social component and is always evolving".

Accordingly, this relationship could be unstable if FLMs and employees do not maintain the relationship; therefore, informal EIP success could also change (Townsend, 2014). This relationship's success is often characterised by mutual trust, respect, liking, and loyalty (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). In the same vein, Wilkinson et al. (2013) presented empirical evidence to support the point of view that when

employees attempt to discuss their working conditions, they are more likely to discuss them directly with their FLMs regardless of the existence of several mechanisms.

The evidence indicates that FLMs are effectively encouraging employees to be involved in decision-making at their workplace and want to have well-developed working relationships between managers and employees to facilitate this (Wilkinson et al., 2013, p.590). In Wilkinson et al.'s (2013b) case study of five organisations, interview respondents at all levels within each organisation pointed out the significance of open-door policies and the relationship between FLMs and their employees and listening to their voice. They further suggest that informal interaction between FLMs and their employees includes different issues such as workloads, duty rotas, and flexible working time (Wilkinson et al., 2013b).

Furthermore, in their study, Townsend & Loudoun (2015) found that employees only feel obliged to participate if they have a good relationship with their managers. Their suggestion illustrates that managers are the main drivers in convincing employees or enabling them to participate and approach their FLMs. Initially, employees often voice their concerns with their FLMs. If employees do not achieve positive outcomes from approaching FLMs informally they might approach trade unions, which can provide employees with greater influence, even in informal settings and on matters associated with HR. In their case studies of the hospitality and manufacturing sector in Australia, Wilkinson et al. (2013) found that participants stressed the importance of open-door policies and how they enhance the relationship between FLMs and their employees.

Detert & Treviño (2010) also explored how employees speak up through formal and informal forms of voice. The qualitative study was conducted in a high-tech multinational corporation with employees at multiple levels in two manufacturing and two research and development units. The findings showed that employees preferred to voice their concerns in informal settings including hallway meetings or informal lunches, rather than formal settings including project-related meetings. In contrast, Brooks (2018) argued that informal voice might go unheard in organisations and suggested that formal voice mechanisms are advantageous for encouraging employees to share their views and concerns.

Baku et al. (2017) conducted a case study on the use of informal participation in ensuring occupational health and safety in the manufacturing industry in Ghana and found that informal participation was the mechanism preferred by both management and employees in solving direct work-related issues and occupational safety and health issues. A study conducted by Marchington & Suter (2013) suggests that informal voice mechanisms through FLMs are the preferred initial approach due to the strong exchange relationship between FLMs and employees. Moreover, the participants in their qualitative research showed that face-to-face meetings are sufficient and achieve better outcomes in terms of solving problems than formal meetings.

Most studies emphasise the importance of informal EIP as the first necessary step in initiating the employee voice process. Others emphasise that this must be backed up by the existence of formal voice mechanisms. This is primarily because informal mechanisms rely on relationships and goodwill between managers and employees, and these may change or break down over time. In such instances, formal voice

mechanisms are not only desirable but necessary. Ultimately there needs to be a working balance between the provision of both formal and informal mechanisms, the former to ensure availability and continuity and the latter to provide ease of accessibility, if employees' voice is to flourish.

2.7 Employee perceptions of voice

To measure the extent to which employees perceive themselves as having the opportunity to express their voice within their workplace, it is vital to investigate different aspects of organisational communication, as employee participation is highly reliant on employees' subjective experiences and perceptions of whether and when expressing their views is regarded positively or negatively by their team, supervisors, and/or organisation or professional context.

Lainidi et al. (2023, p.15) stated in their study that "when staff in this unit see someone with more authority doing something unsafe for patients, they speak up". In this healthcare unit, staff members show an eagerness to voice concerns when they notice individuals in positions of higher authority engaging in unsafe behaviours that could damage patients' safety. This indicates a favourable culture of safety and transparent communication within the unit and no fear of whistleblowing. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that the degree to which employees feel comfortable expressing their views may vary based on factors including organisational culture, perceived psychological safety, and individual differences.

While this unit may have promoted a culture in which speaking up is encouraged, it is crucial to recognise that employees in other contexts may encounter barriers or challenges when expressing their views. While some individuals may feel

comfortable speaking up in the workplace, open communication may be inhibited in that some more reserved or hesitant people may feel reluctant to speak out for fear of ridicule, being undervalued, or indeed being viewed as troublemakers. Moreover, channels of communication may not always be open to employees, or they may not have been made aware of them by their superiors. Indeed, the training of managers in encouraging employee voice makes an important contribution here.

Employees' fear of raising their work-related issues or suggesting improvements has also been articulated by Morrison (2011). She noted that "employees may worry that raising an issue or even voicing a suggestion for improvement, will damage their credibility, cause them to be labelled as a troublemaker or complainer, or damage their social capital" (p.383). Employees also sometimes fear tangible career-related costs, like a poor performance review, unattractive job assignments, or even termination of employment (Milliken et al., 2003). Kassing (2000) emphasised the importance of an organisational culture that encourages employee voice. The importance of the individual characteristic predictors indicates that some employees are willing to speak up, even if the organisational culture is not in a position to encourage employee voice (Landau, 2009).

Thus, silence is not purely a lack of speech; it can occur for many reasons, including having nothing important to say or being afraid to speak up. Silence refers to not voicing a suggestion, a concern, information about a problem, or a divergent viewpoint that could be beneficial or significant to share (Milliken et al., 2003). There is also evidence that organisational leaders such as top management are frequently unaware of this tendency towards silence. This could be because they are not particularly connected to their employees. Also, they might not be practising any

kind of informal voice mechanisms such as management-by-walking-around. This involves managers moving around among their staff, and observing and becoming aware of their working conditions, their suggestions, and also the reasons why they might be reluctant to speak up. Many managers may be detached from the working environment of their staff.

Leaders and key decision-makers often fail to see the issues and problems that frontline employees notice, and they may assume that "no news is good news" and thus that everything is going well within the organisation (Ashford et al., 2009). This leads to a false sense of security and a failure to understand the nature of silence. Managers might also think that employees are comfortable communicating upward, while failing to realise the reluctance and concern that many employees experience when it comes to expressing their voice upward.

However, on a more unsettling note, Burris et al. (2013) suggested that managers may perceive employees who constantly express challenging voices as offensive, hostile, or disloyal and that this can lead to what they politely called 'involuntarily turnover' in the organisation. It can be thus argued that those who choose to speak up are perceived as troublemakers and are not regarded as being good for the organisation. They may indeed be 'encouraged' to seek alternative employment. Consequently, out of fear of reprisal, some employees might choose not to speak up, for they might experience seeing their colleagues being put in that position.

In this context, Morisson (2023) affirmed that the manner, behaviour, personality, and mood of the managers are key factors in motivating and empowering employees to express their voice. In addition, it is vital to consider broadly the range of issues that employees do or do not have a say about; that is, matters that align

with the concept of voice but have not been adequately listened to. If managers are unsympathetic to the expression of employee voice, there may be a broad range of issues about which employees are not expressing their concerns thus leading to these not being addressed at all. In such circumstances, employees may feel their ability to express their voice is severely constrained and they may feel powerless in expressing it.

2.8 Employee voice systematically excluded and/or unheard

To some extent, one-to-one meetings between employee and manager in the context of employee voice could be problematic. For example, there may be differences in recollection and perception of the nature of any dialogue, which can undermine trust and confidence in management–employee relationships, which might, in turn, impact negatively on the functioning of the organisation in terms of employee engagement. Therefore, a criticism of informal voice mechanisms is that voice exchange is not always documented (Brooks, 2018).

Furthermore, Wilkinson et al. (2018, pp.716-717) identified five types of unheard voices at organisational and departmental (meso) levels. They classified the first type as 'black holes', where numerous small enterprises have no employee voice structure in position. Many organisations like these small enterprises do not give their workers opportunities to express their voice, since the workers are unstable migrant workers and the prevailing norm in those situations is that their voice has little legitimacy. Here it is obvious that the employee could not criticise the owner of the firm. The second is where voice structures are in place and have been utilised by the employees, but the voice typically goes unheard. It is not due to a conspiracy but because the active employees' voice is considered hostile to the institutional

structure. The management does not deliberately inhibit voice; it is simply not heard. Thirdly, they describe a situation where voice structures exist, and grievances are heard by the management, but eventually are not taken into consideration or are ignored. This practice is labelled by Harlos (2001, p.324) as "deaf-ear syndrome (organisational failures to respond to employees' complaints)". Fourthly is where voice structures are in place and the organisations deliberately create and continue a climate of silence, "by focusing on how management, through agenda setting and institutional structures" perpetuate this climate (Donaghey et al., 2011, p.57) and, lastly, workers may have a different approach to employee voice and/or different propensities to employ these opportunities.

In this regard, Morrison (2014) has identified several reasons that hold employees back and make them reluctant or unwilling to voice their ideas, opinions, and suggestions, including leader discouragement, fear of being dismissed or viewed negatively, or having nothing meaningful to convey.

Olson-Buchanan & Boswell (2002) carried out a detailed quantitative study of non-academic university employees. They identified that most employees prefer to have direct communication with their FLMs to pursue assistance. However, they also identified a phenomenon of unwillingness to participate and share views. In the same context, voice has been muted in many organisations, and employees are frequently hesitant to engage in voice. Furthermore, employees may be reluctant to use their voice with their FLMs because they do not feel comfortable expressing their concerns about organisational issues (Morrison, 2014).

There is a phenomenon of unwillingness to participate and share views for fear of stigmatisation: voice has been muted in many organisations and employees are

frequently hesitant to engage in voice, because they believe that they might be considered troublemakers or be threatened by managers. Employees may fear that they would be considered troublemakers and may often have been controlled by managers in terms of what they should say (Milliken et al., 2003). Neglect will result in employees' performance being reduced and they may purposely choose to be incompetent employees (Turnley and Feldman, 1999).

Furthermore, different from the argument that voice behaviour enhances positive impressions and social respect, voicers may gain negative impressions such as being labelled, in extreme cases, as traitors (Frese & Fay, 2001; Milliken et al., 2003). Workers acknowledging negative managerial attitudes towards voice or unions may remain silent for 'fear' of retaliation should management view them as troublemakers (Artus, 2013). For example, in their study, Prouska & Psychogios (2018) found that their interviewees discussed how the fear of being labelled a troublemaker and the consequences this would bring inhibited their voice at work. They also explained their silence by giving examples of how they feared that speaking up would affect future performance appraisals.

Although many non-union firms say they have an open-door policy, and many managers express a desire for feedback from subordinates, workers worry that speaking up will brand them as people who are not team players, resulting in a bad image with the boss, smaller pay increases, and perhaps discriminatory treatment or even termination (Lewin, 2004). More perniciously, employees who give voice may be seen as troublemakers and can receive lower performance ratings from supervisors (e.g. Seibert et al., 2001).

Voice is often observed as adventurous. Employees may apprehend that, in expressing their views in a manner that disputes current practices or past decisions or that highlights a serious problem, they will be viewed as troublemakers or complainers and lose respect or support from others, receive a negative performance review, get assigned to undesirable projects, not be considered for promotion, or even get fired (Grant, 2013; Milliken et al., 2003).

Concerning employees' need for improvements in work-related issues, Brooks (2018) advised that employees should not challenge their FLMs in public because it might cause embarrassment for them. The action may result in negative career consequences for those employees. Similarly, Morrison & Rothman (2009) affirmed that the future development of employees' careers is something that FLMs have the privilege to decide. Consequently, when employees speak up and their voice is not heard, they may feel neglected, which can result in a reduction of employee performance, and they may purposely choose to be incompetent employees (Turnley & Feldman, 1999). This statement is further supported by Landau (2009, p.39), who stated: "Voicing to a supervisor, however, can be a risky proposition, because the supervisor usually has the power to influence an employee's work status, e.g., work assignments, pay raises, and promotions."

To sum up, the existing literature makes it clear that employees can express their voice and influence management's action through different voice mechanisms. For example, Marchington (2008) argued that various formal and informal voice mechanisms are undoubtedly used in most organisations for dealing with employee grievances. However, achieving this depends on managers' attitudes, behaviours, and ability to utilise formal and informal voice mechanisms in their organisation.

Moreover, a strong relationship between management and employees reinforces informal voice mechanisms (Millward et al., 2000). Therefore, concerning workplace productivity, employees need to be engaged in a way that enables them to be involved in making better decisions for improving the firm's efficiency. This approach may lead to employees developing their skills and becoming more competitive.

Marchington (2008) highlights that employee voice improves productivity and creativity by encouraging a fair workplace. Aligning the objectives of enhancing productivity and encouraging a fair workplace frequently leads to tensions and contradictions, because boosting productivity commonly involves establishing high-performance criteria, which could appear unfair to certain employees. On the contrary, promoting a fair workplace focuses on equal fairness and assistance for every employee, which can occasionally hinder productivity if it involves accommodating extra flexibility. Therefore, there is an inherent tension between these two desirable outcomes.

This thesis thus emphasises the significance of fairness in the workplace by the facilitating of employee voice by line managers while recognising the necessity for continued productivity and creativity. Overemphasising productivity may restrict resources for fairness efforts including the promotion of employee voice. When employees feel appreciated and valued, and that things are equitable, their morale and participation are enhanced resulting in higher performance, greater productivity, and enhanced creativity. Providing transparent communication and clear policies and procedures can assist businesses in achieving fairness, productivity, and creativity. A fair working environment, including the facilitation of

employee voice and the provision of multiple channels of communication, both upholds ethical standards and maintains sustained productivity and creativity.

In his one field study and two experimental studies, Burris (2012) found that FLMs see employees who often engage in challenging forms of voice as more intimidating or worse performers and more likely to challenge than those engaging in supportive voice. Supportive voice is seen as protective in response to a threat to the status quo and "can be offered through routine involvement in decision-making, e.g., employees raise their voice in favour of changes via incremental suggestions that defend (or do not meaningfully alter) the work context" (Burris, 2012, p.853). On the other hand, challenging voice "specifically involves speaking up in ways intended to alter, modify, or destabilize generally accepted sets of practices, policies, or strategic directions that make up the status quo to those individuals who have devised or are in charge of sustaining those aspects of an organisation" (p.852).

This illustrates that FLMs perceive those employees who provide a supportive voice as more likely to be loyal to the organisation, as those who support the status quo and endorse the message, than those who are challenging and who are seen as disruptive, thus threatening the status quo. This may contradict what has been noted by some scholars examining FLMs' unwillingness to implement voice, in that some FLMs may be willing to implement voice in organisations even if they feel the voice is challenging (Detert & Treviño, 2010). Furthermore, evidence suggests that employee voice is typically stifled in many organisations and that employees are often very reluctant to participate in expressing their voice, especially when the information provided could be understood by the recipient as negative or threatening (Detert et al., 2010; Milliken et al., 2003).

2.9 Employee voice mechanisms

Employee voice systems are crucial for allowing workers to convey their ideas, problems, and comments within firms. The techniques, both formal and informal, offer structured and unstructured paths to employee involvement. Among the formal procedures, the open-door policy framework promotes open conversation between employees and management, while the upward problem-solving group and team briefing strategies facilitate collective discussions about workplace challenges. Internal attitude surveys are another formal approach for systematically gathering employee attitudes.

In addition, informal mechanisms, such as one-to-one meetings with FLMs, allow employees to voice concerns in a more casual setting. Other communication tools, including newsletters, noticeboards, and more advanced electronic media, further complement these approaches by enhancing information dissemination and fostering continuous employee involvement. These diverse mechanisms, presented in both literature and practice, create a comprehensive system for promoting transparency, collaboration, and a culture where employee input is valued. In summary, research has demonstrated that employees are more satisfied when their firm has different voice mechanisms and channels for addressing concerns and resolving disagreements.

2.9.1 Open-door policy framework

As a component of the initiative to advance the interaction environment in organisations, many line and mid-tier managers choose to exercise an open-door policy, and various strands of senior management create such policies for the

organisation as a whole. Yet, the term open door is contingent upon understanding and several organisations view the same matter differently. An organisation's open-door policy is defined by Shenher (1993) as the protocol or method with which employees can approach their line managers at multiple levels, and a discussion among them occurs as a result of a management action or a managerial decision to meet with the employee. Maintaining an open-door policy for managers does not necessarily show that employees consistently engage with them; it essentially implies that when employees request to meet with their line managers, they would be granted permission so to do without significant effort (Beck and Beck 1986).

Moreover, there should be various approaches that enable employees to have the opportunity to meet their FLMs, including their office, shop floor, meetings outside the company, and so forth. Despite this, as indicated, line managers could choose to adhere only to the local open-door policy derived from their own initiative. Nonetheless, in the context of the case study organisation presented in this thesis, the open-door policy is essentially referred to as a company-wide policy that is recognised by senior management and which applies uniformly to all line managers, supervisors, and heads of department at all levels.

Employees' inclination to meet with their superiors may be linked to other factors, such as individual challenges, a grievance or a concern about work-related issues, and/or a desire to suggest improvements. Conversely, a crucial aspect is that FLMs genuinely should seek to understand the needs of employees, without any distraction. This might mean that their meeting needs to be held in private behind a closed door, and such an arrangement would potentially then have ramifications for maintaining or claiming to maintain an open-door policy towards employees. For

instance, some employees may become concerned that they will not achieve any great outcomes, fearing they will encounter a defensive rather than encouraging stance on the part of management.

Conversely, FLMs may hesitate to maintain an open-door policy or be available consistently due to the overburden such a procedure might enforce on how they manage their time and the way this could impact on their required tasks. Finally, the practice of managing the open-door policy, which might involve a formal written request before employees are allowed to step into the manager's office, adds another obstacle that prevents employees seeking to use an open-door policy. Employees may be reluctant to submit a written request as this action could be understood as a straightforward complaint against another employee or their FLMs or their superiors.

2.9.2 Upward problem-solving groups

This mechanism contrasts with downward communication, where employees have face-to-face communication with management (Rollinson & Dundon, 2007). It includes a variety of voice mechanisms and is considered to "tap into employee knowledge and ideas, typically through individual suggestions or through ad hoc or semi-permanent groups brought together for the specific purpose of resolving problems and generating ideas" (Marchington, 2001, p.182).

Batt et al.'s (2002) survey was conducted in the telecommunications services industry and it was found that highly educated employees are most likely to be involved in problem-solving groups and self-directed teams. Therefore, it can be argued that the more educated employees are, the more they will be able to articulate their concerns. In the same context, empirical research results from an

intensive study of 30 highly successful small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the UK conducted by Drummond & Stone (2007) demonstrated that establishing a problem-solving project team was an operational method which allowed employees the opportunity to be involved in managerial decisions and to enhance their own experience and skills base. According to Drummond & Stone (2007), "the range of skills existing in these firms tends to be broader than those found elsewhere, with particular emphasis upon 'soft' skills such as those relating to internal communication, effective teamwork, etc." (p.198).

The notion of upward problem-solving groups, in which employees engage directly with high management, such as in CEO town halls, is consistent with the findings of this study. These groups give employees a formal way to express their work-related issues and suggest improvements, advocating openness and cooperative issue resolution. The outcomes of this study reveal that these interactions are not just formalities; they give employees the ability to influence decisions, increasing their sense of agency.

This is consistent with the larger concepts of employee voice explored in this thesis, which include systems such as IBTIKAR, a platform used in the bank under study, that encourages employees to submit feasible suggestions, which helps bridge hierarchical levels. IBTIKAR fosters an innovation culture, which not only encourages new solutions but also boosts morale and builds alignment among employees and management via recognition and awards. This emphasises the necessity of structured upward communication channels in developing a more dynamic and responsive organisational culture.

2.9.3 Team briefing strategy

Team briefing is defined clearly as a procedure of direct communication where meetings take place among managers and employees to inform individuals or to communicate to obtain the opinions, ideas, and suggestions of employees concerning various organisational matters (Armstrong, 2012; Okpu & Obiora, 2015). These meetings might take the form of brief meetings, regular meetings, or departmental or staff meetings. They help manage issues systematically and work to enhance team performance. During these meetings, employees could suggest solutions for issues experienced or even discuss ideas to enhance the processes within the organisation (Wilkinson et al., 2013). Consistent and systematic communication between employees and managers is facilitated via team briefings, which were introduced by industrialised society in Britain. Since their inauguration, there have been fewer industrial disputes because people's understanding has been enhanced, enabling them to accept changes (Dudai & Cacioppe, 1992).

Team briefings are useful for ensuring that all employees are in step with the values, goals, and expectations of the organisation. Such briefings involve both managers and their teams gathering for about half an hour, regularly, within an official setting, to examine matters relevant to their roles and to offer information about the wider organisation and its structures (Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018). All employees have the chance to discuss particular job-related matters with their team members (Okpu & Obiora, 2015; Okpu & Seth, 2014). For an organisation to attain its objectives, effective communication is crucial between managers and employees (Gilman et al., 2015).

Information is often disseminated to all employees via interlinked team meetings and team briefings, which represent a systematic yet flexible system (Dudai & Cacioppe, 1992). They facilitate the distribution of information, viewpoints, and questions to be communicated to other managers within the structure. Furthermore, effective communication strongly influences employees' perception of welfare, job satisfaction, and commitment (White et al., 2010; Okpu & Obiora, 2015). Managers can directly affect employees; thus, they must ensure that employees have been provided with suitable information on their job roles (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020). Additionally, employees represent the organisation, and consequently they significantly affect the firm's achievements (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Team briefings, according to Wilkinson et al. (2020), are a kind of direct communication in which managers and employees can discuss ideas and suggestions. The findings of this study emphasise the need for structured communication channels to enhance employee voice. Team briefings not only transmit information but also provide an important forum for employees to express their opinions and affect decisions. This participative method increases employees' sense of ownership and commitment, resulting in a dedicated and motivated workforce, which enhances the organisation's overall performance. This emphasises the importance of direct communication in making employees feel appreciated and likely to participate in determining the organisation's future.

2.9.4 Internal attitude surveys

An internal attitude survey is utilised as a form of direct employee voice mechanism performed by management to gather employees' opinions regarding matters that

impact the organisation to generate better solutions. Employees express their views in a way that enables them to be directly conveyed to the management (Kim et al., 2010). An essential method of engaging employees in decision-making is to utilise internal attitude surveys (Armstrong, 2012). Employees offer information on their preferences, alert management to potential issues, classify the root cause of particular problems, compare the degree of work satisfaction, and have more commitment towards the organisation. They are typically performed utilising a structured questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, or a combination of questionnaires and interviews (Armstrong, 2012; Purcell & Hall, 2012). This information, either questions or proposals, can be shared with employees via email, online groups, etc., and therefore there are fewer face-to-face communications (Wilkinson et al., 2013). Internal attitude surveys can be developed to emphasise employees' views on several issues including their careers, jobs, work environment, training and development, organisational structure and culture, leadership style, stressors, satisfaction, or unhappiness (Gerstmann, 2011; Bartel et al., 2011).

In an attitude survey using questionnaires and personal interviews in a Danish subsidiary of a UK parent company, Gerstmann (2011) found that the survey had been perceived positively by employees, who appreciated the opportunity to express their views and be listened to. Management believed that they had created a voice climate in the organisation which made the employees more committed and motivated, leading to enhanced organisational performance. According to Tourangeau et al. (2003), if a survey is inadequately implemented or the outcomes are misapplied or not disclosed, there is a risk that it may affect the organisation negatively.

Bartel et al. (2011) engaged attitude surveys in their work on banks and found that branch employees had a positive attitude towards the organisation and had superior sales performance. This will largely indicate to the management the reason why employees have positive or negative attitudes about firms, enabling them to find solutions for enhancing commitment and performance. Employees can only voice their opinions by participating in the survey; however, the management of the company is ultimately responsible for putting the survey's recommendations into practice. According to Bryson et al. (2007), this was the only drawback of employing surveys as a direct voice channel.

2.9.5 Other mechanisms

Wilkinson et al. (2014) described further direct employee engagement approaches in the form of frameworks that enable use of various direct voice channels, including newsletters, noticeboards, and more advanced tools like electronic media. Furthermore, these mechanisms are the most diluted form of voice mechanism because they are unable to question the status quo within the organisation, even though they encourage downward communication to employees and may therefore represent one-way methods of information sharing (Marchington, 2015; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018).

The same is true for some direct communications, according to Marchington & Cox (2007, p.238), who state that they "can be viewed as nothing more than a neutral device to inform workers about specific issues or as an instrument to reinforce management prerogatives". Since management always decides what (and when) information is passed to employees, their objectivity is likely to be called into question. This indicates that the organisation uses one-way communication

techniques, especially from management to employees, to try to win over the hearts and minds of the workforce by explaining the company's objectives and business position (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020). The idea here is that employees will become more committed to the organisation's actions by understanding why management makes certain business decisions (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Voice mechanisms such as noticeboards, emails, and WhatsApp groups are systems established to provide direct information to employees (Okpu & Obiora, 2015). For example, management can post newsletters, emails, or printed copies of information on the noticeboard for staff members to view (Wilkinson et al., 2014). Noticeboards are also useful for encouraging team meetings and briefings because they may be used to notify staff members of upcoming meetings before they happen. Employees can share ideas, knowledge, and information via internal newsletters or social media intranets to enhance their present work practices (Wilkinson et al., 2014; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018).

The results of the thesis show that employees in the case study bank make substantial use of electronic media, including WhatsApp groups, to express their views and opinions to FLMs or to bring up work-related concerns in the group. On the other hand, management uses a variety of methods, such as digital screens and HR portals, to notify staff members of relevant updates and policies in the organisation.

2.10 Effectiveness of employee voice mechanisms

According to Wilkinson et al. (2014), just listing the number of voice mechanisms is insufficient. What is crucial is the efficacy of employee voice channels. Specifically, understanding the degree to which various employee voice schemes provide employees with the opportunity to be involved and participate in issues that impact their workplace experience is essential (Wilkinson et al., 2020; Kwon & Farndale, 2020). Likewise, Dundon & Wilkinson (2018) state that understanding the purpose, meaning, and impact of employee participation is important. To achieve this, they introduced a four-level framework which is also known as the escalator of participation (Wilkinson et al., 2010). The framework comprises the degree, level, scope/range of subject matter, and form of different direct/informal voice mechanisms in practice. Mowbray et al. (2022) present useful insights about how FLMs contribute to EIP. They emphasise FLMs as proactive contributors to shaping and managing employee voice mechanisms in the organisation. However, their research focuses on broader general contexts, leaving an opportunity to investigate FLMs' role in high-pressure, customer-oriented industries such as banking. This study expands on their findings by examining the banking industry, where FLMs balance EIP with customer satisfaction. Even without formal HR support or training, FLMs in banking boost EIP, address employee problems and improve productivity and service quality.

The ability to influence final decisions is dependent on the extent to which employers encourage participation and the extent to which the employees and their representatives engage. Marchington et al. (1993) summarised degrees of

participation in their famous escalator of participation, which demonstrates gradual upward communication (Figure 2.1). They suggest a progression upward rather than aiming to move from zero participation to worker control (Wilkinson et al., 2010).

Figure 2.1: Escalator of participation (the degree of EIP)

Control

Control
Codetermination
Consultation
Communication
Information
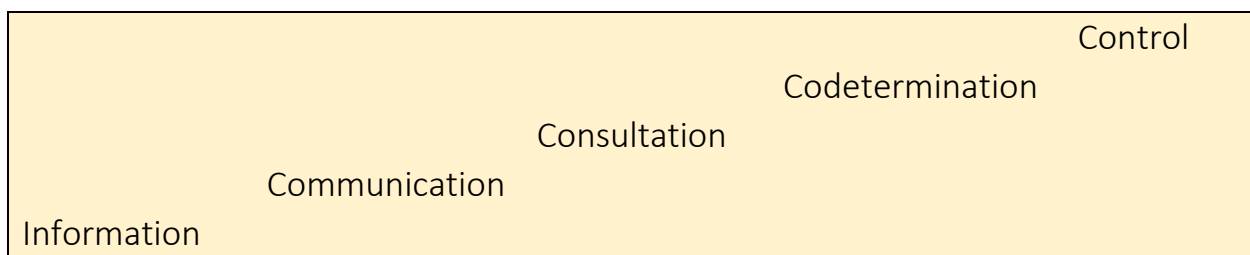
Source: Wilkinson et al. (2010).

The *degree* specifies the extent to which employees can influence different aspects of workplace decisions. For example, they are simply informed about decisions made by the management or they could be essentially making decisions (Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018).

The *level* refers to the level at which participation occurs. This could be from the level of tasks accomplished by the employees to the departmental, establishment, or corporate headquarters (HQ) level. Wilkinson et al. (2020) affirm that management enables employees to contribute more to minor issues in the workplace to minimise the impact they have on main organisational decisions, which will significantly influence company conditions. Consequently, the amount of involvement an individual is supported to have in decision-making within the organisation depends on the level of the employee in the organisation (i.e. senior and lower level). For example, it would be improper to involve lower-level

employees in a team meeting concerning future policy since lower-level employees may lack the authority to modify organisational policy (Wilkinson et al., 2013; Dundon & Wilkinson, 2018).

According to Wilkinson et al. (2010), *scope/range of subject* reviews the topics related to employee voice, ranging from the relatively insignificant, such as the quality of the work canteen, to more fundamental matters, such as investment strategies. Moreover, trivial matters in the organisation were noted by Marchington & Suter (2013), "such as the date or theme of the Christmas Party"; they further noted that these "have little or no influence on key management decisions" (p.285). Thus, organisations must pay attention to strategic matters through which they focus on the interests of the business and employees. Thus, management has the right to pick which subjects employees are allowed to have a voice about.

Finally, *form* recognises that employee participation can take various forms that may be distinguished by whether a mechanism is direct or indirect and formal or informal (Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2014). Firstly, there are direct forms of voice, where the employee expresses their concerns to the management through various channels. Secondly, there are indirect forms of voice, through employee representatives elected by the employees. Formal mechanisms are employed by management consistently, while informal mechanisms are implemented more occasionally or on an ad hoc basis. Bryson et al. (2006) suggest that there are three avenues for employee voice: union and non-union representatives and direct voice mechanisms.

Indirect voice mechanisms involve an intermediary, which is either a trade union member or an employee representative (Dundon & Rollinson, 2011). Direct

employee voice mechanisms focus on employees and management expressing their views directly to their counterparts. Many academics have recognised that the communication channel utilised inside companies is undergoing significant change with direct mechanisms overtaking more indirect mechanisms (Mowbray et al., 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Della et al., 2021).

CHAPTER THREE: Literature review – Devolution of HRM to FLMs

3.1 The impact of HR devolution

The role of FLMs is significant in this study, as stated in the research aims and objectives. This study focuses on how FLMs enable the direct employee voice process in the private sector, both formally and informally. It examines how FLMs encourage employees to express their concerns, ideas, and suggestions for improvements, hence increasing the efficacy of both employees and FLMs. FLMs play an important role in developing employee voice since they serve as the initial point of contact for employees who wish to address work-related issues or make improvements.

To have a better knowledge of this topic, it's vital to analyse the obstacles FLMs encounter, their specialised roles in fostering employee voice, the communication channels that are most frequently used by FLMs, and their involvement in managing health issues like sickness or injuries. FLMs face a variety of challenges, including balancing their managerial responsibilities with additional HR obligations, managing employee expectations, and resolving possible conflicts. They utilise informal discussion channels including one-to-one meetings and open-door policies to encourage participation.

Furthermore, FLMs play an important role in addressing health-related issues, demonstrating their dedication to promoting employee wellness. This obligation complicates their work and raises concerns about whether they are adequately trained and supported to handle sensitive situations appropriately. Taking these

variables into account is critical for developing a strong theoretical framework that represents FLMs' different roles and their impact on employee voice.

Researching the literature on HR devolution is relevant for various reasons. First, it emphasises how empowering FLMs allows them to take on more tasks, which improves their ability to facilitate employee voice. In addition, the rationale for devolving HR practices to FLMs is summarised by Brewster & Larsen (2000) with five main elements: "to reduce costs; to provide a more comprehensive approach to HRM; to place responsibility for HRM with managers most responsible for it; to speed up decision making; and as an alternative to outsourcing the HR function" (pp.196–198). Thus, FLMs play a varied function in management, emphasising the importance of effective supervision and training. Overall, the research on HR devolution provides a useful foundation for understanding FLMs' comprehensive roles in fostering employee voice.

The advantage of devolving HR functions to FLMs is that they are closer to employees, may be trusted by employees, potentially know their employees' work records, and are suited to becoming conduits for communication between employees and management (Bainbridge, 2015). The disadvantage of this system is that FLMs may become disincentivised because they already have a workload, and by taking on HR functions, they may feel overburdened. Similarly, they may have insufficient time to undergo the necessary training and professional development to carry out HR functions adequately. Also, they may have not been rewarded or even recognised in this role by management, and that, in itself, is a disincentive. Therefore, if management is sincere in their devolution of HR functions to FLMs,

they must also consider the steps necessary to give them relevant competencies for the task of being voice managers in the organisation (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013).

FLMs' resistance to executing HR responsibilities can be for several reasons, including a lack of trust between FLMs and the HR department and high workload demands (Sikora & Ferris, 2014). A lack of trust between parties could prevent employees from participating in the employee voice system and result in adverse employee attitudes and behaviours. This can indicate that the stronger the FLMs' involvement in HR responsibilities, the higher the organisational performance levels. The FLMs questioned in Whittaker & Marchington's (2003) study commented on the danger of devolving HR activities preventing them from focusing on their functional obligations. Furthermore, they also found that FLMs and HR specialists needed to have a partnership approach to attain the organisational goals on a larger scale, using the example of recruitment and selection, where HR specialists set the HR activities framework. Still, FLMs should be involved in decisions in these areas with clear support from HR specialists.

Likewise, grievance control could be done more efficiently if HR helped FLMs deal with what they see as negative issues from a more positive perspective. By accomplishing this partnership strategy, both parties may perform more effectively. However, disciplinary issues have to be controlled jointly, with FLMs taking the lead with minor problems at the earliest stages. In a broader observation, Whittaker & Marchington (2003, p.245) noted that "the line managers claimed to be satisfied with the HR responsibilities that have been devolved to them and are keen to take on activities that relate explicitly to the development of their team. Most line

managers report working closely with their HR counterparts and see the configuration moving towards a partnership."

In many areas of human endeavour, a partnership approach is desirable as it both outlines responsibilities and competencies and maximises the available pool of skills. There is a separation of HR and traditional FLM functions, but by devolving some HR responsibilities to FLMs, an optimisation of HR can be achieved with FLMs being the voice channel between employees and employers.

3.1.1 FLMs' HR responsibilities

Wall & Wood (2005) argued that FLMs are the most important factor in HRM architecture and Hutchinson & Purcell (2003) suggested that effective FLMs are a means by which HR strategies can become fully functional in organisations. The perception presented in the literature is that FLMs have been the explicit target of organisational change in which some strategic responsibilities of the HR or personnel department might shift to them, including de-layering, restructuring, downsizing, heavier workloads, work intensification, broader spans of control, closer performance monitoring, and decreased promotion prospects (Burke & Cooper, 2000; Cascio, 2002; Worrall et al., 2004; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Hassard et al., 2011).

However, HRM/ER voice studies indicate that FLMs are responsible for implementing voice schemes and escalating within their department or section. In terms of FLMs' involvement in HR practices, HR staff and FLMs work together on different HR matters. Marchington et al. (2016, p.175) have identified three different responsibilities of FLMs:

- Major responsibilities: managing team briefings and problem-solving groups, informal communications with employees, reviewing performance, developing team/staff skills, and monitoring employee absence
- Shared responsibilities: own department employee decisions, induction programme, and training; disciplinary situations; and flexible working patterns
- Minor responsibilities: performance-related pay; recruitment advertising, applications, and initial search; promotions; welfare; organisational development.

Townsend (2014) proposed that more explicit responsibility for HR of FLMs increases their "ownership" over HR issues, and consequently increases their commitment; however, "ownership over HR also means ownership over employee voice" (p.159). According to Purcell & Hutchinson (2007), giving ownership to FLMs increases their responsibility in managing HR tasks.

Nehles et al. (2006) carried out a case study examining FLM responsibilities in four organisations in four different multinational business units based in the Netherlands and Germany, and found that in the four business units FLMs were responsible for applying appraisal and training and development activities. FLMs are responsible for daily staffing decisions, such as work distribution among employees, and administrative tasks, for instance time registration and holiday planning. Moreover, the current trend in most countries is that FLMs not only voice managers but also are responsible for a range of personnel-related operational functions and people management, including: recruiting and selecting new employees, which is normally managed by HR departments; training and development; performance

management; flexible working; and conflict and reward management (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2007; Larsen & Brewster, 2003).

The variety of HRM operational or transactional activities devolved to FLMs consists of pay, performance appraisal, recruitment, training and development, discipline, and health and safety (MacNeil, 2003). MacNeil (2003) further argued that the flatter the structure and knowledge management in a firm, the greater the FLMs' role in knowledge sharing within the organisation. In this context, the HRM feature of FLMs' role in different areas of HRM has been reviewed. This includes FLMs' involvement in dealing with employees who are sick, injured, or disabled (Cunningham et al., 2004); managing absences (Dunn & Wilkinson, 2002); conveying HR messages from top management to employees (Townsend et al., 2012); using communication and information systems (Conway & Monks, 2010); ensuring business performance (Harris & Ogbonna, 2001); and managing discipline and grievance or dispute resolution (Teague & Roche, 2012). FLMs also play an important role in occupational health and safety, in which they enable upward safety communication, assisting in "the freedom employees feel to communicate safety concerns with their supervisors" (Kath et al., 2010, p.643). Furthermore, FLMs also play an essential role in delivering HR services, as they are the link between the policies developed by the HR department and their impact on employees, as well as their performance (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003).

Additionally, organisations need to train and encourage FLMs to embrace further initiatives to manage voice in a way that considers voice management a component of performance appraisal evaluations (Landau, 2009). This would give FLMs a better understanding of how to manage performance appraisal reviews with their

employees. Furthermore, conducting valuable performance appraisals with employees and offering feedback would help employees to feel supported by their FLMs, potentially motivating them to engage more effectively in their work. Performance appraisal review is one of the FLM responsibilities of formal HR practices (Gilbert et al., 2011).

As Wai-Kwong et al. (2001) reported, the exceptional character of FLMs is in the position they occupy between the "strategic apex and operating core of organisations" (p. 10). The authors suggest that FLMs are often knowledgeable about an organisation's day-to-day operations; they are closer to the customers and stakeholders than many senior managers (Wai-Kwong et al., 2001, p.1328). Therefore, FLMs' power within organisations results "not from their hierarchical position of authority but from possessing specific knowledge that enables them to influence both strategic and operational organisational priorities" and play a critical role in implementing day-to-day HRM activities (MacNeil, 2003, p.294).

In this regard, several empirical studies demonstrate and examine employee voice management through FLMs, who have an enormous responsibility for HR practices, usually in conjunction with HR specialists. Hales (2005), in his attempt to outline the role of FLMs in making decisions, presented evidence from 135 organisations he surveyed in London and the Southeast of England. He found that in 80–90 per cent of organisations, FLMs were responsible for implementing efficiency improvements, including monitoring quality, planning, reviewing and reporting performance through meetings, and dealing with customers' problems. Moreover, in most organisations, FLMs had authority, often without having to consult senior managers. FLMs were commonly consulted regularly over routine operational matters such as

work methods and rarely consulted on strategic issues relating to products, staffing levels, and budgets. In most organisations, strategic issues were reserved unilaterally for more senior managers or specialist departments (Hales, 2005). It could be argued that productivity would increase if FLMs were encouraged to exercise a more significant input into such strategic concerns as they would be able to communicate voice, e.g. employees' opinions and ideas, in such contexts.

3.2 FLMs as key actors in HRM

The role of FLMs has recently gained greater recognition in business organisations and academic research, where it has been increasingly noticed that FLMs are adopting core HRM functions and responsibilities (Azmi & Mushtaq, 2015). Furthermore, Valverde et al. (2006) found that HRM functions are not limited to HR departments; FLMs are also noted as being involved in the constructive management of HR. The role of FLMs has developed and continued to expand over time, as they are essential participants in managing HR functions (Papalexandris & Panayotopoulou, 2003). Effective HRM implementation is a process that is not only executed by HR managers but also the responsibility of FLMs and other employees of the organisation. Increasingly, the responsibilities of HRM are being passed on to FLMs, who have thus become more involved in dealing with their employees' HRM issues.

In this context, it is essential to review how the voice process is designed and implemented by organisations, to what extent HR activities are devolved to FLMs, and whether FLMs can take on these initiatives from management given the responsibilities of executing HR practices on the work floor. A consensus has been reached that the one key change in working practice that has been realised is that

responsibility for HRM has now been handed down from HR office personnel to line managers, who now fulfil a pivotal role in the functioning of HRM (Hutchinson & Wood, 1995).

Managing HR in this way ensures a sustainable means of safeguarding a company's strategic lead over its competitors through the tactical use of a skilled, proficient, and loyal workforce (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995). However, Cunningham & Hyman (1995) note that the devolution of HR responsibilities may be further broken down into two principal ways of implementation, namely, either a 'hard or soft' application. A hard interpretation seeks to optimise the skills, resources, and distribution of the workforce, to the advantage of the company, through the strategic planning, management, controlling, and directing of HR. A soft interpretation relies more on advancing the productivity, aspirations, and established objectives of the company by cultivating the loyalty, motivation, and job satisfaction in the workforce (p.6).

Whether the adopted style is control-orientated, i.e. a 'hard' approach, or a more enabling 'soft' approach, managers are required to embrace new approaches and responsibilities concerning workforce management. To be able to do this effectively, managers require an attendant expansion of their training to facilitate the development of their own "people-centred skills" or people-orientated capacities (talents and abilities) (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995, p.5). For optimum results, there has to be a compromise between such hard and soft approaches, and a suitable balance between effective employee management and employee loyalty. While it is necessary to have strategic planning, employee voice management, and directing of HR functions in place, it is also desirable to cultivate employees' motivation and job

satisfaction. If this does not occur, resentment may build among the employees, incentives for producing good work may be lost, and overall productivity may be compromised.

In considering the responsibilities of FLMs involved in HR practices, Renwick (2003) indicated that devolvement of HR practices to FLMs had become organisations' intention, and thus he identified that significant organisational benefits and costs exist from involving FLMs in HR practices. A range of HRM practices exists in modern organisations associated with differences in how human resources and practices are structured and adopted (Mayerhofer et al. 2011). The literature on devolving HRM to FLMs is generally clustered into categories including employee involvement along with recruiting and selecting, training and developing, appraising, rewarding, directing, motivating, and designing work for and controlling workers (Wilton, 2011).

Major firms are more likely to shift HR responsibilities to FLMs, investing in resources to support FLMs to gain better outcomes. This approach can mitigate any potential industrial conflicts (Renwick, 2008). However, the approach of major firms in providing comprehensive support to FLMs would give a clear picture of how they could control any potential industrial problems. Also, an inclusive support and partnership approach would enable FLMs to take mixed messages from the management and make them acceptable to their employees, enhancing employee satisfaction.

3.3 Voice-related role of FLMs

As noted by Hales (2005, p.473), the expression 'first-line manager' usually stands for the "position representing the first level of management to whom non-

managerial employees report". Yet, it has been argued that different levels of FLMs are likely to play various roles within HRM and ER (Townsend, 2014). Referring to the broad definition of FLMs, however, there are various arguments that the terms FLM, supervisor, and team leader essentially describe the same management role; or they may be regarded as being different roles. These terms are frequently utilised interchangeably with empirical evidence from Hales (2005) comparing the roles of supervisors, middle managers, and FLMs. In this thesis, the term FLM will be utilised to refer to first-line managers, supervisors, team leaders, and heads of department.

According to Townsend & Loudoun (2015), FLMs play an important role in managing different aspects of organisations, including people management, and fulfil a role that could be perceived to include both HRM and ER. The FLM is the first level with managerial responsibility with whom employees interact regularly, and FLMs are responsible for attaining core business objectives and directly influencing their subordinates' motivation, commitment, and discretionary behaviour (Gilbert et al., 2011). In this context, FLMs play a significant role in employee voice as they are categorised as the link between employees and management to escalate voice when needed throughout the organisation and to implement voice mechanisms effectively (Wright & Kehoe, 2008). Essentially, FLMs are the individuals around which everything revolves. They are central characters with a crucial role in facilitating voice throughout organisations.

The important role of FLMs is further supported by Detert et al. (2013, p.625), who claim that "managers are implored to create environments in which speaking up to them and others [is] routine because the voice is presumed to aid in the discovery of new products and services, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of task

processes and address problems in work systems". This demonstrates how routine communication enhances the relationship between FLMs and employees, where both parties play a crucial role in developing effectiveness. They also added that employees might direct their voice to targets other than their formal leader, i.e. "upward flow", to their FLMs or other managers outside their chain of command (such as the manager of another unit in their firm or a co-worker) (pp.629–637).

Mellahi's (2010) study suggested that employees have a voice at different levels in organisations and FLMs are required to develop mechanisms and processes to capture voice at both team and organisational levels. In this regard, the role of FLMs as the simple implementers of employee voice has been contested by Mowbray et al. (2021), who found that FLMs are not just the translators of organisation strategy and do not just redesign and reprocess existing voice mechanisms, but also create new voice mechanisms. Their involvement in doing so is subject to the nature and scope/competence of their given HR role and the market strategy of the company. This study focuses on the role of FLMs in adopting HR practices, demonstrating how FLMs assume HR-related tasks, such as implementing policies and monitoring HR procedures within their teams. They contribute to improving productivity and create employee loyalty by allowing employees to express their views.

Furthermore, Mowbray et al. (2021) revealed that, in the case of voice implementation, if FLMs have not been provided with voice mechanisms and training on HR practices, they will still be keen to encourage EIP, which will enable employees to contribute to better performance outcomes. By doing this, they might create their voice flow mechanisms for the overall productivity of their unit and

team. In this context, the authors also argued that not all FLMs will have the drive to work in partnership with HR teams and thus will need to develop their voice mechanisms and HR practices. To support this, HR departments should initiate work in parallel with FLMs to assist them for mutual benefit. Also, in their study, Wilkinson et al. (2020) found that it is beneficial for management and HR departments to provide extensive support to FLMs for shaping voice mechanisms and channels through which employees can express their voice and influence organisational outcomes.

To enable employees to feel self-assured and secure in expressing how they feel, FLMs ought to recognise the value of employee voice and embrace listening. HR professionals ought to encourage an environment within their organisation that rewards idea-sharing and values open discussion (CIPD, 2019). Moreover, FLMs are responsible for implementing the voice mechanisms that have been created by the management, in which they escalate voice up and down the hierarchy (Townsend, 2014). The implementation of voice requires organisational support for FLMs that encourages and enables them to act upon their employees' suggestions and concerns. Therefore, the more support FLMs obtain from the management, the more they are willing to implement an employee voice process. Managerial attitudes are frequently perceived as key to the existence of highly developed employee participation practices (Kessler et al., 2000; Millward et al., 2000).

Gollan & Wilkinson (2007) affirm that employees can be trusted to participate in essential workplace decisions that will lead to better productivity and efficiency. To participate in these decisions, employees must be allowed to develop their knowledge and skills. Holland et al. (2012) found that increasing cooperation

between employees and FLMs occurs when a greater amount of direct voice is utilised in the workplace. In a leadership behaviour study by Gao et al. (2011) conducted on 314 employees throughout 40 workgroups within the same organisation, employees' trust in their FLMs was positively linked to employee voice. Therefore, it can be argued that it is essential for organisations to foster trust between employees and their line managers.

The above discussion demonstrates that FLMs play a fundamental role in assessing and taking employee concerns into account, enabling their voices to be heard; and there is much evidence to argue that employee voice should be heard. Despite FLMs executing different HR practices to improve organisational performance, this will not fulfil its objectives if employees do not see the HR practices as an efficient means to enhance their abilities and participate.

3.3.1 Common voice mechanisms used by FLMs

FLMs play an essential role in facilitating employee voice within organisations, particularly through informal channels of communication. Research indicates that informal channels are frequently used for employees to raise their concerns and make suggestions for improvements. For example, findings from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) suggest that one-to-one meetings with FLMs are the most common mechanism for employees to express their views, with 62 per cent of employees utilising this channel, followed closely by 49 per cent of employees expressing their voice in team meetings (CIPD, 2021). Townsend & Loudoun (2015) further investigated how FLMs create an environment promoting open communication, increasing employee engagement and organisational effectiveness. The authors underline how the interaction between employees and

FLMs has a substantial impact on the effectiveness of these voice channels. When FLMs promote trust and openness, employees are more likely to communicate informally. Additionally, FLMs not only listen to employee concerns but actively advocate for employees in the organisation, guaranteeing feedback is turned into practical recommendations (Townsend & Loudoun, 2015).

Thus, evidence suggests that direct voice may be effective in resolving minor conflicts or perceived inequalities in conditions. It has been noted that the direct voice mechanism has a greater immediate effect on employees than the indirect voice mechanism and is therefore regarded as more responsive to employee demands (Freeman & Rogers, 2006). Employees may value it more since having direct interactions with supervisors allows them to see outcomes immediately. This proximity, and visibility of consequences, supports the perceived success of direct voice methods, making them critical for meeting employee expectations and building an adaptive work environment. By acknowledging and characterising these diverse methods and channels, organisations can enhance employee contribution and participation. Informal voice methods are particularly important in this regard. Informal voice can be used in unstructured communication between FLMs and employees, enabling more spontaneous and participatory discussions.

Landau (2009) argued that, to some extent, employees might use different forms of voice and channels to make their concerns and suggestions known if they feel that their FLMs are not approachable or receptive. Her study found that what are generally recognised as being significant companies in the US have established numerous mechanisms that allow employees to voice their concerns and ideas, including open-door policies, grievance systems, regular team meetings, and

suggestion schemes. Landau (2009) reviewed the literature on employee voice mechanisms and suggested that there is no means of associating the number of voice mechanisms in an organisation with the propensity of employees to express their voice in the workplace. Thus, she suggests that perhaps an organisation does not need to have multiple alternative voice mechanisms, but simply needs capable and approachable managers who are willing to act upon their employees' concerns, suggestions, and ideas, thus assuring employees that their voice has not been neglected or disregarded (Landau, 2009).

It can be understood that all these procedures that organisations initiate to develop the employee voice process do not fulfil the needs of employees unless their voice is truly heard and taken into consideration. Also, FLMs must indeed act upon their employees' concerns, suggestions, and ideas to assure employees that their voice has not been overlooked or ignored. Purcell & Georgiadis (2007) argued that organisations must recognise and enhance the value of face-to-face conversations with employees, and there is a clear affirmation of the importance of informal voice exchanges between employees and FLMs in organisations.

3.4 FLMs' role in implementing employee voice

This literature review emphasises the necessity of understanding how FLMs implement direct employee voice mechanisms and channels. In addition to their HR functions, FLMs play an important role in addressing employee work-related issues and ensuring their views are heard and acted upon. This section will examine key studies that investigate the issues FLMs face and practices they employ when implementing these mechanisms, as well as their broader function within HR management in promoting effective employee voice.

FLMs understand their vital role as the link between organisation policies and personnel management. One of their primary roles is to provide opportunities for employees to express their views, ensuring that these issues are escalated to higher levels and, when appropriate, addressed. This position is critical in creating an environment that encourages and integrates employee voice into the organisation's decision-making processes (Burris, 2012; Townsend, 2014; Venkataramani et al., 2016). Therefore, although the HR department is critical in initiating both formal and informal mechanisms and channels for voice, it is the FLMs who interact directly with the employees, and the FLMs who play a vital role in facilitating this communication within the organisation.

FLMs are the main actors in both encouraging and facilitating employee voice, and in communicating the policies of HR management. Much depends on the personality, willingness, and training of FLMs, who may lack the basic training to adequately facilitate employee voice. They may feel time constraints and workload do not allow them to make room for facilitating employee voice. They may indeed not appreciate or be unwilling to appreciate the value of the contribution made by employees expressing their voice. On the contrary, some FLMs may be excellent at enabling and facilitating employees to express their voice. FLMs are thus key to the successful and fruitful deployment, or otherwise, of employee voice.

Hutchinson & Purcell (2008) noted that effective FLMs are a method by which HR strategies can come to life in organisations. Furthermore, FLMs must communicate back to employees to ensure that their voice has been heard and acted upon, and not simply disregarded (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020). Morrison (2023) showed that her study is significant in demonstrating that while managers' reactions influence

employees in expressing their voice, a positive reaction does not always mean that the voice is implemented. Moreover, even if the idea is not implemented, employees can still feel heard and valued, and believe that the manager was approachable and receptive to their voice. It can be argued that employees only need their manager to hear them for them to have confidence in their abilities. That confidence is enhanced when employees' voice is both heard and acted upon. However, the key factor here is FLMs' approachability. This is what determines the level of trust that employees have in their FLMs.

Regarding particular leader behaviours, employee voice expression has been demonstrated to occur more often when managers display helping behaviour, as this creates a greater sense of employee self-worth (Cheng et al., 2022), and when they display responsiveness to voice, especially for employees with a strong sense of self-worth (Janssen & Gao, 2015). Additionally, Weiss et al. (2018) suggested that the expression of employee voice is more likely to occur when leaders utilise inclusive language. Lebel & Patil (2018) suggested that voice is likely to occur less when managers engage in discouraging or unsupportive behaviour, as this decreases employees' efficacy in taking the initiative and embracing responsibility for change. Frazier & Bowler (2015) found that supervisors exhibiting challenging behaviour are more likely to reduce voice by impacting perceptions of voice climate. Voice is influenced not only by leaders' style and behaviour but also by their dispositional characteristics as well as their approachability.

The FLM is a key factor in implementing employee voice, not only by their willingness to spend their energy and time, but also in terms of their approachability and positive disposition, and their ability to act upon employees' concerns and

suggestions. When managers react to the initial voice with endorsement and/or implementation, positive feedback loops are established whereby employees who have expressed their views feel more motivated to have a say with constructive suggestions again (Janssen & Gao, 2015; Wu et al., 2021). Furthermore, positive feedback loops can enhance and encourage subsequent constructive voice when managers express respect, gratefulness (Weiss & Zacher, 2022), and concern for employee voice (King et al., 2019). Due to positive feedback loops and productive voice interactions, employees can form positive relationships with managers categorised by higher levels of LMX (Cheng et al., 2013). By providing feedback, FLMs not only acknowledge employee contributions but also create a supportive environment that motivates employees to continue expressing their views This process is integral to the effective implementation of employee voice mechanisms. Kim et al. (2023, pp.458–459) noted that "implementation may be more beneficial and elicit greater reciprocity for voicers than endorsement because it involves actual changes that are easily recognised by others, whereas endorsement represents an attitudinal agreement that may or may not be translated into actual changes".

To illustrate, when employees raise issues of concern regarding heavy workloads and high work pressure, they expect their FLMs to go beyond just agreeing with their concerns (i.e. endorsement) and also make efforts to rectify the situation (i.e. implementation). Implementation advances the status quo and creates feedback loops where employees participate in subsequent voice exchanges. Otherwise, when employee suggestions are only supported without implementation, eventually, employees may start to think that managers are not taking their voice seriously. Employees may hesitate to engage in subsequent voice, a situation in which the development of a feedback loop will be impeded (Kim et al., 2023).

According to Basheer et al. (2021), employee voice is a strategy of knowledge sharing from the lower level to the upper level and boosts employee motivation, as employees feel satisfied when they can express their views to their managers. Furthermore, their findings demonstrate that employees and their senior managers engage actively in organisational innovation. Employees participate and are involved in organisational issues, as the supportive actions of managers drive the organisation to innovate. Employees of any organisation know the practical realities more than the managers do. They can give creative solutions, suggestions, and opinions, and if the managers support their ideas, the employees will become more involved in their work and participate more actively in solving organisational problems.

What is important is not only freedom to express ideas and concerns but also knowing that these will be listened to and acted upon. Employees know what is going on in the immediate workplace environment more than their managers do, and therefore it is very important that their suggestions and solutions to problems are not only listened to but acted upon. This will encourage further such communication and feedback for the overall good of the organisation, including engendering a sense of employees being valued in their work, thus increasing job satisfaction and potentially productivity.

Extensive literature concerning the decentralisation and devolution of HRM identifies the dual role of the FLM as "not only the 'implementer' of practices, but also the 'experiencer' of those practices; although they are managers, they are quite often also employees, albeit employees with a higher status" (Townsend & Loudoun, 2024, p.1766). This dual function not only illustrates the complexity that FLMs face but also creates conflict between their obligations and experiences within the

company. On the one hand, FLMs are responsible for enforcing HR policies, managing employee voice, and ensuring organisational objectives are reached. On the other hand, they are employees themselves, subject to the very pressures they impose. This unique position may cause conflict between their managerial duties and their personal experiences within the system.

Additionally, FLMs experience a paradox between being a "master and victim" of HRM implementation (Townsend et al., 2022, p.82). As 'masters', they have the authority to shape HR procedures, such as employee voice mechanisms. However, as 'victims', they must navigate the demands and limits imposed by these systems, frequently balancing senior management expectations with employee concerns. This duality can place contradictory demands on FLMs, who may feel split between completing their managerial responsibilities and supporting fairness and employee well-being. Moreover, FLMs frequently are involved in the design of systems that relate to the practices they are expected to implement, but lack training and support for effective HRM implementation (Townsend et al., 2012).

According to Townsend et al. (2022, p.88), the twofold FLM role increases questions concerning the devolution of HRM. One issue they identified is the role of the traditional HRM department after 'devolution'. FLMs can perceive the HRM department as 'faceless', working over electronic websites and portals, and yet the effect of this in the performance link is unexplored. Some studies are starting to identify the question. For instance, Bos-Nehles (2010) determined that the greater the support received from HR professionals, the greater the effectiveness of FLMs' performance of HRM. In their 50 hospitals survey report, Kellner et al. (2016) found that FLMs in hospitals were excessively busy, and time constraints disallowed their

capacity to adequately implement HR policies, and because of this, FLMs became victims of a system that hindered them from a high level of agency over their decision-making.

Kim et al. (2023) also focused on constructive voice expressed to managers instead of colleagues because managers are decision-makers and can implement voiced suggestions. Managers acquire sources for enacting improvement (Detert et al., 2013) and support the additional conveying of employees' suggestions to executive teams (Burris, 2012), which eventually advances work team or organisational effectiveness (Detert et al., 2013; Hussain et al., 2019). This confirms the crucial role of FLMs in both implementing employee voice and devolving HRM effectively.

Furthermore, the most utilised mechanisms for employee voice expression are informal channels of communication, and FLMs play a crucial part in enabling employees to communicate their concerns and suggestions. Moreover, from the findings of CIPD studies, employee voice is most facilitated through one-to-one meetings with FLMs, with 62 per cent of employees using this channel to communicate their suggestions and ideas, and 49 per cent expressing their voice within team meetings (CIPD, 2021).

3.5 The role of FLMs in employee voice: Managing health-related issues

The HRM function of FLMs' role in different areas of HRM has been studied by various academics. Manager support involves expressing concern for employee well-being and career development and communicating to employees the value of their work. In exchange, employees feel the need to expand their efforts and demonstrate trust in managers (Holland et al., 2017). Holland et al. (2017) also found

in their case study that the company had an HR manager who was responsible for framing absence policy, but that responsibility for dealing with daily absence and employees with disabilities was devolved to FLMs, who were accountable for running the corporate facilities. In this context, FLMs play a key role in handling sensitive employee matters namely sickness, injuries, and disabilities. This commitment not only fosters confidence and creates mechanisms and channels for communication but also places FLMs as supporters of employees' needs and welfare.

As reviewed by Dundon et al. (2004), the role of managers is significant in determining the ease with which employees have a say in the workplace. In addition, Holland et al. (2017) drew attention to the managerial support that can improve employee participation, strengthening the idea that FLMs' contribution in sensitive matters is crucial to advancing a healthy voice setting. This is further elaborated by Wilkinson et al. (2020), who highlighted the wider concepts of employee voice and organisational effectiveness, emphasising the significance of management functions in confirming that employee work-related issues are heard and acted upon. Also, the usefulness of encouraging employees to have a say is not guaranteed unless employees perceive voice as safe and effective.

The latest research highlights the significance of employee voice in handling mental and physical well-being. Beneficial employee voice mechanisms and channels can contribute to identifying and addressing problems including stress, burnout, and other typical mental health difficulties, eventually mitigating absences. This advanced planning not only elevates employees' well-being but also boosts organisational productivity. Myers et al. (2021) point out that within the UK's

National Health Service, developing an atmosphere where employees feel comfortable articulating their concerns is critical for sustaining well-being and job satisfaction. This encompasses implementing formal channels such as consultations and informal channels such as consistent team meetings and open-door policies.

Furthermore, Brooks & Wilkinson (2021, p.1) illustrated in their work, "Employee Voice as a Route to Wellbeing", how employees having a say might improve their well-being within the work environment. They stress that voice has been conceptualised divergently by academics in ER, OB, and HRM, but that these approaches together offer an in-depth understanding of the influence of voice on well-being. They further recognise four theoretical underpinnings that provide insight into how voice could enhance well-being, including "Job Demands-Resources, Behavioural Approach and Inhibition, Psychosocial Safety Climate, and Psychological Safety" (p. 1). In light of their findings, while voice is frequently observed as a resource that increases well-being, it may also become a requirement if psychological safety is deficient, wherein employees avoid expressing their concerns as a result of fear of revenge or isolation. The authors add that organisations focusing on both productivity and well-being are more inclined to have robust voice practices that boost open communication and resolve problems influencing well-being (Brooks & Wilkinson, 2021).

Cunningham et al. (2004) stressed the issues that FLMs confront in protecting job security for ill workers in modern workplaces, reinforcing the importance of adequate training and support to handle these tasks effectively. Morrison (2014) shed light on the organisational framework and its impact on employee voice, hence

further emphasising the significance of FLMs in creating a supportive environment where employee voice is supported and valued.

In summary, the role of FLMs is fundamental to the successful deployment of employee voice mechanisms and the encouragement of mental and physical well-being within organisations. FLMs' participation guarantees that employees' work-related issues are heard and acted upon in a timely and suitable way, contributing to a more beneficial and efficient workplace.

3.6 FLMs' role in conflict resolution and difficult conversations

According to Townsend (2013), in addition to managing general workplace conflicts, middle and lower-level line managers are now being instructed to manage workplace disputes. He also recorded in his three case studies that, in 2006, there were significant employee relational problems in the workplace: 64 grievances had been registered during that year, and a similar number in the following years. A combined training and coaching programme for FLMs was then introduced by executive managers (Townsend, 2013). This was developed to provide FLMs with the skills to manage the difficult conversations that may occur in the workplace; for instance, managing conflict between employees, addressing issues related to workload, and discussing performance appraisal reviews. These training programmes have been very successful, reducing 64 grievances registered in previous years to three each year from 2009 to 2011 (Townsend, 2013).

Teague & Roche (2012) conducted a quantitative survey of five organisations in the private sector and state-owned commercial enterprises in the Republic of Ireland. They confirmed that FLMs are recognised as playing a significant role in employee

voice in most companies and are principally engaged in resolving workplace conflict. The common patterns of managing conflict and grievances designed to provide FLMs with suitable tools to handle unacceptable behaviour are based on the assumption of a long-term employment relationship (Klass, 2010). Additionally, FLMs are perceived to have a different role in managing crucial conflicts by performing as coaches and mentors for their employees (Anderson et al., 2009). This process would provide FLMs with a close relationship with their employees, where they could intervene in the early stages of any potential conflicts. It also depends on the capability of FLMs to handle disputes including the experience and training they have accessed to do so (Teague & Roche, 2012). It can be presumed that FLMs having trusting relationships with their employees enables them to resolve any conflict informally. Failing this they can escalate to management in a more formal approach.

In their study, Teague & Roche (2012) confirmed that FLMs are recognised as playing a significant role in employee voice in most companies and are principally engaged in resolving workplace conflict. Coaching and mentoring activities afford FLMs the chance to recognise whether employees are encountering work-related issues and consequently make early effective interventions to prevent conflict. FLMs can likewise play an active role in the resolution of workplace conflict. Therefore, it is evident that the majority of organisations are seen by respondents as allocating FLMs a role in preventing and solving workplace conflict (Teague & Roche, 2012). Furthermore, the study found that under half of participants agreed with the statement that FLMs lacked the confidence to resolve workplace conflict and relied instead on HR managers or other senior managers for this purpose, while FLMs were willing to engage in conflict resolution as part of their role, but only a portion

regarded themselves as having sufficient training to undertake this satisfactorily (Teague & Roche, 2012).

Several researchers have discovered that FLMs play an important role in controlling how workplace disputes escalate (Anderson et al., 2009; Teague & Roche, 2012). According to Townsend & Mowbray (2020), the more proficient FLMs are in handling employee grievances, the more likely it is that they will settle issues that arise on the shop floor before escalating them to higher management, necessitating union engagement. Hutchinson & Purcell (2003) highlighted that excellent line management is one approach to making HR practices more effective in organisations. FLMs should go beyond merely hearing employees' opinions and honestly convey their issues to management (Freeman & Medoff, 1984).

3.7 Prerequisites for FLMs to implement HR practices and employee voice

To successfully implement HR policies and improve employee voice inside an organisation, FLMs must have a distinct set of competencies that go beyond fundamental managerial skills. These proficiencies are important since FLMs frequently serve as the first point of contact between employees and the broader organisational and managerial framework. Their ability to implement HRM and encourage open communication is vital for supporting a productive and engaged workforce. Understanding the specific abilities and competencies required for FLMs in this context is critical to guaranteeing they are prepared to manage the complexities of employee relations, drive results, and enhance a positive workplace environment. This section will explore the necessary prerequisites for FLMs, building

on key research and literature that underscores the skills and traits essential for successful implementation of HRM and employee voice.

Bunch (2007) argued that organisations spend as much as US$200 billion annually on training and development; nevertheless, a considerable amount of this investment appears misapplied on ill-conceived or poorly implemented interventions. Suitable training could significantly impact how managers conduct themselves concerning the implementation of employee voice and how to encourage their employees to express their voice. Marchington (2015), in his recent critical review within 25 organisations across four liberal market economies, found that the breadth and depth of EIP were improved when HRM practices were handed over to FLMs. Most of those FLMs had been offered intensive training to support them in being engaged in EIP. it could be surmised that the delegation of HR functions is desirable, and for it to be effective a positive programme of training for FLMs requires to be implemented to enable them to manage EIP effectively.

Bunch (2007) affirmed that only a small number of organisations commented that there is a link between training and positive change, because training does not take place in a vacuum. Marchington & Suter (2013) suggested that skilled and qualified FLMs are more amenable to empowering employee views and using them for joint benefit. This is a clear indication that the value of offering FLMs appropriate training is significant both for the organisation and for its employees in terms of productivity and work satisfaction.

As Marchington (2015) argued, FLMs' willingness to enhance employee engagement is maximised when they are offered adequate training in the implementation of EIP. Leisink and Knies' (2011) study based on a survey of 160 FLMs in the Netherlands

found that FLMs who had enhanced levels of training were more eager to utilise their abilities, had greater opportunities to carry out supportive activities, and had the degree of influence necessary to encourage their employees to express their voice. In contrast, Teague & Roche (2012) found that FLMs often lacked organisational support in areas such as training and performance monitoring and thus lacked the confidence to make decisions independently. Senior managers consider FLMs as having low confidence in handling workplace conflict.

It can be inferred that FLMs need to have full support from their seniors to gain their trust to act independently, and that transparent HR policies with training should be in place. It has been argued that the greater the skills FLMs have in people management issues, the greater their ability in terms of resolving the disputes that arise at the shopfloor level before those conflicts escalate to the top management and require trade union intervention (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020). This would prevent potential and further escalation of disharmony and assure employees that their voices are being heard and that employee grievances are taken seriously by their FLMs.

In their case study, Cunningham et al. (2004) noted that the organisations studied produced distinct guidelines outlining how FLMs ought to deal with cases of long-term absence and afforded them access to appropriate HR and occupational health support. They added that often FLMs felt unprepared to manage such cases due to a lack of training. They also claimed that these responsibilities were frequently undertaken in an independent and unassisted way and that they struggled to handle the tensions that existed between instructions to provide sympathetic support and the requirements of disciplinary and dismissal procedures. However, it appeared

that the main reason for this lack of skills and knowledge was inadequate training provision within the case study organisations. As such, organisations could consider paying greater attention to the training and development of FLMs (Townsend et al., 2022).

Chang et al. (2021, p.507) suggested that "organisations need to ensure that control mechanisms governing leadership workplace favouritism behaviors are in place. For instance, organisations may proactively and routinely provide ethical training and sensitivity education to leaders so that personal biases do not influence decision and behavioral outcomes." This strategy not only advances fairness and justice but also cultivates an environment that makes employees feel confident and empowered to express their views. By easing favouritism, organisations build a broader workplace culture that encourages employees to voice their opinions and concerns and suggest improvements without fear of intimidation or other negative consequences. As a result, this improves communication and teamwork, and advances the overall success of the organisation.

In their recent study on organisational voice and employee-focused voice, Shipton et al. (2024) emphasised that, for line managers and supervisors, adequate training and support are necessary to encourage both forms of voice and offer rewards and encouragement that are associated with employees' experiences of expressing their views. This comprises recognising some possible negative effects resulting from the application of organisational voice including employee burnout. To mitigate this, FLMs require adequate training. Such training for FLMs, to manage organisational voice efficiently, can reduce the direct consequences of voice on staff burnout. Moreover, it provides FLMs with skills to handle and report employees' concerns

positively. This study revealed that those line managers who had sufficient training were able to facilitate both employee voice and the demands of HRM effectively.

In their qualitative study conducted on FLMs in two hospitals, Kumah et al. (2016) described how top management did not support FLMs adequately to perform their roles effectively. They suggested that FLMs have the requisite competencies and skills, but they will not effectively perform without access to the empowerment structures; therefore, they require active support from their top management to work and execute their duties effectively. This support includes the provision of resources, recognition, time, and role clarity. This view has been echoed by Lombard & Crafford (2003), who postulated that FLMs would not be able to adopt change effectively within their unit/team if there is no adequate support from top management. Kumah et al. (2016) confirmed in their survey that insufficient training is offered to FLMs, which prevents them from acting and performing adequately as leaders.

In contrast, senior managers receive more training. McKinsey & Company's (2010) survey showed that the company had offered only 9 per cent of its FLMs such training. This situation indicates FLMs' lack of requisite competencies to perform their given roles effectively. Therefore, organisations have to have a plan for training their FLMs to perform effectively by providing requisite knowledge and skills. Accordingly, Kumah et al. (2016, p.28) argued:

> Equal importance should be placed on developing both hard and soft skills of FLMs. While hard skills will equip them to plan, organise and co-ordinate change management activities; soft skills such as coaching, leading and conflict resolution will enable them to effectively engage, persuade, motivate,

and empower frontline employees to actively participate in the change being implemented.

It can be argued that developing both hard and soft skills of FLMs is vital for the benefit of the organisation because FLMs are leaders who deal directly with and manage a team of operational employees on a day-to-day basis and are responsible for performing HR activities.

Townsend (2013), in investigating FLMs' views in three case studies, found that the training and skills of FLMs greatly influence their performance at the workplace level. Another study undertaken by Townsend et al. (2012) on ward managers' roles in HR function in hospitals found that there had been a lack of investment in developing their HRM and other management skills. Bozionelos & Baruch (2015) described some elements that enable FLMs to supervise their team, including technical knowledge, motivational skills, coordination, and capacity to negotiate within their influence circle. Managerial roles are not easy and not fixed; therefore, some managers are keen to empower their employees and some maintain high control levels over their employees (Tengblad & Vie, 2015).

There is little evidence that organisations offer formal training to FLMs to allow them to carry out HRM activities (Cunningham & Hyman, 1995), despite the fact that HR practices and roles have been devolved to FLMs within organisations. Similarly, Brewster & Larsen's (1992) research, using an annual survey of a European organisation's HR functions, found that most organisations are not providing any formal training to position their FLMs to handle HR issues in a way that organisations desire. They also found that there is no clear relationship between the devolvement of HR responsibilities and the amount of training in HR issues that FLMs receive.

Furthermore, they identified several organisations that trained as little as a third of their managers in HR techniques, including performance appraisal, communications, delegation, motivation, and team building.

In their research conducted internationally, Hoogendoorn & Brewster (1992) found that, in the main, personnel and organisational managers in larger organisations affirmed that there was an interest from FLMs in taking on personnel tasks. However, it was also noted that FLMs are not well qualified in personnel knowledge and the skills to handle the tasks appropriately. It was acknowledged that FLMs lack time to execute personnel tasks and do not feel that they have obtained proper qualifications and skills. The authors concluded that the time constraints experienced by FLMs and the lack of time for training to learn the skills needed highlight that management must reduce pressure on FLMs by mitigating workload. This will allow suitable training to enable FLMs to execute personnel tasks, supporting their willingness to take such tasks on (Hoogendoorn & Brewster, 1992).

Three reasons FLMs lack formal training have been identified by Brewster & Larsen (2000). There is the assumption from top management that, firstly, FLMs have the technical knowledge of HRM to qualify them to make decisions and, secondly, FLMs gain HRM knowledge and skills through their daily practical experience. Thirdly, FLMs are often appointed to their position unprepared to accept devolving HRM roles due to top management's lack of training. In summary, organisations must adopt the strategy of providing more training in HR-related issues otherwise some FLMs might perform as per their understandings and interpretations, which may contradict HR policy.

FLMs' effectiveness will improve when provided with sufficient training, making them more capable of enhancing EIP. It could thus be argued that FLMs should be provided with formal training to be effective voice managers and facilitate employees escalating their voice to them. HR policies should make it very clear to FLMs the expectation and crucial importance of employee voice. FLMs are often frustrated because of the workload burden being heavy on their shoulders, and they not only have to do their managerial job but also have to maintain an HR role and function as conduits and facilitators of EIP. Because of a lack of adequate or suitable training, FLMs frequently show low confidence in handling conflict or in making decisions independently. This is intensified by senior managers being inclined to blame their FLMs when problems arise with employees.

In a system where FLMs seemingly receive no reward for taking on the demands of HR activities, they will be disincentivised and demotivated to carry out an EIP function adequately. Conversely, when suitable training of FLMs is offered and accessed, such FLMs may become an effective target for employees to escalate their voice within the overall workplace context. It is apparent that any company that wishes to make the most productive use of their employees would seek to enable those employees to have a voice, through suitable mechanisms, to express their opinions, advance their ideas, and air their grievances. Therefore, FLMs should be given greater responsibilities concerning HR practices and, if necessary, more training to enable them to fulfil their role. As such, FLMs are the critical link or bridge between management and employees. Conversely, if employees are denied a voice or if there are insufficient mechanisms to allow that voice to be heard, they will not be able to take full ownership of the work of the company, and will not be able to

contribute positively to initiative development and advancing positive change. Moreover, they will feel disenfranchised in their role.

3.8 Factors hindering FLMs in implementing HRM

One of the central themes explored in this thesis is the numerous factors that impede FLMs from effectively deploying the HRM process. Despite their crucial role in implementing HR strategies at the operational level, FLMs commonly face several challenges that hinder their capability to perform their duties. These barriers can arise from organisational constraints, a lack of suitable training or resources, and competing priorities between operational demands and HR objectives. Grasping these challenges is essential to improving the support structures for FLMs and confirming that HRM practices are implemented more consistently and efficiently within the organisation.

According to Hutchinson & Purcell (2010), FLMs experienced a lack of resources, role ambiguity, and heavy workloads in their workplace. Within the framework of the workload of FLMs, Townsend (2013, p.429) argued: "Workloads are a major industrial issue within each workplace with the matter playing out very differently for staff and having an impact on not only line managers' approach to managing but also the line managers' own workloads."

This is echoed by Hutchinson & Purcell (2010), who also claim that heavy workloads constitute a significant obstacle to FLMs, who could be pressurised to emphasise short-term priorities and deprioritise implementing the processes with long-term effects, for instance, staff development. Inadequate training and support are often provided to FLMs before they are appointed to their new post by management

(Townsend et al., 2012). From the above discussion, it can be argued that organisations must start to provide adequate support and training for FLMs and must go beyond the old perception that FLMs have the skills to handle EIP without giving them adequate training. Townsend et al.'s (2012, pp.212–216) research suggests that FLMs are "accidental, unprepared and relatively unsupported for the role they were required to perform".

The assumption that FLMs are the barriers or obstacles to implementing voice schemes that have been designed and planned by management is evidenced by Townsend (2014). FLMs not implementing voice mechanisms successfully and EIP schemes failing will allow senior managers the opportunity of frequently "scapegoating middle managers rather than assume blame for the failure themselves" (Fenton-O'Creevy, 2001). This illustrates senior managers not pulling their weight and passing the responsibility to their FLMs as a cover-up or mitigation of their own inadequacies, i.e. blaming someone else with a lesser designation or voice. Therefore, FLMs resistance to change "may be seen by the middle manager concerned as pragmatic adaptation" (p.38).

In a study of EIP schemes, Marchington (2001) identified various unintended actions that affect FLMs' involvement, including lack of commitment, hesitancy, lack of capabilities, lack of time due to extra workload, insufficient experience, and deficiencies in training to become effective voice implementers. It is beneficial to note that informal participation can offer employees a real opportunity to participate and influence change. Still, FLMs might perceive this as extra workload. Therefore, FLMs' workload prevents them from undertaking many HR activities.

Larsen & Brewster (2003) studied line management responsibility for HR, with data drawn from the Cranet survey, the largest ongoing survey of HRM policy and practice in the world. They found that the most common pattern in Europe is of a sharing of people management responsibilities between HR professionals and FLMs. Although many European organisations are still centralised in many aspects of HRM, there is some evidence that FLMs are involved in some countries. They also found some countries where the HR department retains considerable responsibility for HR issues and activities. The major finding from Larsen & Brewster's (2003) study was that FLMs feel that they cannot handle HR activities due to time concerns and workload.

Dundon et al. (2005) used data from seven non-union organisations. Positive outcomes from using employee voice were evidenced, but managers identified some potential barriers. For example, they pointed out relevant barriers that were often attributed to a lack of employee enthusiasm and requisite skills to implement voice in FLMs. It can be argued that organisations have to invest in training and education and provide clear HR policy in employee voice to FLMs to continue with contemporary HR developments. According to a personnel manager in one of the organisations included in the study, managers have to pay more attention to working on team briefings. Some FLMs are more task-orientated and have poor softer people skills (Dundon et al., 2005).

Accordingly, Marchington & Wilkinson (2012) argued that FLMs do not receive appropriate training or support from their organisations to be able to manage voice. Organisations should have a culture of supporting FLMs if they wish to apply voice efficiently. FLMs will be able to interpret and implement HR activities in the required

manner by gaining access to specific HR policies and practices, combined with receiving supervision from the HR department and support from top management (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Several elements have been identified by Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) associated with FLMs performing well. They require, firstly, adequate support from HR professionals and top management and, secondly, clear and accessible policies and processes. They also require a sufficient amount of time to carry out HR activities.

Given the different roles and higher level of responsibilities from changes in organisations' strategic levels, Townsend (2014) argued that there is a contradiction in how FLMs direct their employees and how they listen to their employees, which he believes is not sufficiently understood. The reason is that they do not have the drive, capacity, propensity, or incentive to effectively implement the changes required and might not be rewarded for meeting voice goals. It could be argued that FLMs can only be effective voice managers with clearly defined roles and having support in place from HR specialists and top management.

Marchington et al. (2001) suggest that lower-level FLMs and supervisors do not necessarily implement voice schemes or HR practices as they are designed and intended. Neither are they inspired or committed to people management practices (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). This may be the consequence of workload and lack of training. Kellner et al.'s (2016) study examined the barriers that FLMs face in developing HRM practices. Their survey of 50 hospitals from the national healthcare accreditation market leader in Australia found that heavy workloads and performance targets are the main reasons that FLMs experience inadequate training

and developing of HR practices. The study also found that time pressure prevents FLMs from developing and managing employees.

Similarly, in her qualitative study in higher education, Mowbray (2018) found that some FLMs experienced rational and structural barriers that prevented them from engaging in employee voice implementation. Rational factors obstructing employee voice are the non-supportive and non-participative leadership behaviours of FLMs, whereas structural factors include unsympathetic organisational hierarchy and the absence of available voice mechanisms and channels. Another negative factor is the reticence or fear within some employees that discourages them from speaking out. The assumption that we exist in a culture of fear (Furedi, 2002) is likely to be accurate because when employees feel afraid to contribute to employee voice, they are more likely to stay silent (Brinsfield & Edwards, 2020). Furthermore, Marchington (2008) found that there is a lack of understanding of the notion of voice in some workplaces. Additionally, the majority of employers do not consider voice as a central component of HRM. Implementing a voice process in organisations is advantageous not only for employees but for employers as well.

It has been argued that FLMs are not only responsible for operational work, but they are also accountable for their team's performance, and to obtain outstanding team performances FLMs are supposed to implement HR activities utilising HR practices (Nehles et al., 2006). Nevertheless, FLMs do not usually believe that operating HR practices is the only way to attain their business goals, and HR responsibilities dominate their working day (Harris et al., 2002). Some of the participants in Harris et al.'s (2002) survey stated that they had been hired according to their professional

expertise, which is not as a personnel manager, and had not been trained in HR, and thus constantly refer to HR professionals to avoid mistakes.

Kellner et al. (2019) discovered in their analysis that nine barriers prevent FLMs from providing the type, quality, and quantity of support employees require:

- Training availability

- Attitude and empathy

- Mental health workplace barriers

- Physical proximity

- Time restrictions

- Workload restraints and employee barriers

- Status differences

- Relationship integrity

- Attitude.

Their findings suggest that these barriers are linked to each other, such that one barrier can interact with and affect other barriers. For example, workload restraints could worsen FLMs' mental health due to their decreasing ability to provide adequate support to their employees. Furthermore, FLMs' lack of empathy towards their employees may strengthen the latter's reluctance to engage with them; consequently, employees will be disincentivised to approach their FLMs for help. Individual barriers, as outlined above, should be recognised, addressed, and resolved promptly to prevent escalation of further impediments to effective EIP.

Recently, the role of FLMs has increased, and heavy workloads and comprehensive responsibilities have been combined because of several other organisational failures. Therefore, various factors hinder FLMs from executing HR practices. For

example, Whittaker & Marchington (2003) argued that FLMs are reluctant to take on HR responsibilities due to a lack of support from HR and clear procedures to follow during the delivery of the service, which can detract from the overall effectiveness. The unclear job description leads to a role conflict (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010).

Martins (2009) described how management intensifies this approach due to a lack of support along with the managerial culture, systems, and structures in the organisation. In addition, she articulated five main factors that are crucial to the success or failure of the role: firstly, the definition of the position; secondly, FLM training and development; thirdly, the perception/attitude of the critical stakeholders of the role (including FLMs themselves); fourthly, comprehensive organisational support of FLMs (whether lacking or present); and, finally, FLMs' performance and performance management.

In the context of increasing challenges that FLMs have faced in recent years, Townsend & Kellner (2015) argued that motivation, heavy workload, and FLMs' people management skills are measured as the most critical obstacles to the performance of FLMs. Several factors have been identified that affect FLMs' ability to perform HRM tasks or people management, including unwillingness or lack of interest due to a lack of motivation and commitment on the part of FLMs, along with their workload. "HRM role or rather, the performance of it, has been problematic because their primary responsibilities are in meeting service or production goals" (Martins, 2007, p.4).

These three role stress sources are also described in the analysis of Evans (2017) on the influence of role stress on FLMs. It was noted that role conflict refers to conflicts

in the expectations of role occupants such that conformity with one expectation makes it difficult to achieve other requirements of the role. Role overload arises when there is a mismatch between the work volume and the time available to accomplish it. Role ambiguity occurs when there is little or no information about performing the role.

Role stress has been associated with numerous negative performance results including reduced levels of work commitment and overall lack of interest to advance the objectives of the company (Anton, 2009). It also causes greater employee turnover (Hang-Yue et al., 2005); stress and interruption in the role (Tubre & Collins, 2000); and declining levels of employee job satisfaction and performance (Showail et al., 2013). Townsend (2014) noted that FLMs are not always committed to the views of their organisations: "[I]ndividuals promoted to FLMs positions will still have minds of their own, free will and a capacity for decision-making in their own best interests." Moreover, FLMs are the same as their subordinate employees in that they preserve some capability to determine the level of engagement in their work actively. FLMs are autonomous individuals who do not always follow to the letter the policies and procedures of HR. This informs their own decision-making processes.

In the context of barriers to the effective implementation of HR practices, Nehles et al. (2006) suggested five key factors that hinder FLMs in performing HR practices, under the AMO model. The first of these is lack of desire, whereby FLMs are unenthusiastic in their execution of HR practice. Second is lack of capacity, whereby FLMs have inadequate time for extra commitments. Third is lack of competencies, whereby FLMs have insufficient experience, specialist skills, and knowledge to

perform HR tasks. Fourth is lack of support for FLMs from HR managers, and fifth is a lack of policy and procedures. These barriers must be recognised and eliminated promptly to allow the smooth facilitation of employee voice, and clear HR policy and procedures to accomplish HR tasks at the operational level are required (pp.258–259).

According to Nehles et al. (2006), the five factors highlighted are likely to cause difficulties for FLMs in implementing HRM and explain their reluctance. Utilising the Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) AMO framework would encourage FLMs to overcome the five barriers highlighted above and thus perform HR tasks more effectively; FLMs must have appropriate abilities, motivations, and opportunities to perform their managerial skills adequately.

The survey was completed by the HR director, and among the findings was that "middle managers may resist employee involvement practices in response to threats to self-interest (managerial job loss and delayering). However, lack of congruence between organisational systems and structures and EIP goals and divided or unclear senior management support for EIP were also found to be strongly related to middle management resistance" (p.67). Their resistance also was linked to a lack of orientation to performance management and reward systems. Townsend (2014) affirmed that senior managers and HR departments see a lack of requisite skills as one of the most significant problems for FLMs. In their case study conducted across 76 hotels owned by Hilton UK, Maxwell & Watson. (2006) (2006) found that FLMs do not often admit that their lack of skills is problematic.

In the context of FLMs and HR study, Townsend (2014) argued that the reason FLMs become ineffective voice managers is due to a lack of requisite skills training and

experience in people management. FLMs assume that managing HR tasks is easy, but they face problems in the workplace (Renwick, 2003). They may show reluctance because they may not deem it to be in their interest to take on more responsibilities and may claim that a lack of time is a contributing factor preventing them from implementing an effective employee voice process. It can be argued that FLMs experience a variety of competing priorities in the workplace, including being expected to execute HR functions while still having to address matters that are the mainstay of their job, and a lack of basic information that FLMs require to do their job.

FLMs frequently juggle operational tasks with HR functions, resulting in time constraints. FLMs confronting time constraints due to other work requirements are regularly reluctant to participate in change-orientated efforts, which need HR-designated tasks. A common example is the friction arising when HR professionals try to introduce performance management tools, which FLMs frequently consider time-consuming and bureaucratic, and which HR specialists try to monitor to reduce biased outcomes (Papalexandris & Panayotopoulou , 2005). As Bos-Nehles et al. (2013, p.866), asserted, opportunity can be understood as including the following aspects: "First, line managers need good support from the HRM professionals. Second, there should be adequate capacity in terms of time to get involved in HRM implementation. Third, roles should be clearly defined and allocated, such that role ambiguity is minimised, and hence policies and procedures should be clear and supportive affording FLMs HR professionals' assistance and suitable time for HRM implementation will help to reduce role ambiguity and improve managers' capability to efficiently handle HR functions". This support can ease the issues faced by FLMs, resulting in more positive HRM results and clearer role potential.

Regularly, time pressures and workload related to business performance bring about problems for FLMs in applying sufficient time to communicating and consulting with employees (Cunningham & Hyman, 1999; McConville, 2006). If FLMs perceive a lack of capacity to allocate sufficient time to HRM responsibilities and complain about being burdened with their operational and HRM roles, then clearly the opportunity to perform their HRM tasks is limited (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Because of the time constraints outlined above, FLMs may find it increasingly difficult to find time to facilitate employee voice and to engage in the necessary communication resulting from employee voice, including dealing with employees' concerns and providing feedback to employees. Also, there may not be sufficient time for FLMs to foster good relationships with employees. Such relationships are desirable for the proper facilitation of employee voice.

CHAPTER FOUR: Literature review – AMO enhancing HR practices and employee voice

4.1 AMO model

This study will focus on the Omani private banking sector and how the application of AMO theory in that context may motivate FLMs to be effective voice managers for better overall organisational performance. Consequently, embracing the three AMO elements – ability, motivation, and opportunity – FLMs may contribute to enhancements in the voice process across the organisation and address how individual FLMs may manage the overall employee voice process. Concerning employees, the application of the AMO elements will address how they have a say in their organisation regarding expressing their ideas, opinions, and suggestions, which is perceived as the manifestation of employee motivation, thus becoming more effective in participating in managerial decision-making processes.

Since its development in 2000, the AMO theoretical framework (Appelbaum et al., 2000) has been utilised extensively as an excellent structured framework that provides a better linkage between HRM and performance (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016). In this context, Boxall et al. (2016, p. 109) noted that the "AMO model is central to the performance stream". Indeed, studies published after 2000 that explore the HRM–performance linkage utilise the AMO framework either explicitly or implicitly (Boselie et al., 2005; Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Ehrnrooth & Björkman, 2012; Hutchinson, 2013).

AMO theory has been adopted extensively and "allows various practices to be grouped into three different dimensions of performance antecedents and suggests

the interaction of these elements can help predict a large number of performance outcomes" (Kellner et al., 2019, p.311). Similarly, Purcell et al. (2003) argued that the AMO model could also be used to understand behavioural processes relating to people management initiatives and potential performance enhancements. According to Blumberg & Pringle (1982), all three of the individual components of AMO are essential to achieve enhanced organisational performance. This indicates that ability, motivation, or opportunity exclusively would not produce enhanced performance as one absent element means there would be very little positive impact on performance.

It has been demonstrated that all three areas can be achieved. For example, employee ability could be improved by developing the ability of employees by offering them training and coaching, starting with the adoption of an appropriate selection and hiring approach. Motivation can be encouraged through performance-based pay, performance management, rewards and incentives, and job security. The opportunity to participate can be provided by introducing self-directed teams, suggestion systems, participation in decision-making, information sharing, and flexible work assignments – all ultimately contributing to the organisation's success (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013. Kellner et al., 2019; Appelbaum et al., 2000; Jiang et al., 2012; Boselie, 2010). There is a link between employees' performance and organisational performance, in that the more employees are motivated and encouraged by their FLMs, the more likely it is that they will engage in working more productively.

4.1.1 AMO and the managerial perspective

Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) and Gilbert et al. (2015) have studied AMO theory from the managerial perspective. FLMs are broadly perceived as efficient in implementing HR practices. Based on AMO theory, according to Bos-Nehles et al. (2013), it is expected that the performance of FLMs in devolving HR practices is subject to their ability to apply HR practices as well as their motivation and the opportunities provided to apply those practices. The main contribution of Bos-Nehles et al.'s (2013) study is associating Nehles et al.'s (2006) five devolution factors – desire, capacity, competencies, support, and clear policy and procedures – with the AMO rubric and applying this to explain factors that impact FLMs' HRM implementation effectiveness.

In this context, Bos-Nehles et al.'s (2013) study was conducted in two organisations, examining line managers' motivation and opportunity to perform HR practices effectively. They described AMO as follows: ability – "HRM-related competencies necessary to successfully implement HRM practices on the work floor" (p.864); motivation – "desire and willingness to perform HRM tasks" (p.865); and opportunity – "environmental or contextual mechanisms that enable action, where the work environment provides the necessary support and avenues for expression" (p.865). They also noted that, "without ability, neither motivation nor opportunity would add much to performance" (p.864). The key factors are that FLMs should be suitably trained, appropriately rewarded, and working in an organisation whose culture promotes the AMO paradigm.

This indicates that ability is key to achieving higher performance. Further, Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) found that FLMs' ability is associated with obtaining the

necessary skills, knowledge, and training to motivate them to implement HR practices. There is a need to provide FLMs with appropriate opportunities to strengthen their ability, particularly time to perform an HR role. The authors concluded that FLMs need support from HR professionals, adequate capacity in terms of time to implement HR activities, a clear role defined and allocated, and transparent policies and procedures to support them in performing HR roles. This makes it clear that these requirements need to be available for FLMs to manage voice and decide what mechanisms and channels they utilise to encourage their employees to be active in EIP. Furthermore, it provides clarity concerning the challenges FLMs may encounter that prevent them from managing voice effectively.

Kaufman (2015) argued that employee voice is considered a linchpin practice in organisations with a high-involvement system. Lawler's (1988) model of high-involvement management work processes identified four critical elements labelled PIRK: power (P), information (I), rewards (R), and knowledge (K). Kaufman (2015, p.25) suggested that these elements are four "critical voice ingredients" and are linked with motivating employees to participate in the employee voice process. These may be applied differently across firms, for example, fast food restaurants versus consulting firms and clerical versus technical.

In this context, Boxall & Macky (2014, p.966) noted:

> [H]igh-involvement processes enable workers to exercise greater control over their work and participate in those decisions that concern them (the power or autonomy dimension), enhance the quality of communication and voice supporting this involvement process (information), reward workers fairly for

their contribution to success (reward) and provide the training and development they need to participate effectively (knowledge).

Therefore, it can be inferred that it is likely that both frameworks, AMO and PIRK, could be applied to employees in organisations as well as to individual FLMs. Hence, the resources mentioned above may help FLMs bridge the voice gap within the organisation and enhance their ability and motivation to manage EIP. Based on AMO theory, Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) argued that only ability has an independent and direct positive effect on FLMs' effective implementation of HRM. At the same time, this effect can be influenced, positively or negatively, by motivation and opportunity.

New FLMs could be motivated to perform HR practices effectively when organisations adopt a clear career path for them with HR department support and opportunities for them to develop and perform better HR functions (Kellner et al., 2016). Undoubtedly, the presence of FLMs who are significantly motivated would reduce the need for HRM departments to invest in expanding FLMs' motivation and skills to implement HRM practices (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Although many organisations have invested in management development programmes to enhance FLMs' knowledge and understanding of HRM practices, the rationale for organisations having these programmes is to ensure FLMs have insufficient up-to-date knowledge of HRM practices (Larsen and Brewster, 2003). In this regard, it can be suggested that FLMs should be required to participate in high-quality training programmes to ensure that they are in a position to deliver their extra responsibilities, including managing employee voice and issues. It is acknowledged that FLMs' skills in HRM practices differ across sectors. For instance, Kellner et al.'s (2016) study in an Australian hospital found that ward managers lack abilities in HRM

practices but have sufficient abilities in technical and operational jobs. It is suggested that FLMs' ability is the main predictor of implementing HRM practices effectively (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013).

According to Townsend et al. (2012), HRM is perceived as an element of most managerial jobs. In this regard, generally, FLMs have the responsibility to execute HR practices for the highest number of employees. Employees' perceptions of HRM are of practices that should be undertaken by FLMs (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Consequently, FLMs are significant facilitators in creating organisational performance (Currie & Procter, 2005). This implies that "variation in the implementation of similar practices may be directly attributable to the component elements of the AMO performance rubric" (Harney & Jordan, 2008, p.276).

Various researchers have applied the AMO framework to explore the HRM–performance relationship with FLMs. The "people-performance framework" (Purcell et al., 2003) cited in Harney & Jordan's (2008) study of call centres is a broad model that aims to "unlock the black box" of HRM–performance linkages. This approach provides a mechanism to understand the ability, motivation, and opportunities for FLMs' performance and any consequent influence on employee outcomes.

Gilbert et al.'s (2015) study of a multi-level model of line managers' effective HRM implementation conducted in five Belgian organisations drew data from 125 line managers. They explored whether FLMs' opinions of vital HRM processes were positively or negatively linked to their perceived AMO to perform an HR role, and whether this subsequently increased or decreased FLMs' effective HRM implementation as seen by their employees. They also found that FLMs' perception of AMO is positively linked to HRM implementation effectiveness. Comparing FLMs'

role with that of the HR department, FLMs are considered key performers in accomplishing core business objectives directly, with the potential to impact positively on their employees' motivation, commitment, and discretionary behaviour within their work units (Anderson et al., 2007; Gilbert et al., 2011).

The quantitative study conducted by McCarthy & Milner (2020) applied the AMO theory in managerial coaching in Australia. They argued that the AMO model is a "linear process" where motivated managers are trained in the first place and then apply their skills when they obtain an opportunity; therefore, ability, motivation, and opportunity must each be strengthened consistently (p.164). Drawing on AMO theory, Van Waeyenberg & Decramer's (2018) study examined FLMs' ability, motivation, and opportunity to contribute to performance management implementation. They suggested that, firstly, FLMs should have the required knowledge and skills (i.e. ability) to grasp how to appraise an employee's performance. Secondly, FLMs must be keen to follow the organisation's procedures and policies associated with performance management (i.e. motivation). Finally, FLMs should have adequate opportunity to implement their performance management responsibilities. This indicates that FLMs' role in implementing performance management systems must be harmonious with their other organisational roles, otherwise they might experience role conflict. Similarly, Bainbridge (2015) utilised AMO theory to argue that these factors enable consistency between FLMs to implement HRM systems and the organisation's HR strategy.

Utilising hierarchical linear models, Van Waeyenberg & Decramer (2018) extracted data from 71 line managers and 318 employees working in Flemish education and

found that FLMs' AMO to implement performance management systems was positively associated with employees' satisfaction with the system. On the other hand, FLMs' role conflict related to employees' dissatisfaction with the performance management system. It can be argued that training and providing clear procedures and policies and necessary opportunities are key factors for FLMs' AMO, to implement employee voice, as McCarthy & Milner (2020) proposed that AMO is a linear process.

The usefulness of AMO theory is not just beneficial in examining employee performance. Several scholars have presented empirical research that has utilised AMO theory to examine FLMs' performance in the implementation of HRM practices. Their research has suggested that implementing HRM practices effectively is possible when FLMs have the knowledge and skills to implement the practices, the motivation to carry out these practices, and the necessary opportunities to perform them (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert et al., 2015).

4.1.2 AMO and employee perspective

Ujma & Ingram argued in 2019 that, over the preceding few years, scholars had become convinced that HRM practices should focus on increasing employees' abilities and motivation, which should assist organisations in developing environments in which employees use their abilities and motivation for the benefit of both employees and organisational effectiveness. Several studies have confirmed that AMO theory is appropriate for the field of HRM and ER (Marin-Garcia & Tomas, 2016; Van Waeyenberg & Decramer, 2018; Ujma & Igram, 2019) and therefore is more suitable for explaining the complex relationship between FLMs and their employees within employee voice process.

According to Morales-Sánchez & Pasamar (2019), the AMO model suggests that enhancing employees' performance should include a planned strengthening of employees' AMO in organisations. The AMO model can be used to analyse the relationship between HR practices and performance in organisations (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boxall & Purcell, 2003).

It can be suggested that, to ensure that employees perform HRM practices effectively, they must have the ability to accomplish the job, be motivated because they are keen to do the job, and be provided with a suitable opportunity to perform effectively. Hence, some factors may be detracting from employees feeling enabled to participate in formal meetings. When employees receive signals from their FLMs that they are interested and willing to act upon their voice, their ability and motivation to speak up is enhanced. In contrast, employees may perceive it as risky to voice their ideas and opinions with absent FLMs (Detert & Burris, 2007). Additionally, administering rewards and recognition might enhance employees' motivation to participate (Karadas & Karatepe, 2019).

A meta-analysis by Rauch & Hatak (2016) of 56 studies that focused on SMEs suggested that they must implement HR practices that focus on enhancing skills, motivation, and empowerment. Obtaining the appropriate skills and knowledge increases ability to manage HR practices, allowing employees to perform their tasks appropriately (Subramony, 2009). Moreover, it has been argued that, in preparation to deliver permanent and improved outcomes and to contribute to the benefit of their firms efficiently, employees need to be motivated, committed, and satisfied (Paul & Anantharaman, 2003; Paauwe, 2004).

It has been argued that when employees feel their organisations have put in extra effort to enhance their AMO to advance their performance, they have a higher desire to continue with their organisation (Kundu & Gahlawat, 2018). It might be argued that the AMO model assesses employees based on its three elements: when organisations actively invest in these areas, employee satisfaction and retention rates improve.

Katou & Budhwar's (2010) empirical research investigating HRM performance, applying AMO theory and based on 178 organisations operating in the Greek manufacturing sector, suggested that the impact of HRM policies on organisational performance is fully mediated by employee skills, attitudes, and behaviour. In their review of the AMO model, Jiang et al. (2012) showed that HRM practices utilised for improving employees' knowledge, skills and abilities, motivations, and opportunities are associated with positive outcomes, including: enhanced employee commitment (Gong et al., 2009); high-performance work practices (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Boselie, 2010); lower turnover (Batt, 2002); better performance of services (Chuang & Liao, 2010); positive outcomes on organisational citizenship behaviour (Morales-Sánchez & Pasamar, 2019); increased organisational commitment (Ujma & Ingram, 2019); investigating consumer behaviour (Thøgersen, 1995); and managerial coaching in practice (McCarthy & Milner, 2020).

Furthermore, in their study, Morales-Sánchez & Pasamar (2019) found that HRM practices promoting employees' AMO encourage extra-role development of employees' skills, motivation, and opportunity to participate in the organisation and organisational support. They also suggested that organisations must sustain a positive climate that motivates employees to enhance their extra-role activities and

noted that "employees need to be given explicit support by organisations to increase the chances of developing extra-role behaviour in their workplace" (p.410). When FLMs implement HRM effectively, it increases employee AMO such that employees put in extra effort. This is perceived as a direct result of FLMs' ability to implement HRM effectively and this subsequently has a positive impact on employees' desire to remain within the organisation (Gilbert et al., 2011).

In their meta-analysis of employees' commitment to their organisation, Meyer et al. (2002) indicated that work experiences are strongly associated with affective commitment. Work experience may influence employees' AMO such that they perform better and, in turn, receive greater appreciation, which impacts their commitment to the organisation. Also, employees' commitment might reduce their turnover rate, meaning organisations are not required to hire new employees. FLMs' effective execution of HR practices is considered one of the factors that contribute to a supportive work environment. Furthermore, a better work environment also enhances employees' AMO, impacting individual and organisational performance.

In their study, Mowbray et al. (2020) proposed that there is an increasing effect of AMO components on employee voice behaviour, in that opportunity will enhance practices that affect voice, but HR practices related to motivation and ability will also play an important role in encouraging voice behaviour. Employee performance is related to these three components; employees should have the necessary skills and appropriate motivation and employers should offer employees the opportunity to participate (Appelbaum et al., 2000).

Different scholars have applied AMO in different subjects. It can be argued that, if the style of management in a given company fosters good employee relationships –

including encouraging employees to undertake continuing professional development, offering performance-related rewards and inducements, and promoting the advancement of their ideas, suggestions, and opinions through facilitation of employee voice – this will advance both overall company effectiveness and employee job satisfaction. Moreover, if an organisation embraces a culture that seeks to impose or dictate rather than to discuss and arbitrate, it risks inhibiting the expression of employee voice to the detriment of both employees and the company's overall effectiveness and productivity (Appelbaum et al., 2000). The vision of modern organisations is to develop competent and efficient employees with the required abilities, knowledge, and opportunity to carry out their obligations and contribute to organisational goals (Sargit et al., 2012). By applying the AMO model to analyse and develop the three key elements, organisations can create a climate that promotes employee satisfaction and retention.

Over the past few decades, scholars in HRM have applied the AMO framework to describe HRM practices as factors that affect employees' ability, for example, competencies that induce a high level of work engagement and accomplishment of success (Kellner et al., 2019). Furthermore, to achieve better performance, perceived as individual productivity, creativity, and discretionary effort, organisations must focus on advancing employees' ability and motivation while creating opportunities by providing them the autonomy and tools needed to participate in the decision-making process (Kaufman, 2015). AMO theory suggests that the interaction of these three factors helps improve employees' competence to attain organisational goals because these elements are linked to each other (Boselie et al., 2005).

Ujma & Ingram (2019) reviewed data from 164 employees working in 32 teams in international recruitment and selection agency departments in Poland. They summarised that AMO theory facilitates the articulation of several suggestions. Firstly, in applying AMO theory, HRM practices are likely to indirectly affect organisational performance by strengthening employees' abilities (or skills) and motivation, and by determining situations that enhance their creativity and responsibility and tie-up with the organisation's culture. Secondly, various HRM practices impact different factors of AMO; some practices boost abilities, some have an emphasis on motivation, and some are measured to have an impact on organisational culture. Thirdly, studies on HRM practices are seen as the antecedents of AMO and are located at the connection of management, psychology, sociology, and OB theories. Fourthly, AMO refers to and entails diverse elements, such as "skills, abilities, knowledge, commitment, job satisfaction, decision-making, empowerment, responsibility, creativity and innovation, and others" (Ujma & Ingram, 2019, p.144). Further, they argued that it is difficult to study all AMO factors in one study due to the multiplicity of distinct outcomes of AMO. Consequently, academics often focus on only one AMO outcome at a given time, such as satisfaction, commitment, knowledge, decision-making, or creativity. Finally, some of the AMO theory elements are considered an important organisational goal as such, one of them being organisational commitment (i.e. individual motivation) (Ujma & Ingram, 2019).

To allow FLMs to implement and perform HR tasks effectively, they should have the ability, motivation, and appropriate opportunities to accomplish the tasks because they are obliged to do so. At the same time, employees' ability and motivation have to be boosted to enable participation. They should be provided with appropriate

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opportunity by their organisation and their FLMs to voice their concerns, ideas, and opinions. According to Siemsen et al. (2008), there is some theoretical evidence to suggest that motivation, opportunity, and ability are complementary in driving behaviour. Furthermore, AMO theory remains relevant because the framing of voice from an AMO perspective overlaps with other theoretical perspectives. For example, providing management support for performance is widely considered an important job resource (in job-demands–resource theory), and may impact motivation and opportunity to exercise voice.

AMO is a framework to draw attention to important elements that shape employees' discretionary behaviour – in this case, whether and how to exercise their voice. It is true that a range of concepts, both psychological and sociological, underpin research on employee voice; however, AMO framing allows one to consider many of these while recognising that one (for example, the ability to express voice) in the absence of the other (opportunity to speak) makes voice less likely. Thus, what is particularly useful about AMO approaches is their integrative orientation that goes far beyond, for example, differences in whether individuals are motivated to use their voice.

4.2 Conclusion

It can be argued that an influential voice, either direct or indirect, is beneficial to employees and employers. For the former, it will lead to some extent to enhanced attitudes, loyalty, and commitment, while employers will continue to be competitive and productive. According to Marchington & Suter (2013), both formal and informal voice processes need to be merged to operate effectively. Despite their views, it can be seen from the arguments of some scholars that both FLMs and employees prefer

informal voice mechanisms to interact with each other and share information. In contrast, Cox et al. (2006) argued that a combination of EIP mechanisms allows employees to be involved in different ways and suggested that utilising a variety of formal mechanisms was the preferred approach. Combining formal and informal voice mechanisms would allow various issues to be better considered using different voices through different mechanisms. In this regard, Strauss (1998) argued that formal and informal participation are not mutually exclusive, and therefore it is essential to combine them as they complement each other.

The role of FLMs in creating formal voice mechanisms has not received much attention in the literature regarding employee voice, as FLMs are identified more with informal voice mechanisms such as informal discussion. Therefore, this thesis aims to explore how FLMs implement direct voice mechanisms and execute HR roles to hear and act upon employee voice and the factors that encourage organisations and HR departments to support FLMs to take up HR functions. Based on the literature review, the research questions have been designed to fill the gaps and contribute to the knowledge.

The embeddedness of voice mechanisms requires FLMs to have the requisite skills and training to enable them to be voice managers. The devolvement literature indicates certainty regarding the responsibility and roles of FLMs in both HRM and HRD. Some factors should be maintained and prepared, including clear role definition, policy and organisational support, and training, which is critical in the devolvement of HRM and HRD to allow FLMs to function effectively. As variability exists in how FLMs implement the direct employee voice process, the literature chapters emphasised that FLMs' AMO is crucial in implementing the employee voice

processes in organisations. As such, FLMs have been recognised in the literature as having fewer abilities, being demotivated, and requiring opportunities to become effective voice managers.

FLMs are the first level with managerial responsibility with whom employees interact regularly, and are responsible for attaining core business objectives and directly influencing their employees' motivation, commitment, and discretionary behaviour (Gilbert et al., 2011). In addition, to expect employees to participate in managerial decision-making processes through direct employee voice mechanisms, according to AMO, employees must have the required abilities and skills to participate in employee voice effectively, be motivated to put extra effort into performing their tasks, and be provided with the opportunity to use their skills. They should also be encouraged to express their grievances to enable them to contribute meaningfully to managerial decisions.

CHAPTER FIVE: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, the background and context of the thesis are explained, the relevant literature is reviewed, and the specific objectives and questions for this thesis are developed. However, the general purpose of this chapter is to introduce the critical philosophical research paradigms and theory, including the planned methodology for the thesis. The specific method being employed for data collection procedures is the qualitative approach. An overview of this method is described in the research design section, including its implementation techniques. Primary data collection is in the form of semi-structured interviews with FLMs, heads of department, HR managers, and employees from various occupational groups at HQ and branches. This section is followed by another that explains the sample size of the study and acknowledges the analysis of the qualitative method. The overarching strategy is that of a case study. In this case study, a comprehensive analysis implementing a qualitative method enables a better understanding of how FLMs facilitate direct employee voice processes and enable their employees to have a say through expressing their ideas, opinions, and suggestions and through raising their concerns in the banking sector in Oman.

Selected methods and approaches are also justified in this chapter. Researchers must provide justifications for their choice of methods and procedures employed in any thesis. This approach is necessary to enable examiners of the thesis to have confidence in the results. I will, therefore, begin this chapter by describing the critical philosophical research paradigms used in this thesis. This is followed by

outlining epistemological and ontological assumptions to explain the research methods adopted for data collection.

5.2 Research paradigms

Guba & Lincoln (1994, p.105) reported that every researcher needs to decide which paradigm they intend to apply, as an appropriate paradigm will provide a clear image and view of the project. Different philosophers have described paradigms differently. For instance, Kuhn (1962) explained a research paradigm as "the set of common beliefs and agreements shared between scientists about how problems should be understood and addressed". Bryman (1988, p.4) describes a paradigm for scientists as "a cluster of principles and orders which affect a particular research area, and how to conduct the research and how should interpret the outcome of the study". Pansiri (2005, p.192) noted that paradigms "define different views of the social world based upon different meta-theoretical assumptions concerning the nature of science and society".

Concerning social science, it should be noted that to view or look into a different angle of the globe, it is essential to be positioned in a particular paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Scotland, 2012). Burrell & Morgan (1979) stated that social sciences involve either a subjective or objective approach to research. Under these two primary philosophical approaches, there is a group of core assumptions concerning the ontology and epistemology of the reality being investigated. The research paradigms have been categorised and can be explored by three fundamental and interconnected elements: ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Scotland, 2012).

Ontology is the study of 'being' and is concerned with 'what is', with assumptions concerning the nature of reality and what we can understand about that reality (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2004) – how it is possible to view and know about the social world (Snape & Spencer, 2003) and "what kind of things are there in the world" (Benton & Craib, 2010, p.4).

Epistemology concerns the assumptions we make about the ways of knowing or the nature of knowledge and the connection between the researcher and what can be identified (Ormston et al., 2014; Richards, 2003). Crotty (1998) defines it as a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. Furthermore, he argued that epistemology involves the nature of knowledge and its possibilities, such as what knowledge is possible to endeavour and what is not, and its scope and legitimacy (Crotty, 1998).

Methodology allows the investigation of reality; basically, the researcher applies a technique to find out what beliefs can be known (Healy & Perry, 2000). As specified by Benton & Craib (2011), the main dominant paradigms within social science are positivism and interpretivism. However, it is essential to discuss those dominant paradigms to know which one is a better fit for this study (Figure 5.1).
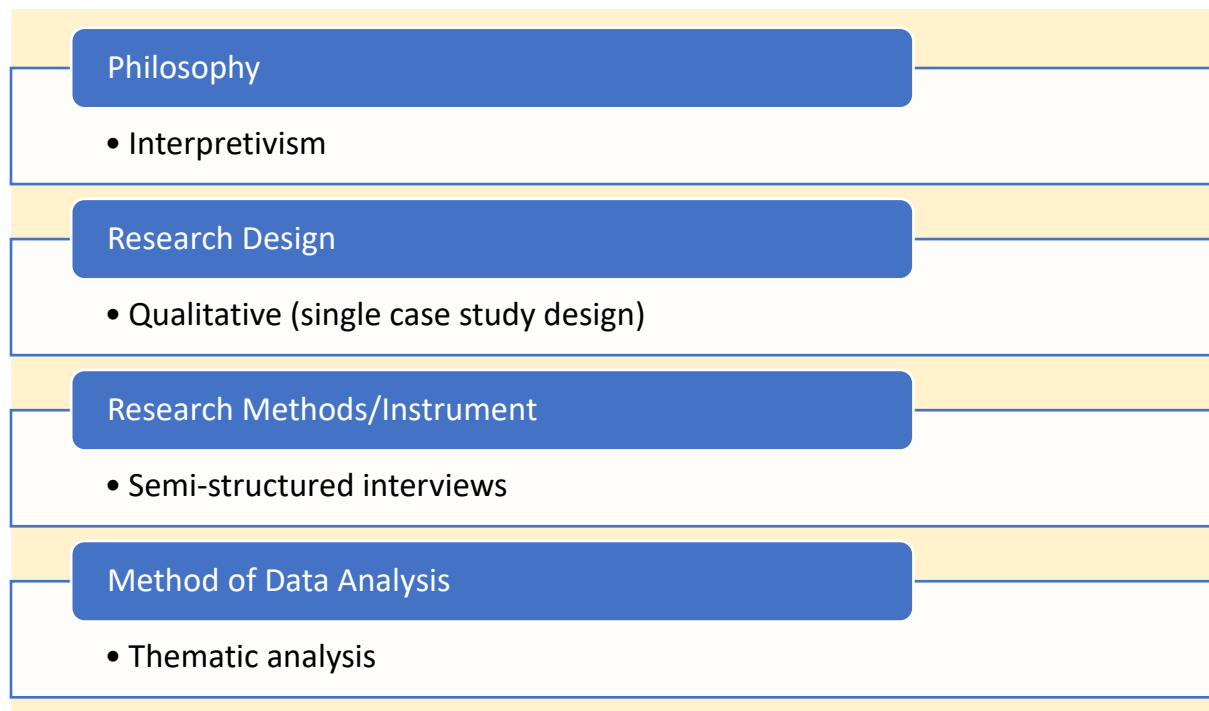
Figure 5.1: Methodological framework

5.2.1 The interpretive paradigm

Interpretivism is considered an opposing view to positivist and objectivist theory as well as a critique of positivist epistemology (Bryman, 2008; Crotty, 1998). "As emphasised by researchers, interpretivist knowledge is derived from the meanings attached to the concerned phenomenon" (Wijesinghe, 2011, p.13). Wijesinghe (2011) further explained that the interpretive approach differs from the positivist; however, there are some similarities. In interpretivism, facts are multiple and constructed, creating a holistic picture. Therefore, referring to the concerned phenomenon, explorations can be deep and complex.

As stated by Bryman (2012, p.28), "[I]nterpretivism shares a view that the subject matter of the social sciences, people and their institutions is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences." Bryman (2012) explained that a person is not an

object that acts as a machine, but is aware and sensible about what is going on. There is a need for the subjective matter of human affairs to be understood in order to understand social phenomena and to interpret how people's concern is significant to their own experiences. Cohen et al. (2007) stated that "social science is seen as a subjective rather than objective undertaking and is a means of dealing with the direct experience of people in specific contexts and is when social scientists understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (p. 21).

5.2.2 The positivist paradigm

As specified by Bryman (2012, p.28), positivism is underpinned by an epistemological position; its emphases are on the objective reality of the subject, and there can be only one, tangible reality in the world. Facts and values are very distinctive, and therefore objectivism in research is possible (Snape & Spencer, 2003; Wijesinghe, 2011). Positivist assumptions measure quantitatively with independent facts about the single reality. In other words, since the data and its observation do not change, they are value-free. Therefore, human behaviour is categorised by predictability and causality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012).

Positivism assumes that reality is objective, and the researcher is an independent observer of that reality (Addae & Baffour, 2015, p.155). It has continuously been believed by positivists that different researchers will observe the same accurate problem; therefore, this will lead to generating similar, if not the same, outcomes (Creswell, 2009, cited in Addae & Baffour, 2015, p.155).

There are distinctions between positivism and interpretivism, as formulated by Weber (2004). He identified seven areas of comparison between the two paradigms, as shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Key differences between positivism and interpretivism

	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontology	Person (researcher) and reality are separate.	Person (researcher) and reality are inseparable (life-world).
Epistemology	Objective reality exists beyond the human mind.	Knowledge of the world is intentionally constituted through a person's lived experience.
Research object	Research object has inherent qualities that exist independently of the researcher.	Research object is interpreted in light of meaning structure of person's (researcher's) lived experience.
Method	Statistics, content analysis.	Hermeneutics, phenomenology.
Theory of truth	Correspondence theory of truth: one-to-one mapping between research statements and reality.	Truth as intentional fulfilment: interpretations of research object match lived experience of object.
Validity	Certainty: data truly measures reality.	Defensible knowledge claims.
Reliability	Replicability: research results can be reproduced.	Interpretive awareness: researchers recognise and address implications of their subjectivity.

Adapted from Weber (2004).

These two paradigms have been recognised by various academics and researchers (Cohen & Manion, 1994; Verma & Mallick, 1999; Muijs, 2004; Wiersma & Jurs,

2005). Positivism is linked to the normative, scientific, empiricist, or quantitative paradigm, while interpretivism is related to the naturalistic, constructivist, or qualitative paradigm. The present study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm; therefore, the next section presents the argument for adopting an interpretive approach.

5.2.3 The research paradigm adopted in this thesis

Based on the specific research questions drawn in Chapter 1, this thesis is grounded in the interpretive paradigm. The key aim of this thesis is to evaluate direct employee voice processes as formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say through expressing their concerns ideas, opinions, and suggestions regarding the effectiveness of both employees and FLMs. Employees generally seek to share knowledge with management to thus become partners in decision-making processes according to their subjective experience (Noah, 2008). Thus, the study is underpinned by the assumption that the research participants, including employees from different levels in the selected organisation, will have different understandings about employee voice practices.

As the interpretive viewpoint is described by the subjectivity of knowledge, with the active involvement of the researcher with all FLMs, HR managers, and employees who contributed to answering the research questions, it is essential to get a better grasp of their interpretations in respect of direct EIP. Consequently, the researcher should be involved in the investigation context as the researcher is the main data-collection instrument (Radnor, 2002). The fundamental notion of the interpretive approach is that the researcher is perceived as part of the research, interprets the

data, and would never be fully objective and isolated from the research (Weber, 2004).

Positivism would not fit with this thesis, as it has been criticised by many social scientists regarding its restriction or deterministic 'blind objectivism' (Crotty, 1998; Siebert et al., 2016, p.277; Bhaskar, 1998, p.125). However, interpretivism could fit into the framework of the research objectives. This is because the emphasis of interpretivism is on several realities of the phenomenon and positivism is based on one reality. Referring to the research subject, realities are based on different practices among people of different mentalities spread in various areas of the organisation. Thus, the emphasis is on subjective reality; and to generate data, researchers usually interact with the subjectivity of the research.

Individuals think epistemologically, observing social reality in various ways and, accordingly, their actions and decisions are influenced by their interpretations of their reality. Hence the interpretive researcher's task is to "make sense of their world, to understand it and to see what meaning is imbued in that situation by the people who are part of it" (Radnor, 2002, p.21). Interpretivism understands reality as being subjective. Its ontological point of view is relativism, in which reality differs from one person to another (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Moreover, many researchers have reported successful results in qualitative approaches, based on interpretive research, which have progressively increased in management and organisational sciences (Prasad & Prasad, 2002), and generally within social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Schwandt, 1994). Based on such facts, this thesis will adopt an interpretivist paradigm as a philosophical stance. Employee voice research in OB is more tied to the positivist

perspective, with a focus on identifying general patterns and causal relationships using quantitative analysis. This is in contrast to the interpretivist perspective usually observed in disciplines such as sociology or IR, which focuses on understanding the subjective meanings and socially constructed realities that people attribute to their actions and relationships. In OB, positivist techniques seek to discover observable phenomena and statistical linkages, whereas interpretivism delves deeper into context-specific, socially created interpretations of those phenomena.

Adopting such a paradigm for this thesis is confirmed to be valuable, especially in studying phenomena that require deeper understanding: the interpretive researcher obtains the bulk of the data from conversing with participants in the setting in which they create their realities (Radnor, 2002). Denzin & Lincoln (2011) observe that interpretive philosophy is essential in qualitative research. This method enables researchers to comprehend the subjective and socially created interpretations that individuals assign to the phenomena under study (Creswell, 2014).

When deciding on a research design, researchers often evaluate three approaches: deductive, inductive, and abductive. For this thesis, the inductive approach is most suited. According to Bryman & Bell (2007), this method entails gathering specific observations to derive broader conclusions, successfully progressing from particular instances to a general study (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Differing from deductive research, the inductive approach does not follow a set framework. This study focuses on the elements that influence the quality of direct employee voice channels, facilitated by FLMs. The inductive approach enables significant

generalisations based on the findings from interviews from different levels (HR managers, FLMs, and employees).

The methodology of this thesis is based on key research in the employee voice literature that uses inductive methodologies and an interpretive approach. For example, Dundon et al. (2004) used qualitative case studies in their article, "The Meanings and Purpose of Employee Voice". They explored how employees express their voice and how line managers play a role in facilitating this process. They looked at several areas of employee voice, demonstrating its complexities and the importance of understanding how organisations work. This is consistent with an inductive research approach, which seeks to extract detailed information from qualitative data to find broader themes and understandings.

Morrison's (2023) work, "Employee Voice and Silence: Taking Stock a Decade Later", provides a comprehensive assessment of the trajectory of employee voice research, highlighting both considerable gains and persistent gaps in understanding. The article explains how employee voice and silence are inextricably linked, emphasising the role of the surrounding setting in shaping these dynamics. This study's interpretive and inductive methods benefit greatly from Morrison's work, providing a strong foundation for understanding how managers enable direct voice channels and how these channels affect employee engagement and OB. By incorporating the AMO framework, this study seeks to shed light on the viewpoints and meanings that FLMs and employees attach to their activities in certain organisational environments.

The primary focus of this study is to collect rich qualitative data via comprehensive interviews with HR executives, FLMs, and employees. This strategy permits new

themes and ideas to develop rather than just testing existing theories. While past theories inform the research background, the goal is to identify new patterns based on participant experiences, which represent the complex dynamics of the AMO framework in the Omani context. This study aims to clarify how employees' ability, motivation, and opportunities affect their voice in the organisation. This approach enhances understanding of employee voice dynamics while addressing issues about theory testing. Finally, the findings attempt to refine and expand the AMO model within employee voice, demonstrating how these elements function in Oman. This combination of qualitative approaches and the AMO framework offers a comprehensive perspective of employee voice dynamics, contributing significantly to the broader literature on employee voice.

5.3 Research design

As with all research studies, the research design officially describes the methods and procedures utilised to collect data and defines "where, when, from whom and under what circumstances data were obtained" (Kerlinger, 1986, p.279). This study uses a case study method employing a qualitative data collection method.

The researcher's intention is to gather data qualitatively from three different levels – senior HR managers, FLMs, and employees – from different departments and branches of one of the leading banks in the Sultanate of Oman. The decision was taken to interview these three levels, as the main aim of this thesis is to fully explore how the direct employee voice process is formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say by expressing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions. First of all, interviewing FLMs and employees provides a broader understanding of the

employee voice process and the relationship between employees and FLMs and how this interaction functions between them. Secondly, interviewing HR managers validates the accuracy of the responses of FLMs and employees on the channels and mechanisms that are available in the organisation, because the HR department is responsible for the implementation of channels that allow employees to express their voice.

While analysing the dynamics of employee voice, it is critical to note that participation in this study is entirely voluntary, with volunteers coming from all levels of the organisation. This emphasis on personnel at a 'higher level' originates from the belief that they have more authority and influence over decision-making processes. However, this emphasis may neglect the reality that the lowest levels of the hierarchy are most likely to be silent owing to fear of consequences, lack of confidence, or the idea that their contribution may not be valued or play a significant role in organisational dynamics.

These various levels of employees provide diverse and fruitful data to answer the research questions and attain the study's aims. Nevertheless, some participants, especially junior employees, are more likely to be silent and reluctant to provide more detailed answers, perhaps because they perceive themselves to be of little value within the organisation and thus to have little to contribute. This reluctance from the lowest levels of the hierarchy impacts the findings of the study where the researcher to some extent is not able to fully compare the data gathered from different levels of the study. However, the fact that employees are the key players in the process of employee voice and that their valid and valuable responses can be heard enables a fuller grasp of the information to be gleaned to make the study

more solid. The following sections elaborate on the case study methodology, qualitative research design methods, and instruments used.

5.4 Case study method

Yin (2009) argued that many social scientists believe that an appropriate way to conduct exploratory research is through case study methods. These allow empirical examination and deep investigation of modern phenomena in their real-life contexts, where there are no clear boundaries between the phenomena and real life. Zainal (2007) noted that case study research can be in depth and is accepted as a research method used to understand and explore complex issues. Tellis (1997) argued that a case study is the best method to clarify the process and results of a phenomenon, achieved through observation, reconstruction, and case analysis within the investigation.

The scope of the study is significant when considering how to plan case study research. For example, an investigation can examine one aspect and focus narrowly on just one case or consider several case studies or several factors (Marelli, 2007). Therefore, after creating the case study, it is crucial to start a framework before data collection. This includes the dimensions to consider: the unit of analysis, selection of cases, scope of the study, time, sources of information, and data collection methods (Marelli, 2007; Stake, 1995).

A case study can also be employed to evaluate most programmes in government, education, non-profit, and private sectors. Marelli (2007) affirmed that the researcher's first decision is to identify the individual or entities to be investigated. In this study, it is the banking sector, and it is necessary to determine if it fulfils the

essential criteria for a single case study. Most importantly, researchers should always plan to determine the best courses of action to take to engage with the selected research subjects.

Case study findings can suggest "a theoretical contribution if they challenge, change or fundamentally advance our understanding of a phenomenon or initiate new theory" (Ridder et al., 2014, pp.380–381). With the intention of providing a contribution, the researcher must "engage scholars in an intellectual conversation" (Bansal & Corley, 2011, p.235). Furthermore, case study methodology is considered a practical research method while exploring 'how' and 'why' questions to narrow the interest in a specific topic (Yin, 2014, p.14). Ridder (2017) believes that there are four case study research designs which can be used. First is "no theory first" (getting data through the richness of observations without being limited by a theory). Second is "gaps and holes" (defining gaps or holes in existing theory to advance theoretical explanations). Third is "social construction of reality" (the purpose of the research is not theory-building, but to advance the understanding of the research issue). Finally is the "anomalies" (case study research is guided by the anomalies, to such an extent that previous theory could not explain these through internal contradictions of theory, theoretical gaps, or silences) (pp.286–290).

Although much work has been undertaken in the study of employee voice, it has not generally been researched through the lens of AMO theory; therefore, there remains a significant gap in research here, specifically concerning the Omani context. Thus, the 'gaps and holes' analogy would fit the research objectives. However, it is necessary to consider some of the challenges that the researcher

might face when implementing such case study research. These will be elucidated in the strengths and limitations section of this thesis.

5.4.1 Single case study

As Patton (2002) reported, there are three groupings of case studies: the single case study, collective or multiple case studies, and a series of layered case studies. With Patton's definition, it can be argued that Creswell's (2013) detailed definition is advantageous: *"a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (*a case*) or multiple bounded systems (*cases*) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observation, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes"* (p.97). Frequently, a case study has a combination of data collection methods, using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, including interviews and questionnaires (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Furthermore, Cresswell & Poth (2016) identified three types of case studies: the single instrumental case study, the collective or multiple case study, and the intrinsic case study. Within the single instrumental case study, the researcher concentrates deeply on the issue of interest and then selects one given case to study. With the collective or multiple case study, the researcher selects one issue or concern and selects multiple case studies to demonstrate the issue. The purpose of selecting multiple cases is to show different perspectives on the issue. The final type is an intrinsic case study, in which the focus is on the case itself (e.g. evaluating a programme, or studying a student having difficulty) because the case presents a unique or unusual situation (p.74). Moreover, the case study could be conducted as

an individual, a small group, an organisation, or on a partnership basis; it could also be a community, a relationship, or a decision process (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

In the same vein, Zainal (2007, p.1) stated that a "case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context. In most cases, a case study method selects a small geographical area or a very limited number of individuals as the subjects of study." According to Yin (2014), there are different rationales for selecting a single-case design. As Ridder (2017, p.287) noted:

> [P]purposeful sampling is conducted if an extreme case or an unusual case is chosen and if rarely observable phenomena can be investigated concerning unknown matters and their relationships. Common cases allow conclusions for a broader class of cases. Revelatory cases provide the opportunity to investigate into a previously inaccessible inquiry, and the longitudinal study enables one to investigate a single case at several points in time.

The purpose of choosing a single case study is to rigorously investigate new phenomena.

Also, in a single case study design, the researcher concentrates intensely on the issue of interest and then selects one specific case to study (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). In the detailed explanation and analysis, single case studies are seen as adventurous, particularly when the need arises to have a greater understanding of 'how' and 'why' questions (Ridder, 2017). There is an opportunity to open black boxes when conducting single case study research and thus investigate the phenomenon's underlying factors (Fiss, 2009). Moreover, Gomm et al. (2000) argue that single case study findings identify and reveal patterns and relationships, producing, spreading, or examining a theory.

Case study research has a diverse purpose with regard to contributing to theory. Within single case studies, research retains influence in generating theory by building relationships within different situations (Ridder, 2017). This can be illustrated by describing the various competitive advantages of a single case study. Ridder (2017) suggested that a single case can assist when testing theory with a 'gaps and holes' design, where the test could be limited to particular events. Testing in gaps and holes is similar to a single experiment, assuming that a single case presents a serious case. Yin (2014) summed up some facts regarding single case studies, noting that "overall, the single-case design is eminently justifiable under certain conditions especially where the case represents a critical test of existing theory" (p.56).

According to Siggelkow (2007), the existence of a phenomenon can be richly described by single case studies, which have an advantage over multiple case studies in that they tend to give rise to deeper and more diverse theories. According to Yin (2003), when the researcher intends to examine one single thing (e.g. an individual from a particular group) or study a single group (e.g. a group of people, i.e. an organisation or community), then a single case study is the right decision. Further, Gustafsson (2017) articulated that once a single case is conducted, the investigator has an opportunity to question old theoretical relationships and discover new theories because a more careful study is made. The benefits of single case studies are that they are less expensive and less time-consuming than multiple case studies. This situation allows the researcher to understand the subject in greater depth (Dyer et al., 1991).

Based on Zainal's (2007) argument, this thesis adopts a qualitative single case study approach. It involves investigating data within a specific context in one private banking sector and is an appropriate method to utilise to help achieve the objectives and answer the research questions of the study. There is significant emphasis on the context because of the exploratory nature of the qualitative method approach.

5.5 Qualitative research

Creswell (1994) defined qualitative methodology as a study process to understand a social or human issue, based on construction structure, comprehensive picture, words framed, and detailed views of informers, in a normal situation. Creswell (1998) also expanded the concept by delineating it based on diverse methodologies within traditions of inquiry. In this regard, Merriam (2002, p.4) noted that "understanding a phenomenon from the participant's perspectives – the meanings people derive from a situation or understanding a process – requires asking important questions, questions that lend themselves to qualitative inquiry".

Qualitative research could be interpreted as a research strategy that highlights words and values as opposed to quantification in the collection, analysis, and presentation of data. It focuses more attention on theory generation rather than theory testing, highlighting an inductive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Several instruments are generally utilised in qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual resources (Creswell, 2007).

Hennink et al. (2020) detailed the differences in the data methods employed identifying seven areas of comparison, shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Key differences between quantitative and qualitative research

	Quantitative research	Qualitative research
Objective	To quantify data and extrapolate results to a broader population.	To gain a detailed understanding of underlying reasons, beliefs, and motivations.
Purpose	To measure, count, quantify a problem. How much? How often? What proportion? Relationships in data.	To understand why? How? What is the process? What are the influences or contexts?
Data	Data are numbers.	Data are words.
Study population	Large sample size of representative cases.	Small number of participants selected purposefully.
Data collection methods	Population surveys, opinion poll analysis.	In-depth interviews, observation, group discussions.
Analysis	Analysis is statistical.	Analysis is interpretive.
Outcome	To identify prevalence, averages, and patterns in data. To generalise.	To develop an initial understanding, to identify and explain behaviour, beliefs, or actions.

Source: Hennink et al. (2020).

The difference between quantitative and qualitative methods is evident as Table 5.1 shows. The quantitative method focuses primarily on recognising variables and utilising statistical relationships in order to answer the research questions. In contrast, qualitative methods focus mainly on contextual understanding (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, a mixed method involves integrating quantitative and qualitative forms of data and utilising different designs that can include philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. This approach's central assumption is that combining qualitative and quantitative methods will provide a comprehensive understanding of a research problem. It usually involves both forms

of data being collected simultaneously and then integrating the information to interpret the overall results (Creswell, 2013). The fundamental purpose of qualitative methodology is observing and describing precisely and gathering and analysing circumstances arising in their usual social contexts (Fryer, 1991).

The qualitative method allows researchers to fully understand what has been observed without under-representing or exaggerating events observed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and to observe events as they occur within their natural settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Additionally, qualitative methods are sensitive to their context, and research can be achieved in natural settings. This results in three key advantages of the methodology: exploration takes place; concealed reports can be highlighted; and a deep examination of the processes takes place (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The researcher utilises a qualitative methodology to examine different factors, including individuals' behaviours, attitudes, and opinions linked to the studied subject; this is recognised for its subjectivity (Hennink et al., 2020). Moreover, the researcher benefits from utilising the qualitative method when intending to examine the subject area in depth. This approach will provide him/her with the flexibility to highlight the research subject's significance (Yin, 2011). The following sections will therefore review qualitative research design and its instruments.

5.5.1 Qualitative research instruments (interview)

Qu & Dumay (2011) argued that the most effective qualitative data collection method is the research interview as extensively used in conducting field studies. It comprises gathering data through direct verbal communication between the interviewer and interviewee or between groups of individuals (Borg & Gall, 1989). Interview, as defined by Cannell & Kahn (1968) (quoted Radnor, 2002, p.59) is a

"two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purposes of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by him on content specified to the research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation". This quotation illustrates that an interview method involves three elements – the interviewee, interviewer, and subject – to accomplish a particular goal.

Besides different kinds of skills such as note-taking and listening carefully, interviews also require careful planning and appropriate preparation (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Qu & Dumay (2011) further argue that they are perceived as a convenient instrument from which researchers learn the world of others. However, even although interviewer and interviewee speak the same language, there could be completely different cultural meanings in their words (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Interviews are the most widely applied tool for conducting data collection in qualitative research methodology (Cassell, 2005; Alsaawi, 2014). However, they can also be utilised as a complementary or supplementary method along with a questionnaire, as planned for this thesis: "the questionnaire providing what is often called the 'hard data' and the interviews … making it possible to explore in detail and in-depth some essential aspects covered by the questionnaire (supplementary) or related topics which do not lend themselves to the questionnaire approach (complementary)" (Verma & Mallick, 1999, p.122).

Additionally, as a complementary approach, interviews seek to "follow up unexpected results, or to validate other methods, or to go deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding as they do" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.273). Whether utilising interviews as a means of complementary or supplementary data gathering, Alsaawi (2014) stated that there are several types of

interviews which can be applied in social research. These are structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews. Based on the quality of the research questions, the most appropriate type of interview is used to obtain the required information. These are discussed below.

5.5.1.1 Structured interviews

Structured interviews are a more controlling way to obtain information from interviewees. Interview questions are prepared and written down before the interview is conducted, and there is limited possibility for probing the answers of the interviewees (Bryman, 2008).

5.5.1.2 Unstructured interviews

Unstructured interviews contrast with and are opposite to structured interviews, in that there is flexibility and questions are open. This method is similar to a conversation with a single question asked by the interviewer with the interviewee having an opportunity to respond freely (Dornyei, 2007; Doyle, 2004; Bryman, 2012).

5.5.1.3 Semi-structured interviews

"Qualitative interviewing varies a great deal in the approach taken by the interviewer" (Bryman, 2008). It combines structured and unstructured interviews. In this method, the interviewer's questions are planned previously, with the interviewees having an opportunity to simplify and elaborate via open-ended questions. Dornyei (2007) recommended that open-ended questions should be

prepared in advance. Thus, a semi-structured interview is the most appropriate type to obtain more comprehensive information from the interviewees:

> Semi-structured interviews have been selected as the means of data collection on account of two primary considerations. Firstly, they are well suited for exploring the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers. Secondly, the varied professional, educational and personal histories of the sample group preclude the use of a standardised interview schedule. (Barriball & While, 1994, p.330)

Although this method of collecting data is considered appropriate, some challenges may occur when the researcher aims to implement it. It has been noted that some participants might be hesitant to allow the interview to be recorded (Borg & Gall, 1989). Furthermore, the data gathering through the interview method may introduce unconscious bias from the researcher. Additionally, the interviewer must be courteous and skilful to prevent any stress (Verma & Mallick, 1999). To avoid such challenges, the researcher should relay to the interviewees that anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed by explaining the importance of ethics in social research; otherwise, there will be no trust and the interviewee might not feel confident enough to answer the research questions.

5.5.2 Rationale for interview

The reason for choosing face-to-face semi-structured interviews is to achieve a more in-depth understanding and interpretation of the employees' voices, which includes interviewing HR managers, FLMs, and employees. Such face-to-face interviews sit well with the culture of Middle Eastern countries, particularly those in the GCC,

where top-level employees prefer to engage face to face (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014). Accordingly, in this research, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted online via the Zoom platform, a video conferencing program, due to restrictions of Covid-19 on meeting physically. Interviews may be costly and require a significant amount of time especially if interviewees refuse to be interviewed via Zoom and demand that face-to-face contact take place. As with all research studies, the research design officially describes the procedure for conducting a study. To provide an appropriate answer to the specific research questions, this study adopts a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews for data collection.

5.5.3 Translation of interview questions

The researcher conducted this study in the Arabic context, specifically that of Oman, the home country of the researcher. After the creation of the interview questions, they were translated accurately into Arabic to avoid misunderstanding, because Arabic is the official language in Oman. However, as English is widely used and understood in Oman, the researcher preferred to have versions in both languages. It was therefore important that the Arabic version reflect and have the same meaning as the English version. Moreover, the researcher sent both versions to an Arabic scholar who is a bilingual expert from Sultan Qaboos University to ensure accuracy.

5.5.4 Conducting the qualitative research

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using the Zoom platform in both Arabic and English. The interviewer made the questions more accessible to

interviewees by encouraging them to answer either in Arabic or in English. Moreover, all meetings were recorded using two different devices, the researcher's own mobile phone audio recorder and the Zoom recorder. The interview did not exceed one hour to avoid participant exhaustion.

In this thesis, the major source of data collection is the use of employee interviews to facilitate achieving the objectives of the research. These revolve around employees' perceptions of the voice processes within their organisation, through which they may express their suggestions and concerns to FLMs. Therefore, HR managers, FLMs, and employees were interviewed to answer the interview questions, which reflect the main research questions. However, some of the questions for the above parties overlapped and paralleled.

5.6 Interview guide

In a qualitative study, it is found that rigorous data collection procedures are key to the quality and trustworthiness of the data (Kitto et al., 2008). Also, Gibbs et al. (2007) suggest that they crucially influence the results of the study. Interviews are the most commonly used data collection method (Taylor, 2005) and the semi-structured format is often used in interview procedures in qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured interview method is effective in allowing a degree of trust and openness between the interviewer and the participant. This is one of its main advantages (Galletta, 2012) and prompts the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions derived from participants' responses (Hardon et al., 2004).

The deployment of semi-structured interviews requires previous knowledge of the research subject because the interview questions evolve from such knowledge (Kallio et al., 2016). Therefore, the interview questions are decided before the interview and formulated using an interview guide (Mason, 2006), which includes the main topics of the study (Taylor, 2005). It offers a focused structure for the discussion during the interviews, but should be followed loosely as the intention is to explore the research area by collecting similar types of information from each participant (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010). This provides the participant with guidance on what to reveal and share during the interview process (Gill et al., 2008). Consequently, the interview guide for this study was developed by focusing on three key literature areas and the particular research questions related to each area. Hence, the interview questions were formed into three sets to interview the HR managers, FLMs, and employees. This allowed the researcher to increase the validity and reliability of the data, facilitated further by translating into Arabic the interview questions for employees only. The Arabic translation should help provide clarity on specific points between interviewer and interviewee. It is, however, understood that HR managers and FLMs will already be proficient in English, and thus no Arabic translation is necessary for them.

5.7 Data collection process

This section highlights the process that was followed throughout the data collection. This process was accomplished in three levels by interviewing two people from the HR department, 12 FLMs, and nine employees. At the beginning of the study, the researcher intended to conduct face-to-face interviews by agreeing on a place and time with the main contact appointed by the organisation. McGrath et al. (2019)

argue that conducting face-to-face interviews provides an approach whereby the interviewer builds rapport and establishes a comfortable interaction with interviewees. This method is important for the quality and quantity of data collected. However, the interviews were conducted online via Zoom due to the pandemic. The Covid-19 outbreak has forced people to work remotely, irrespective of their preferences and abilities and the nature of their jobs (Wang et al., 2021).

The first step, before the interviews, was to send the interview questions in both Arabic and English to the participants. This was done in order to familiarise them with the questions in their native language and because some participants preferred to be interviewed only in Arabic. Therefore, those interviews that were conducted in Arabic were translated into English, which required the researcher to revisit the original recordings to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher introduced himself and explained the aim of the study to the participants. The researcher began by asking them what they do in their organisation, who they report to, and also the size and nature of their work team. This created a basic bond that mitigated the nervousness of the participants and made it more comfortable for them to provide fruitful answers. The interview questions began with the researcher asking the participants about the policy, vision, values, or written documents that describe the organisation's attitude to employees' views and employees having a say in the organisation.

In the interview most of the participants affirmed that the organisation has created a policy which fuels a culture that encourages employees to express their views through different mechanisms and channels. On the other hand, other participants remarked that there is no defined policy as such, although the organisation has

created an open-door policy and one-to-one meeting strategy that enable employees to express their views via their line managers. Chapter 6 elaborates on what was discussed in the interview sessions based on the interview questions set for this thesis.

The impact of remote data collection during a global pandemic is that, with interviews being conducted electronically, and with the lack of rapport and concentration due to staff choosing not to use video, and often multitasking, this could all lead to interviewees not giving the interview their full attention, thus possibly affecting the quality of responses. There are factors that affected the quality of the data gathered during the pandemic, including being unable to interpret body language, which potentially affects the way the interviewer interprets the interviewees' responses. Also, one participant was concerned with the motivation of the interviewer whom she knew had worked in the banking sector, suspecting him of working undercover for management. She thus was reluctant to answer the interviewer's questions honestly. This posed a considerable challenge to the interviewer in keeping the interviewee focused on the task in hand.

Added to this were the workplace distractions that caused interviewees to lose focus, such as working in an open-plan environment and being constantly interrupted by colleagues. The organisational culture assumes that employees sit in an open space where they can talk together. Another factor is the national culture whereby people greet each other even when they see the other person is busy on the phone or an online meeting. This caused interruption during interviews, as happened with three candidates with their colleagues interrupting just to greet them and to invite them for a coffee. Moreover, one candidate participated from his

car and the signal was weak, thus it was difficult for the researcher to fully understand the participant's response. One could say it was his choice to participate from his car rather than from his workplace perhaps due to time constraints or for fear of being overheard.

5.7.1 Data analysis

This section provides an analytical methodology managed in this study with the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews with HR managers, FLMs, and employees from the different occupational groups. The researcher merged the data gathered from these three levels using triangulation. It was done in this way because the researcher was not able to obtain the policy, or written documents, that describes the organisation's attitude to employees' views and employees having a say in the organisation, due to confidentiality concerns. In addition, some of the interview questions for all three levels were in parallel. In this context, the researcher compared and contrasted the responses from all three levels to confirm the validity and reliability of the data gathered.

Triangulation is a procedure for data validation whereby researchers look for convergence between multiple and different sources of information to elucidate themes or categories in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation is valuable due to its facility for comparisons of different methods and data sources that may lead to validation or invalidation of claims based on single data points (Denzin, 1970).

The analysis of qualitative data was followed in different steps. Firstly, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed along with interviews in the Arabic language. Secondly, for more accuracy, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews one

by one to compare with the transcript pages, because the Zoom platform transcribing system is not sufficient and does not provide such clear and accurate information as was found in the interview. This approach is, by its nature, time-consuming for the researcher. Thirdly, the researcher created a table for each group of interview questions where he copied and pasted the interview answers into the table. Fourthly, responses were tabulated, to facilitate data analysis. And then from the responses, codes were created, enabling the main themes to emerge.

5.8 Thematic analysis

The most recognised approach to qualitative data analysis is commonly referred to as thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012). It is often used in research areas (Clarke & Braun, 2018) to categorise, analyse, and interpret forms of meanings, referred to as 'themes', in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). According to Saunders et al. (2018), thematic analysis is the method most frequently utilised in qualitative data analysis and can be used to analyse data from interviews (Terry et al., 2017). Therefore, the thematic analysis approach is utilised in this study.

Thematic analysis is defined by Vaismoradi et al. (2013, p.400) as an independent qualitative descriptive method for identifying, analysing, and reporting pattern 'themes' within data. This suggests that thematic analysis is a structured process which examines the meaning of data sets comprehensively. More widely, the thematic analysis approach provides the possibility of understanding the latent potential of any issue (Marks & Yardley, 2004). Moreover, searching for themes is an activity that has been performed in many if not most approaches to qualitative data analysis, such as critical discourse analysis (Bryman, 2012). Whether analysing large or small data sets, thematic analysis can be appropriate for both.

5.8.1 Codes, categories, and themes

There are three outputs of thematic analysis. These are codes, categories, and themes. The data is coded and the frequency is reviewed to ultimately determine categories and emerging themes.

5.8.2 Manual thematic analysis

In this study manual thematic analysis was adopted, although there are different electronic software tools that researchers can utilise for electronic coding, including CAQDAS, ATLAS, and NVivo (Gill et al., 2008). As Roulston (2014) argued, both electronic and manual approaches are appropriate for analysing qualitative interview data. This implies that researchers can utilise any of them individually. According to Creswell (2012), within the manual thematic analysis of qualitative data, the researcher endeavours to read the data, mark it, and divide it into parts. Similarly, in his analysis of qualitative data, Gibbs (2007, p.22) found that "paper allows [the researcher] the kinds of creativity, flexibility and ease of access that is important at the early stages of analysis". He further noted that "for most of the last century, those undertaking qualitative analysis did not or could not use electronic software. Most of the classic studies using qualitative research were undertaken without electronic assistance" (Gibbs, 2007, p.22).

In the same vein, Saldana (2016) argued that, in the context of coding manually, researchers can manipulate qualitative data on paper and write codes in pencil, which gives them additional control over ownership of the work. Therefore, analysing the data manually makes the researcher more familiar with the data, which results in easily identifying the themes (Creswell, 2007). The following part of

this section will identify the five phases of thematic analysis in qualitative data, identified by Braun & Clarke (2006, p.87) and adopted in this thesis.

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data. This is a process that starts during data gathering. In this stage, researchers familiarise themselves with the data gathered, through transcribing the data, reading it thoroughly, and noting down initial ideas.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes. Researchers have read and familiarised themselves with the data and have generated an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting. This phase then involves the production of initial codes from the data, where researchers must engage in depth with the data.

Phase 3: Searching for themes. In this phase, the researcher collates codes and then identifies potential themes. There are two techniques by which themes are established. The first way is termed an 'inductive approach', which comes from the data. The second is called the 'a priori approach', a theme which comes from the literature review of local, common-sense constructs; and from researchers' values, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p.88). Therefore, the theses in this study have been generated from both approaches, i.e. the themes have emerged from the research study questions, the three parts of the literature review, and the responses from the interviews.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes. This involves checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, thus generating a thematic map. The steps of reviewing themes have been defined by Schreier (2014, p.177):

> Once all categories have been generated and defined, it is time to take a step back, look at the structure of the coding frame once again, and "tidy up" any

loose ends. If subcategories are very similar, it might be best to collapse them. Some subcategories may be much more comprehensive than others and might be better conceptualised as main categories. These and other considerations may lead to a revision of the structure of the frame. If the coding frame has so far been based on part of the data only, the frame should, in the next step, be expanded to include the next part.

This strategy enables the researcher to review all the codes and to generate themes and subthemes. The researcher will then embark on the reporting of the data analysis.

Phase 5: Producing the report. This commences when the researcher has arranged the set of themes, and involves the final analysis and write-up of the report. Two main approaches to writing up the qualitative research findings have been noted by Gill et al. (2008, p.432):

The first is to simply report key findings under each main theme or category by using appropriate verbatim quotes to illustrate those findings. This is then accompanied by linking a separate discussion chapter in which the findings are discussed in relation to the existing research. The second is to do the same, but to incorporate the discussion into the findings chapter.

The researcher in this study followed the approach of segregating the findings and discussion into two different chapters. The findings chapter consists of qualitative data gathered from all three levels (HR managers, FLMs, and employees from different occupational groups), combining all levels' findings under the relevant themes and subthemes. The subsequent chapter is assigned to discuss the findings of these levels.

5.9 Validity and reliability of the research

Validity and reliability are crucial issues to be taken into account while designing and using any type of research. In addition, they are important in all methods of research and all types of data collection. As described by Creswell and Poth (2016, pp.207–208), "[V]alidation in qualitative research is an attempt to assess the 'accuracy' of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants." Wiersma & Jurs (2005) pointed out that validity primarily involves research being formulated on evidence. The term 'validation' as deployed by Angen (2000) is used to emphasise a process, rather than simple verification.

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) suggested various strategies and tools that may improve the validity of qualitative studies, including researcher-as-detective, extended fieldwork, low-inference descriptors, triangulation participant feedback, peer review, and external audit. Creswell & Poth (2016) pointed out that in triangulation, researchers apply multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence. This triangulation strategy of utilising more than one data source is effective in increasing the credibility and validity of the research method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, triangulation reduces the risk of systematic bias that might stem from a specific method or source and enables a better assessment of the generalisability of the explanations that are developed by the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, the sampling procedures and interviewee guide and process were defined. It is assumed that triangulation increases the validity of the findings, and therefore corroborating evidence from participants for this research is obtained by interviewing participants at different levels in the organisation.

5.10 Demographic information

The number of participants in the interviews was 23, including two male HR managers, 12 FLMs – six males and six females – and nine employees from different occupational levels including three males and six females. Table 5.2 shows the participants' demographic information in terms of age, gender, educational background, and work experience as a manager. The table also includes the codes utilised for each interviewee. For instance, Interviewee FLM-M1 indicates that the interviewee is FLM Male 1 and FLM-F2 indicates FLM Female 2, while HR1 and HR2 indicate HR managers 1 and 2 and both are male. In addition, EMP-M1 implies that the interviewee is Employee Male 1 from a different occupational level and EMP-F3 is Employee Female 3. As mentioned, the plan was to interview as many participants as possible, but as the participation process organised by the bank was done voluntarily, only 23 staff agreed to participate in this research. Table 5.3 shows participants' roles.

Table 5.2: Interviewees' demographics and codes

Participant codes	Age group	Gender	Educational background	Work experience as a manager
Interviewee HR1	40–49	Male	Higher National Diploma	3–10 years
Interviewee HR2	40–49	Male	Master's degrees and above	3–10 years
Interviewee FLM-M1	40–49	Male	Higher National Diploma	Greater than 10 but less than 20 years
Interviewee FLM-F2	30–39	Female	Bachelor's degree	Less than 3 years
Interviewee FLM-F3	30–39	Female	Higher National Diploma	3–10 years
Interviewee FLM-M4	30–39	Male	Bachelor's degree	3–10 years
Interviewee FLM-M5	30-39	Male	Bachelor's degree	3–10 years
Interviewee FLM-F6	40–49	Female	Bachelor's degree	Less than 3 years
Interviewee FLM-F7	30–39	Female	Master's degrees and above	3–10 years

Participant codes	Age group	Gender	Educational background	Work experience as a manager
Interviewee FLM-M8	30–39	Male	Master's degrees and above	3–10 years
Interviewee FLM-M9	30–39	Male	Bachelor's degree	3–10 years
Interviewee FLM-F10	30–39	Female	Bachelor's degree	Less than 3 years
Interviewee FLM-M11	30–39	Male	Bachelor's degree	3–10 years
Interviewee FLM-F12	40–49	Female	Master's degrees and above	Greater than 10 but less than 20 years
Interviewee EMP-M1	30–39	Male	Bachelor's degree	3–10 years
Interviewee EMP-M2	30–39	Male	Higher National Diploma	3–10 years
Interviewee EMP-F3	18–29	Female	Bachelor's degree	3–10 years
Interviewee EMP-F4	30–39	Female	Bachelor's degree	Greater than 10 but less than 20 years

Participant codes	Age group	Gender	Educational background	Work experience as a manager
Interviewee EMP-F5	30–39	Female	Master's degrees and above	3–10 years
Interviewee EMP-F6	30–39	Female	Higher National Diploma	3–10 years
Interviewee EMP-M7	30–39	Male	Master's degrees and above	3–10 years
Interviewee EMP-F8	18–29	Female	Bachelor's degree	3–10 years
Interviewee EMP-F9	30–39	Female	Higher National Diploma	Greater than 10 but less than 20 years

Table 5.3: Interview participants and role

Participant	Role
HR1	Assistant General Manager (AGM) HR department
HR2	Deputy AGM HR department
FLM-M1	Manager branch
FLM-F2	Manager head office
FLM-F3	Manager head office
FLM-M4	Manager head office
FLM-M5	Manager head office
FLM-F6	Manager branch
FLM-F7	Manager head office
FLM-M8	Manager head office
FLM-M9	Manager head office
FLM-F10	Manager head office
FLM-M11	Manager head office
FLM-F12	Manager head office
EMP-M1	Employee head office
EMP-M2	Employee branch
EMP-F3	Employee head office
EMP-F4	Employee head office
EMP-F5	Employee head office
EMP-F6	Employee head office
EMP-M7	Employee head office
EMP-F8	Employee head office
EMP-F9	Employee branch

Table 5.2 indicates that the majority of interviewees were of age group 30–39 years old, only two were of age group 18–29 years old, and three FLMs were from age group 40–49 along with both HR managers. Both genders were nearly equal in participation. In terms of education level, one HR manager held a master's degree

and the other one a higher national diploma, and they both hold a senior position in the HR department of their organisation. FLMs were mostly from first and middle managerial levels with the majority holding bachelor's degrees. The education level of all interviewed employees from different occupational levels varied from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree and above with only one employee holding a higher national diploma. In terms of their work experience, the majority of the participants were in the experience group of 3–10 years with three from less than 3 years and only one from greater than ten but less than 20 years.

In summary, most interviewees from all occupational levels were aged 30–39 years with bachelor's degrees and a minority had master's degrees and above. It can be demonstrated that all participating staff are young and well educated with sufficient years of experience, which suggests that their responses should be reliable enough to obtain valuable data for the study.

5.11 Population and sampling

To fulfil the objectives of this thesis, sampling is one of the critical tools. As noted by Borg & Gall (1989, p.213), "[A] researcher cannot investigate the entire population … [in which] they are interested. They must limit their investigation to a small sample." Fraenkel and Wallen (2006, p.92) note that the "sample is the group on which information is obtained, while the population is the larger group to which one hopes to apply the results". In this regard, the case study that is selected is within the commercial sector of a local bank in Oman. Section 1.5.1 in the introductory chapter shows the rationale for selecting a bank as a case study for this research. Moreover, Table 1.1 in the introduction chapter shows how qualitative research methodology is implemented in this thesis and reveals the research participants.

5.11.1 Sample types

According to several scholars, samples can be separated into two main groups: random samples and non-random samples (Borg & Gall, 1989; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The advantages of random samples outweigh those of non-random samples, particularly when making generalisations concerning a population: "Random sampling techniques give the most reliable representation of the whole population, while non-random techniques, relying on the judgment of the researcher or on accident, cannot generally be used to make generalizations about the whole population" (Walliman, 2005, p.276).

5.11.2 Sample size

The nature of the research and its objectives will determine the size of the sample as there are no prescribed parameters regarding sample size. However, a larger sample size will provide more authentic results. Borg & Gall (1989) argued that the mean and standard deviation of a larger sample are more likely to be representative of the mean and standard deviation of the population. In addition, a large sample base will probably not lead to adverse results or deny the principal hypothesis. While the accepted approach is to embrace a broader sample base, the researcher must follow the accepted minimum standards for sample size. For instance, in survey research, in each major subgroup, there should be at least 100 participants and 20 to 50 in each minor subgroup (Borg & Gall, 1989). The minimum number of participants, respectively, should be 100, 50, and 30 in descriptive studies, correlation studies, and experimental and comparative studies (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Accordingly, the researcher intended to interview between 30 and 40

participants from all levels of the selected bank. However, ultimately only 23 participants provided interviews.

5.11.3 Sample in this study

The purposive sampling method was utilised in this study. In their study on purposive sampling methods in research, Rai & Thapa (2015, p.5) noted that "purposive sampling represents a group of different non-probability sampling techniques. Also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units (e.g., people, cases/organisations, events, pieces of data) that are to be studied".

Purposive sampling is a form of a non-probability sampling, often linked with qualitative research, particularly in case study research design (Bryman, 2012). This suggests that the researcher can select participants and sites for the study because they can persistently provide an understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The key aim of purposive sampling is to focus on particular features of a population that are of interest, which will allow the researcher to better answer the research questions (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

Consequently, the researcher purposively designated various stakeholders − HR managers, FLMs, and employees of the bank – who would become the sample of this study. FLMs and employees were chosen as they are the main actors of direct employee voice. The aim is to explore the direct employee voice process, as formally and informally implemented by FLMs. HR managers were chosen also to be a sample set to see from their perspective if line managers are effective in implementing employee voice. The researcher anticipated that the sample sets chosen would have the necessary information to attain the aims of this study.

5.12 Research ethics

5.12.1 Anonymity and confidentiality

It is understood that the security and privacy of personal data obtained from interviewees should be considered an essential matter for any research. It is advantageous to provide privacy for the participants as anonymity is the most critical factor that increases the reliability of the study, mainly when sensitive information is being dealt with (Babbie, 2007). In this regard, the intention is to provide a unique code that represents the names and designations of each participant to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. This coding approach has been introduced and widely adopted by various academics and researchers in social research contexts (Walliman, 2005).

5.12.2 Ethical considerations

For this thesis, the University of Strathclyde's ethical processes are strictly adhered to in order to address concerns associated with anonymity and confidentiality. Moreover, the researcher is fully aware of specific cultural norms and sensitivities since the data collection of this thesis will be conducted in Oman, the home country of the researcher. It must be acknowledged that Omani culture is conservative, especially when dealing with female participants.

In this regard, the researcher obtained two letters, firstly from the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee (Business School, Department of Work, Employment and Organisation) and secondly from the Ministry of Labour in Oman, the researcher's employer, to support conducting data collection with confidentiality.

5.13 Conclusion

The methodology chapter plays an important role in any thesis, and is considered a roadmap for the researcher. In this chapter, the researcher began by grounding the study in a suitable research paradigm, which is the interpretive paradigm, and presented the ontological and epistemological assumptions of said paradigm. The adopted methods discussed in the chapter are semi-structured interviews in a single case study. Finally, ethical considerations are introduced which explain the sensibilities to be considered when conducting interviews with the participants in this study. The next chapter identifies the data collected from the semi-structured interviews from all levels, starting with HR managers, then FLMs, and finally employees.

CHAPTER SIX: Analysis and presentation of the findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter includes the presentation of the case study findings based on interviews conducted mainly in English (with one interview in Arabic) from the organisation that was the focus of the case study. The study's results on direct employee voice within the company used a triangulated approach to guarantee the reliability and validity of the data. Three different participant levels from the organisation – HR managers, FLMs, and employees – participated in the study through in-depth interviews. This multi-level approach enhanced understanding of employee voice and made it easier to analyse in detail the various ways that diverse roles and viewpoints affect the dynamics of voice mechanisms across the organisation. To gather consistent insights and enable comparative analysis, the interview questions were created to be parallel at all levels.

Clarity on the relationship between each theme and the research questions is provided in the way the findings are arranged around the major themes found in the literature and analytical framework. The next sections will delve into more detail about the specific findings, emphasising the relationship between HR policies, management styles, and employee experiences, as well as how direct employee input is encouraged and viewed at different organisational levels.

Moreover, this chapter is divided into ten sections. The findings of all levels presented from Section 6.2 onwards examine the themes that emerged from the data. How the employee voice process is used at the overall organisational level and

the implementation of direct employee voice by the organisation and its FLMs are investigated. Tthe chapter ends with the chapter conclusion.

6.2 Employee voice policies and practices in the organisation

The goal of this section and its subsections is to provide answers to the initial research question. The data shows whether the organisation has a policy, vision, value statement, or written documents that describe its attitude to employees speaking up. Examining the viewpoints of HR managers is crucial to comprehend how organisational policies shape employee voice mechanisms. HR managers are essential in creating and carrying out policies, and their perspectives offer useful data on the formulation and interpretation of these rules. Their opinions on the efficacy of the in-place policies and how they affect employee voice are discussed in this section. For example, research emphasises how crucial good communication is to the influence of employee voice mechanisms (Morrison et al., 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020; Nechanska, 2020; Della et al., 2021), as demonstrated by the HR data:

Building on the perceptiveness of the first HR manager, the perspectives of the second HR manager further contribute to the understanding of the topic of organisational policies and their effect on employee voice mechanisms.

> Yes, we have very clearly laid out policies. It's not only about just the policies, but it is also about the culture that we try to have in the bank. We do have employee engagement surveys every year. We do have various forums, whereby employees can voice their opinions, whereby basically what happens there is, for example, if you take our retail, we have branches across the Sultanate of Oman, so there are continuous meetings which are held by the

group head with the employees, whereby they can voice their opinion, which reaches HR, so that is one forum. Plus there is a town hall that the CEO conducts quarterly, whereby it's an open forum where people can ask questions or voice their opinion, whereby employee voice is heard. We evaluate the requirements which come up and then we take the necessary action, but, see, at the end of the day, not all the concerns can be addressed. There are certain restrictions, based on regulatory, there are certain restrictions based on the local laws, which we cannot always deliver. (Interviewee HR2)

The HR managers stressed the need for transparent, well-communicated policies in promoting employee feedback and providing various channels and mechanisms to enable employees to share their opinions, for example, annual surveys, meetings with employees, and quarterly CEO town hall meetings. According to Interviewee HR1, the organisation already has a policy set in place to enable employees to speak up and the organisation places appropriate emphasis on its employees being able to articulate their views and raise concerns, including grievances. Similarly, Interviewee HR2 noted that the organisation has created a culture that enables employees to express their views via various forums and channels. Through these, employee views are evaluated, and decisions are taken as to whether or not to act upon them. However, some concerns cannot be addressed, as they are subject to the various local laws and customs in place within the country, such as working hours, which remain fixed in law.

<u>FLMs' perspectives</u>

This part explores the viewpoints of FLMs on organisational policies, their efficacy, and their effects on employee voice mechanisms, building on the knowledge obtained from HR managers. FLMs are essential to the effective implementation of these policies, and their perspectives offer insightful background on the actual application of policy.

From the viewpoints of FLMs, the organisation has initiated a system that enables employees to express their views through it.

> Yes, we have vision and values that are available on the bank website … the portal called Together We Can. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

> There are policies that are available for the employees to have a say. It means, like, you have the right to talk; you'll have the right to speak out, whatever you have in your mind. (Interviewee FLM-F6)

In contrast, one FLM emphasised that no such policy is embedded within the organisation.

> We don't have a policy or anything in writing, but we have an open-door policy with us. Like, for example, if an employee wants to say something, has a suggestion, has an idea, he can come to his line manager, and he can speak, but not a policy as a written policy. (Interviewee FLM-F3)

In summary, on the one hand, some FLMs responded that the organisation has created such a policy within the portal called Together We Can (TWC) and that they are aware of the existence of an HR manual. However, it is not clear that the HR manual contains anything that specifically relates to the policy on employee voice

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and allowing or encouraging employees to express their views. On the other hand, other FLMs seem unaware of any policy that enables employees to have a say. Thus, there seems to be an inconsistency of approach about how employees are enabled to enact employee voice mechanisms, concerning knowledge of available portals and awareness of policy documents. There seems to be a gap or a disconnect between the directives as set out by the high-level policy from senior management especially regarding employee voice and how FLMs execute this policy or indeed how it relates to the way they do their job (how they function as FLMs). It seems they may not pay much heed to what the policy says, preferring instead to act as they see fit.

Different responses have shown that some of them are aware of the HR policy, although staff only view it when seeking a specific thing. However, others affirmed that there is no such policy regarding employee voice. Also, there were divergent viewpoints among FLMs when discussing their role in implementing employee voice. Some of them disputed the process of implementing employee voice, making it clear that there are different views on whether the organisation has employee voice policies. Additionally, the discussion on the appraisal process also raised the concern that FLMs are not aware of the organisation's policy that they facilitate employee voice during the appraisal process.

Employees' perspectives

This section looks at how employees interact with the organisation's employee voice policy. The findings are mainly drawn from interview data, with various professional employees included in the sample. Therefore, their point of view towards a policy, value statement, or written document that describes the organisation's attitude to

employees speaking up is essential to identify its success or failure in the organisation. In this regard, respondents presented evidence that the vision and values are laid out very clearly in the organisation.

> There is, it's a written policy and we can find these policies. Whenever you join the organisation, in my case in the bank here, they had informed us that there is a policy; they briefed us about this policy. (Interviewee EMP-F5)

> Yes, we do, and it is available on the bank's web page. Policy, all documents, are available for all employees (Interviewee EMP-M7)

Conversely, some employees noted the opposite, which means there is an inconsistency in the dissemination of the policy.

> In our organisation, we do not have a such policy; however, we have an open doors policy, so we have direct access to our line managers, and to the senior management as well. (Interviewee EMP-F4)

By examining the viewpoints of HR managers, FLMs, and employees on organisational policy regarding employee voice, several important factors become evident. For instance, HR encourages employees to speak up and provides various forums, channels, and policies in this regard. However, most FLMs are not aware of the HR policy document found on the HR portal Together We Can. Employees can exercise their voices effectively only if they are made aware of available ways to do this. Otherwise, their voices remain unheard, and their ideas remain untapped. Thus, all levels are keen to promote and enable the expression of employee voice. HR is keen to create a culture that promotes this, and FLMs recognise the value of employees speaking out, especially when sharing concerns or ideas.

Ultimately, employees themselves are at their most contented and engaged with their work when they can speak up. They are much less likely to exercise their voice if they are not aware of the channels available to them for doing so, or of the policies that regulate these. There seems to be a lack of communication within and between departments on available portals for the expression of employee voice and policy documents relating to these. This causes confusion among employees as to what policy documents and channels are available and how to utilise them.

The creation and implementation of the employee voice policy ensures the organisation has a robust and systematic method that enables employees to express their views. However, FLMS still have a role in facilitating employee voice by encouraging their employees to express their views through utilising the various mechanisms and channels available, including the open-door policy and one-to-one meetings. Factors contributing to a lack of voice expression could be a shortcoming in suitable FLM training, workload, or time constraints in addition to being unaware of management policy. Furthermore, some FLMs lack the overall motivation to encourage their employees to speak out, perhaps through not recognising the value of employee contributions. Also, some employees are reluctant to speak out because of natural shyness, or for fear of being ignored or harbouring a feeling of having little worth or value.

Moreover, it is evident from the findings that there is a variety of differences within and between FLMs. For instance, some have high levels of skills and competencies and have received suitable training, while others lack these. Some FLMs feel constrained by their existing time and work burdens and cannot spare time to resource employee voice facilitation, especially in particular departments. Certain

FLMs are perceived by their employees to be too close to senior management to be trusted, even though such FLMs may be ideally placed to facilitate employee voice. On the other hand, some FLMs are unaware of HR policies on employee voice or the existence of available communication channels.

It can be argued that some FLMs exhibit a lower degree of flexibility and willingness to engage with employee voice, while others are more hierarchical and thus are unwilling to devolve responsibility to their employees. Some expatriate managers are less inclined to help their employees, preferring to focus their energies on their own concerns. Other FLMs simply do not appear to appreciate the value of employee contributions. While some FLMs find it difficult to develop positive relationships with their employees or are reluctant to do so, other FLMs are demotivated due to a lack of career progression. Finally, some FLMs simply lack the capacity or the decision-making powers to adequately facilitate employee voice.

In conclusion, not all FLMs can be good employee voice facilitators. Even though they face challenges, some FLMs still can create mechanisms and channels to enable employees to have a say. But again, employees always seek to receive feedback and outcomes from the ideas and concerns they have expressed.

6.2.1 Rationale for the policy on employee involvement

Focusing on the HR managers' data, this section shows why organisations must establish a policy on employee voice, the justification for its creation, and how it might help enhance workplace communication among employees. This will support the organisation in reaching its goals and fostering an atmosphere that encourages employees to voice their opinions.

Both interviewees questioned the rationale for the policy on employee involvement. According to Interviewee HR1, ideals of transparency and fairness in the organisation have motivated the organisation to implement employee voice.

> The rationale is transparency and fairness in the way we deal with our people. (Interviewee HR1)

The other interviewee sounded an even more positive note: he claimed the organisation was determined to become the 'bank of choice' for customers.

> It's the vision of the bank. See, at the end of the day, we want to be the bank of choice in Oman, not only for our shareholders, not only for our customers, but even for our staff – we don't hire people for a job, we hire people for a career. We want them to grow with us, we want them to be with us and share our success and to be loyal to the organisation as well. That is how we will become the bank of choice. (Interviewee HR2)

To summarise, the HR managers claimed that the organisation has introduced policies and practices regarding the implementation of employee voice and made these available to all employees, in the interests of transparency and fairness, and to make the organisation an appealing place to which talented prospective employees may be attracted to work. Furthermore, they place an onus on employees to familiarise themselves with HR policies.

In the same context, FLMs' focus regarding voice is similar in some ways to that of the HR managers but also slightly different. In terms of similarity, FLMs conceptualise employee voice expression as something that encourages a more harmonious working environment because employees feel valued when they can speak out. The difference lies in the focus of FLMs being on problem-solving and

productivity: when problems are resolved to the satisfaction of employees, this increases productivity to the overall good of the organisation. Moreover, employees are good ambassadors for their organisation when they are happy in their work. This occurs when their voices are heard, and their suggestions and opinions are received and valued. Contented employees lead to contented customers. Here the focus is on customer service and satisfaction and the desire for this organisation to become the bank of choice in Oman.

6.2.2 Employees' accessibility of the organisation's policy on employee involvement

In order to confirm the efficacy of the organisation's employee involvement policy, this section looks at how staff members access and use it. It also seeks insight from FLMs through their opinions. The study evaluates the policy's accessibility and its effect on staff involvement and engagement by looking at the experiences of both managers and employees. Several interviewees recognised that such a policy exists in written form and is made available to all employees and that they have read it.

> Yes, the policies are available through, we have the portal, it's related to the employees, and all the policies are available to all employees. I read that a long time back. (Interviewee EMP-M1)

Although the policy is available, the organisation must encourage staff to familiarise themselves with it regularly. According to Interviewee EMP-M1, the policies are available in the HR portal and all employees can access and read them.

Other interviewees noted:

Yes, everything is published to all employees, and we have a platform called Together We Can. Any new things that come up in the bank will be uploaded to this platform, and I have read it of course. (Interviewee EMP-M2)

<u>FLMs' perspectives</u>

The organisation has created a special HR website (intranet portal), Together We Can, which is available to all employees and through which they can access all policies available in the organisation. It is essential to enable employees to access the policies which are related to their day-to-day tasks. Interviewees FLM-F2, M4, and M9 confirmed that there is an intranet on which the organisation publishes the policies and guidelines for employees to view.

We have an intranet within the bank, where all the policies, guidelines, and procedures are published in all approved documents, so the staff can access it anytime, anywhere. In addition, all new joiners go through some new joiner awareness programme. Even in that awareness programme they will inform them about these guidelines. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

In a different understanding, Interviewee FLM-M11 refers to IBTIKAR (innovation) and recognises that this is about serving people.

Yeah, all staff should, because we had a big event, the IBTIKAR, and every staff will get a message and email. The line managers will share with them that they encourage them because this is part of our customer service industry; we are in the service industry. (Interviewee FLM-M11)

Interviewee FLM-F7 believes that the organisation has provided different types of tools to make all employees aware of the organisation's policies. The TAWASUL

(communication) channel, created by HR, is available to all, but its use may not be well understood.

> I believe so, yes, because we have a communication channel called TAWASUL now. How would the recipient understand that and comprehend that's something different? Some people would read it, and some people will just ignore it because they just don't want to partake in it. (Interviewee, FLM-F7)

In summary, all employees affirmed that there is a policy about employees having a say, published and made available on the organisation's intranet portal. A variety of communications channels are in place for employees to use including the intranet portal and the TAWASUL communications channel. There is, though, a question about how well these channels is understood by employees; if they are not well understood, they will not be well used. That it is essential to have a good working environment is also emphasised, as this will be for the good of employees and customers and the overall health and growth of the organisation. Such an environment is achieved when employee voices are heard.

FLMs affirm that all employees have access to the organisation's policies on employee involvement. These documents are uploaded onto the employee portal to be viewed. Concern is expressed that the documents may be too large, which may discourage employees from reading them. In addition, the IBTIKAR innovation event has taken place and the TAWASUL communication channel has been implemented. These ensure that employees have ease of access to company policy on employee voice.

While an intranet can provide a platform for, and facilitate, communication and support tools such as email, in and of itself it is insufficient to fully convey employee

voice. Other tools and mechanisms are necessary, including face-to-face informal meetings between employees and FLMs, and other mechanisms provided by the organisation, such as IBTIKAR, which allows innovations to be conveyed to management. It is a platform which encourages employees to speak up and offer their ideas and suggestions for improvement. They are encouraged to do so as part of the drive to improve customer service and to become the bank of choice in Oman.

6.2.3 Employees' engagement with the organisation's policy on employee involvement

As perceived by managers and HR managers, employee participation in the organisation's employee involvement policy is a major theme in this study. During the interviews, their opinions on the importance of employee voice in the workplace were gathered. This theme looks at these executives' perceptions of employee participation in the policy and how important they think it is for employees to have a say in decisions made within the organisation.

Gaining an understanding of these insights is crucial for assessing how effectively the policy is received by the workforce, as well as how it affects employee productivity and loyalty to the organisation. In general, according to the interview participants' responses, it does matter that employees both express their views and are heard, and also know that their views or concerns are acted upon. This enhances employees' productivity, efficiency, performance, and loyalty to the organisation.

> Yes, it does matter. It has a direct impact on the productivity and efficiency of people. The more engaged people are with the overall strategy and overall say in how the bank is being run, the better they can contribute because they start

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owning it; they are more responsible, they are more accountable. (Interviewee HR2)

In summary, the HR managers confirmed that it is important for employees to be engaged with, and participate in, matters related to their concerns and suggestions for improvements. This approach to employee involvement has been perceived as boosting employee productivity and enhancing their loyalty to the organisation.

<u>FLMs' perspectives</u>

The organisation has implemented and developed different channels for employee involvement, but it is not clear what motivates employees to participate and be part of the employee voice process unless there is a specific requirement to do so. Different FLMs have deployed a variety of approaches regarding the organisations' policy on employee involvement.

The following comment raised by an FLM attested to this view – he claims that all the employees have knowledge of the policy concerning employee voice but are only likely to use it when the situation necessitates it.

All the employees are aware of the organisation's policy on employee involvement, and they will engage with it when there is a need. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Another FLM affirmed that the organisation has implemented new tools for employees to be involved and engaged, and referenced the digital strategy group that encompasses a range of people from different divisions and departments.

I think involvement and engagement of employees with how to suggest ideas, the organisation has a digital strategy group, which contains different people

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from different divisions, and in that group every person will have to participate with new ideas and how to enhance the processes and services of the organisation in the future, and this is implemented. So, in addition to this, there was an initiative called IBTIKAR in the organisation where people who have any ideas, they will register to this programme. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

An interesting issue concerning employees having a say was identified by an FLM who noted that staff members themselves must take the initiative when it comes to speaking out, and she acknowledged that she cannot force her employees to engage with the available mechanisms. However, she is still keen to encourage her staff to find a way to speak out.

I would say they will try to be involved. So, although everything is available, there's a role that the staff himself or herself need to play as well. So, if you have all the forums available and the channels available, unless and until the staff wants to be involved in it, then that takes a different turn. But if the staff has no interest, then you cannot force that right. We will just need to find the mean or a method to make them want to be involved. (Interviewee FLM-F7)

In summary, encouraging employees to express their voice has the potential to enhance employee productivity. Employees are generally aware of HR policies regarding employee voice; however, they only engage with them sometimes. Staff cannot be compelled to speak out. If they do wish to express their voice, various channels are available including the quarterly CEO town hall meetings. However, as one FLM states, employees regularly attend meetings with stakeholders and thus do not have to wait for the town hall meetings or IBTIKAR to express their voice. A questionnaire is released every year that employees are required to complete. It

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addresses various topics relating to the employees' work, including concerns over salary, employee engagement, and work–life balance. The purpose is to garner employee feedback.

Therefore, various channels for the expression of employee voice are available for employees to use. However, it appears not all employees avail themselves of these or are fully aware of the HR policies relating to them. It seems clear that employee productivity has the potential to be enhanced when employees do express their voice. Empirical evidence suggests that giving workers greater autonomy and including them in decision-making processes can have positive effects on both employees and organisations. This viewpoint backs up the idea that valuing employee input and promoting open communication can boost productivity and produce favourable outcomes for the company. Thus, FLMs have an important role in encouraging employees to express their voice. Thus, FLMs play an important role in motivating employees and providing opportunities to express their views, so contributing to a productive work environment.

6.2.4 FLMs' viewpoint on the organisation's policy on employee involvement

Employee participation policies are viewed by FLMs as a vital tool for inspiring and involving employees. Giving employees a say in decisions fosters a sense of accountability and ownership that can increase productivity and loyalty. On the other hand, how well leadership supports and implements it will determine how successful it is.

I think it's a great opportunity because if you don't listen to your people, then people will leave you, and always top management must be in their people's shoes. It's like, we have to be in customer shoes and top management has to be in employee shoes, so they understand the good and the bad happening in the bank. Not always have to listen to the direct managers because they might not deliver the right picture. (Interviewee FLM-M5)

This response is positive in that the interviewee explores the link between employees having a say and their loyalty to the organisation. Top management is better able to comprehend and value the recommendations, opinions, and concerns that employees make when they have an employee-centred perspective that takes into account their experiences and points of view. By fostering a more responsive and encouraging atmosphere for employee input, this compassionate approach ensures that employees feel appreciated and valued. As a result, there may be a rise in engagement and a reduction in turnover.

Similarly, a statement made by another interviewee suggested that it is crucial to enable employees to have a say in their workplace; employees always need to have a good working environment where their voice is heard and their thoughts are appreciated so that they become more productive and loyal to the organisation.

I think it's always good to have your employees involved in a sense. I mean, we as human beings, when we believe our voice or voice out our ideas or thoughts to a place, that it's recognised and appreciated, that will give you more productivity. So, when I have an environment where I feel comfortable voicing out my thoughts and my ideas, and I know they will be considered at

one stage, that will give me a sense of loyalty I think even to the organisation. (Interviewee FLM-F7)

In the service industry, it is critical to pay attention to what employees have to say and share that information with management so that changes or solutions can be applied. Neglecting this procedure can impede the growth of the organisation and make it more difficult to satisfy customers. Therefore, preserving good customer relations and attaining overall success depend heavily on developing a responsive strategy for employee voice.

In summary, based on the interviews, some FLMs appear to have a high level of involvement with HR responsibilities and other FLMs seem to be unaware of the existence of the HR policy document concerning employee voice. This demonstrates a difference in Ability, as some FLMs may lack the essential knowledge or training to implement HR policies about employee voice adequately. Employees always need to have a good working environment that encourages them to become more loyal and productive as this will lead to customer expectations ultimately being met. This reflects motivation, as creating a supportive environment encourages employees to engage, increasing loyalty and productivity. Thus, FLMs encourage their employees to be involved and engage with the organisation's policy in terms of employee voice through different mechanisms, including employee surveys and team meetings. These mechanisms create opportunities by providing employees with various avenues for expressing their work-related issues and suggesting improvements.

6.2.4.1 levels of employee contribution

Employees are encouraged to contribute to how the workplace is managed through three distinct levels or a combination of these: local teams, division level, and overall organisational level. There are several opportunities for employees to participate in management and decision-making processes at each of these levels. Employees can impact and develop workplace practices in a variety of ways, including by actively participating in local teams, offering suggestions at the divisional level, or contributing to larger organisational conversations. Examining these various participation levels facilitates comprehension of how to promote employee engagement and how it fosters a cooperative work environment.

> All levels, anybody can contribute anywhere, there are no restrictions, there are no boundaries – it's a very metrics-driven organisation. We encourage staff to contribute cross-functional more so that, you know, they also get exposed to the knowledge. So, that is the way we are cultivating that culture, that everybody should be contributing to everything – we don't want to restrict people into vertical silos. (Interviewee HR2)

In summary, according to the HR managers, there should be no restrictions placed on employees regarding expressing their voice. All levels of employees are encouraged to express their concerns and ideas. This indicates that employees' views and work are valued by the company.

All participants affirmed that participation is encouraged and unrestricted for employees at all organisational levels. This strategy shows a strong dedication to employee involvement and voice. The group promotes inclusivity and open communication by permitting local, divisional, and organisational involvement. This

approach fosters a more collaborative work environment by valuing and incorporating employee input into decision-making processes, which raises employee engagement.

6.3 Employee voice mechanisms and channels

In response to the first research question on the systems and procedures in place for employee input, this part focuses on mechanisms through which employee voice is enabled. In order to address the second research question on how FLMs support employee voice, it also looks at their involvement in supporting these systems.

This section will offer perspectives from all parties because certain interview questions are parallel for all levels. This study aims to determine how these elements contribute to effective employee participation and engagement by examining the use of various voice mechanisms and the support line managers offer. This will provide researchers with a thorough understanding of their effects on organisational communication and employee participation. The organisation has designed certain mechanisms and channels for employees to communicate with their FLMs or the HR department to express their views.

> There are certain channels. We do have an email as the main channel that we use for all types of communication with work-related issues. There is one common platform that we use across the bank we call Facebook at Work – it is one of the platforms. We do have TAWASUL to which we send all the messages that we wanted to reach all employees. Plus, the open-door policy and one-to-one meetings with the line managers with their employees. (Interviewee HR1)

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Those meetings are continuous: every morning the line managers do huddles with the staff, plus the performance framework that we have within the bank calls for, like, a monthly kind of face-to-face meeting with the staff, whereby, you know, these are another kind of forums, which are available. The various platforms where the staff can voice their views, staff can voice their concerns, staff can voice their appreciation. Plus, if you see our seating arrangement also, it is a very well laid out open plan, whereby we have very few people sitting inside glass cabins. So, most of the people sit outside, which again re-stresses the importance of the approachability of senior management. And there is no restriction that a person cannot, like, a lower-level cannot approach our senior staff; no, there is no such policy which binds to it. (Interviewee HR2)

In summary, several channels and mechanisms have been created by the organisation to enable employees to have a say. Therefore, according to the HR managers, some of the above are dependent on the attitude of FLMs: they play a key role in the facilitation of employee voice, through monthly face-to-face meetings with staff, daily huddles with staff, and the implementation of an open-door policy. The effectiveness of employee involvement initiatives largely depends on FLMs' perspectives; an approach that is open and helpful guarantees that these endeavours genuinely foster significant contributions. The seating plans reflect the open-door policy and thus there is no barrier preventing employees from approaching their FLMs and senior managers.

<u>FLMs' perspectives</u>

There are several ways in which employees can communicate and express their views and ideas to their FLMs through different mechanisms and channels, and these have been designed by the organisation for this purpose.

> We have the general yearly survey, which is provided to all staff for their feedback on any improvements. We also have the CEO town hall – this is a live screen, and all employees are free to join, and they actually can directly communicate to the CEO by providing their comments in the chat status. And we also have TAWASUL – as I said, it's an email communication channel, but this is a … one-way communication channel so it's from HR or the management to the employee only; you cannot respond or reply to that. However, adding to those two points, I do believe, to some extent, we have an open-door policy. So, if an employee is not happy or not satisfied, on any conflict either, if that communication door or channel is available between his line manager and himself then well and good. If that is not resolved, the employee has all the right to go to HR. We also have one-to-one meetings as well. Also, employees can send an email directly to the HR user address, if they have any concerns that have not been resolved by their line manager. (Interviewee FLM-F7)

In summary, FLMs mention mostly the same channels that are available for the expression of employee voice. These include emails, one-to-one meetings with line managers, CEO townhall meetings, and social media outlets such as WhatsApp groups and Facebook at Work. Most FLMs operate an open-door policy, which is

facilitated by employees and managers working together in an open-space environment rather than closed offices.

Annual surveys are also produced to elicit specific responses from employees. Moreover, Employee surveys are usually considered a form of indirect voice because they're structured and often anonymous, with feedback collected, reviewed, and acted upon periodically by HR or management. This setup lacks the immediacy of direct conversations or face-to-face meetings, where employees can directly raise concerns and receive responses on the spot. Since employees communicate their views to their FLMs indirectly and anonymously, this allows employees to reveal information and communicate their work-related concerns comfortably.

Furthermore, the main objective of the survey is to gather valuable perspectives and opinions from employees to measure their fulfilment levels and experience of the organisation. The information that is gathered by the survey as a structured platform can be utilised by the management to recognise areas of improvement and address concerns. Therefore, it is a vital tool that assists the management to listen to their employees' views and concerns and to take suitable measures to ensure a harmonious environment and make employees feel valued. However, surveys can feel more like a direct voice if the organisation responds quickly and transparently to the results. So, depending on how a survey is used and how promptly actions are taken, it can have elements of both direct and indirect voice.

Employees' perspectives

In order to gain some insight into the organisation's achievement in the creation, adoption, and use of different voice mechanisms, employees were interviewed to

explain and identify the variety of formal and informal voice mechanisms and channels available to raise issues and concerns and to suggest improvements.

> The first channel is our line manager, as well as the platform that I have mentioned previously, TWC, and a Facebook at Work. We also have a platform that we can use annually called IBTIKAR Innovation. It is a famous event similar to town halls that all employees get to gather and discuss, and the bank will always support all suggestions that came up in this event. (Interviewee EMP-M2)

> One-to-one meeting, email and open-door policy, and we have Facebook at Work. It's open for all employees and anybody can add any views – it's more like socialisation or what's going on in the organisation, anything new. (Interviewee EMP-F4)

In summary, according to employees, although most channels have been mentioned regarding the expression of employee voice, some channels are preferred over others when communicating with managers. While email is the most commonly used channel, one-to-one meetings with line managers are also very frequently used by employees. Social media channels such as Facebook and WhatsApp provide alternative communication channels. There is also the availability of the quarterly CEO town hall meeting and the yearly survey (which has not featured very prominently). Therefore, many employees prefer one-to-one meetings as this is a very human and informal setting in which to convey concerns and ideas. This is encouraged by managers, having an open-door policy, and by the open physical layout of the workspace. Emails remain a useful tool but are more formal and they do not provide an immediate response. Shy staff members may prefer to use this

option rather than speaking up at a very open forum such as the CEO town hall meeting. In addition to the above, TAWASUL and IBTIKAR are also available.

Furthermore, these responses highlight that most employees prefer a direct approach to expressing their voice; that is, they would rather approach their manager directly via a one-to-one or face-to-face meeting than use emails or social media. To validate this, the interviewer pursued a follow-up conversation with employees, FLMs, and HR managers for the purposes of validity and reliability, and this confirmed that the direct one-to-one approach is the favoured option when it comes to the expression of employee voice. Moreover, an open-door policy and physically open workspaces helped facilitate this. Additionally, the results demonstrate a strong relationship between the mechanisms employed to encourage employee voice and the topics identified in the literature.

These mechanisms, such as the previously stated channels, staff huddles, open-door policy, and regular meetings, have been shown to be successful in promoting candid communication and a more welcoming workplace. The data also shows that, although these mechanisms are necessary, FLMs' mindsets have a big impact on how successful they are. The effectiveness of these approaches can be significantly increased by FLMs who are transparent and encouraging.

Overall, this finding is consistent with the literature and highlights the significance of putting these mechanisms and channels into place as well as having a management style that promotes active employee participation.

6.3.1 Encouraging employees to utilise mechanisms and channels

As the primary participants in the employee voice process are HR managers, FLMs, and employees, they must all be taken into account when analysing the frequency with which employees use the available channels or procedures to voice their opinions. Consequently, HR managers frequently highlight the established formal procedures and their availability. However, FLMs are essential in encouraging and promoting their utilisation. Depending on variables including perceived impact, executive support, and trust, employees' level of involvement with different channels may differ. Through the process of gathering data from all three stakeholders, it becomes evident how the success of these processes can affect employee involvement and the degree to which they feel comfortable sharing their ideas or concerns.

This theme is closely related to the first research question, which is about the voice policies of the organisation and how employees utilise and perceive them. Knowing how voice channels are used and perceived helps to clarify the efficacy of these policies and their function in promoting employee voice within the organisation. From the perspective of HR management, how often and effectively do employees utilise the mechanisms and channels of employee voice?

> The mechanisms that are available are not very much used by the employees. (Interviewee HR1)

> To some extent, I would say employees use these channels. (Interviewee HR2)

Both HR managers agreed that the mechanisms are available, but they disagree as to how frequently they are used by their staff. Perhaps one FLM can resolve most

issues without other channels needing to be used. It could also be that he or she, because of other work commitments, including workload and time constraints, is just not able to address the issues of employee voice as he or she ought. Maybe the FLM is unaware that employees have used the available channels. According to both HR managers' responses, it can be argued that some employees regularly utilise the mechanisms that are available and others utilise the mechanisms only when there is a pressing need. Moreover, although there are mechanisms available, some employees may be reluctant to use them for fear of being considered troublemakers. Other employees may be unsure how to access or utilise some mechanisms as they have not received any training in their use.

<u>FLMs' perspectives</u>

In any organisation, several employee voice mechanisms and channels can be identified, which typically offer a process for communicating mutual concerns. Therefore, understanding the degree and extent to which employees utilise those channels is essential. Interviews reveal that all participants acknowledged high use of those channels and mechanisms. This section will examine how FLMs within the management of employee voice encourage their employees to use those mechanisms.

> If I would speak specifically about our team, with the grace of God, we have that open communication between all members, so if I have an issue or there's something that is bothering me, whatever it is, I can freely speak to my line manager and I know his door will be open to hearing my feedback or whatever issue of bother. (Interviewee FLM-F7)

Interviewee FLM-M9 concentrated on open offices giving employees more space to have a say.

> For me, I'm sitting beside my staff so that there are no offices. We don't have offices so I'm already sitting with them, and we are indirectly communicating with each other all day, but I always do like 15-minute huddles where I assign tasks to them, so I don't think here there are any obstacles or barriers. How we're structured now with the new building, you will not see a lot of closed offices. Most of the line managers, they're sitting beside their staff so they will be looking after them whatever they are doing, not in terms of supervision of it, in terms of the guidance and support. (Interviewee FLM-M9)

Another participant emphasised organisational culture. The organisation has created a very dynamic culture in which communication is encouraged. Employees can openly express their views and raise concerns. Such communication is an everyday thing, and people communicate often and freely.

> I worked in different banks. Here we have more of an interactive way – every day we are sharing what we are facing with customers, what we suggest, and how we improve things, and we engage the right people, so this is a very communicative, very dynamic culture here with what we have here in the organisation. (Interviewee FLM-M11)

In summary, FLMs encourage their employees to participate, and employees get the courage to speak up collectively because other colleagues support them. The open-door policy, CEO town halls, and workplace channels help to encourage employees to participate. Some people are afraid to speak up in case they are judged or it goes against them, and one-to-one meetings may intimidate some employees, but they

may find courage when speaking in a group. However, it must be noted that some shyer employees may be more reluctant to speak out publicly at, for instance, the town hall meetings. It seems that employees encounter no barriers (apart from shyness) to expressing their views since the organisation has provided a variety of mechanisms and channels to enable them to speak up, and they take the opportunity to speak often. The organisation has created a very dynamic culture where communication is encouraged. Employees can openly express their views and raise concerns. This culture is consistent with the AMO concept by creating opportunities for employee voice, in that it motivates employee involvement through inclusive practices and helps them acquire the confidence and skills needed to engage effectively.

Employees' perspectives

The organisation has established several mechanisms to enable employees to communicate including an open-door policy and one-to-one meetings in which FLMs are expected to facilitate employee voice mechanisms and channels and employees are expected to use them. Effectively, employees are encouraged and supported to express their views informally with their FLMs. The FLM has a crucial role in enabling employees to speak up. Most of the employees interviewed discussed how they approach their managers directly when there is a need.

> One-to-one is the channel I can go to my line manager and talk, which I can say quite often, as in when you have anything you can just meet the managers and they are always available to listen to us. (Interviewee EMP-F3)

Another interviewee perceived approaching his line manager directly as an established method of communication, and if the FLM could not resolve the issue then he would escalate the matter to the HR department.

> There are many ways of communication, but the most prevalent one is the old method that you directly go and talk to your superior. And if the issue is not addressed or if there is some issue, then you can further escalate it, you can go and meet the HR personnel as well. (Interviewee EMP-M7)

Employees are keen to participate due to the encouragement they receive from their FLMs, whom they meet frequently through the open-door policy and the workplace's open-space structure. Employees receive encouragement to express their views through their FLMs, and for most employees the first point of contact regarding employee voice is their line manager. Thus, this is their preferred channel of communication.

One may argue that the consensus among HR managers, FLMs, and employees about the promotion of transparent communication underscores the efficacy of the organisation's voice policy. HR managers emphasise the formal procedures, such as policies, FLMs aggressively promote and implement them, and employees value the open-door approach and direct access to their managers. This arrangement demonstrates how effectively the voice mechanisms function in real-world scenarios. The results support major themes found in the literature, including the value of managerial support and easily available channels in promoting an open culture. On the whole, the organisation's strategy successfully promotes employee satisfaction and engagement, highlighting the importance of successfully implemented voice mechanisms.

6.3.1.1 Organisations valuing employee involvement

Once the frequency of employees using the channels available to voice concerns has been investigated, it is imperative to evaluate if the organisation supports and promotes this behaviour. The degree to which employees feel valued for their contributions typically determines their propensity to use voice mechanisms. Interviewees emphasised that the organisational perspective towards employee voice strongly impacts employees' willingness to speak up. A more comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of these mechanisms is obtained by taking into account both the frequency of use and the company support for employee engagement. The interview data reveal that the organisation values employees having a say and has implemented various mechanisms and channels.

> Yes, of course, as the organisation has implemented different kinds of channels for the employees to speak up. If you look at the organisation, we as a bank in the past used to have competition across the bank where we had something called an Oscar. People will participate. It is like, I'm saying this is something that was there in the past, like a year back. So, everyone will be asked to give his ideas and there is a committee, they will analyse all those suggestions, they will meet with the staff, they will get some specialised people to help in making it more effective and there were rewards that are getting out of this … Is the Oscar still exist? It's not existing anymore, because of the Covid-19 situation. For the last few years we've been struggling to meet – that also requires gatherings and events and direct interactions. (Interviewee HR1)

In summary, the organisation has created various mechanisms and channels, implying that it does value employee voice and is keen that employees express their views utilising the available channels and mechanisms. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 situation seems to have undermined the Oscar setup and the bank is struggling to reactivate it. Despite this setback, employees are still encouraged to participate in expressing employee voice. The company values the viewpoints of its employees because it offers a variety of channels for them to raise work-related issues and suggest improvements. Providing a variety of channels indicates an attempt to meet the needs of various communication forms. The true effect, though, will rely on how well these channels are utilised and whether or not employees believe their input is having an influence. This suggests that even while the company wants to promote open communication, employee involvement and satisfaction are key factors in the success of these initiatives. By implementing the AMO framework, the organisation demonstrates its commitment to employee voice by providing the appropriate skills, motivation, and opportunities, ensuring that these efforts benefit both employees and the organisation.

Advantages of voice mechanisms via FLMs

HR managers gave their views on the advantages the organisation may gain from providing a mechanism for their employees through FLMs to raise their concerns about work-related issues and to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team.

> Seeing their way and looking at it, more synergy, people will feel more important to the organisation, and suggestions and ideas are heard. They are

the experts – they will tell you what the gaps are. That is for business improvement, and they will feel that they're part of the organisation, which will increase the engagement aspects and it will help to improve the way we do things. (Interviewee HR1)

To sum up, according to HR managers, FLMs play a crucial role in the facilitation of employee voice by encouraging employees to utilise the various channels and mechanisms provided by the organisation. Consequently, this improves the business by enhancing employee loyalty, productivity, efficiency, and engagement.

Advantages of voice mechanisms via HR

On the advantages the organisation may gain from providing a mechanism for employees through the HR department or other senior managers to raise their concerns about work-related issues and to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team, Interviewee HR1 noted:

The organisation will gain, like, for doing things differently, like, today if I'm doing a process which is done manually and there is a suggestion that was brought up to do it automated way with a lesser cost. That will reduce my cost as an organisation; cost reduction will make things more efficient and effective. Reducing the turnaround time of processes, such as operations, would ultimately help deliver the best service to the customer. (Interviewee HR1)

In summary, the HR department is keen to take up employee suggestions for improvements to facilitate reduced costs and faster turnaround of banking processes. It can be argued that employee suggestions are very important in any

organisation because these may lead to increased productivity and employee job satisfaction and retention.

6.4 FLMs' role in implementing HRM

The role of FLMs in integrating voice mechanisms within the organisation is examined in this section. These insights show how these systems are implemented and how they affect employee communication. FLMs play a key role in HRM practices since they deal directly with employees. Likewise, the HR department plays a key role in supporting FLMs in implementing employee voice, and the importance of FLMs as the facilitator of HRM practices was acknowledged.

> I believe that the line manager is the HR manager. As an organisation with hierarchies and structure, the line manager should be given the power to play a role when it comes to their direct reporters, because if everything has been decided from the top and cascaded down without giving the line manager the importance of managing the team, he will lose the trust. So, you would have someone who doesn't have any sort of decision, which would make him lose trust and people under him will not obey with his instructions. So, the line manager plays a very critical role, and the management should give him empowerment, and make his role more effective and efficient. (Interviewee HR1)

In summary, according to HR managers, a majority of FLMs do effectively implement HR policy concerning employee voice and act as facilitators for employees accessing the mechanisms and channels for having a say. Therefore, HR activities are to be devolved to the FLMs to enable them to consult directly with their staff on important

decisions, thereby building up trust between FLMs and employees. Such trust is crucial as FLMs are the first point of contact when employees wish to express their voice. Organisations can increase employee communication and the actual deployment of voice channels by incorporating FLMs directly in these processes. This strategy is in line with well-established research that demonstrates how manager engagement results in voice systems that are more responsive and effective. In terms of the AMO framework, FLMs play an important role in improving employees' ability to express their concerns by assisting them through the process and ensuring they understand how to raise issues. FLMs also motivate employees to speak up, as employees know their work-related issues will be acknowledged and addressed by their FLMs. Furthermore, FLMs allow employees to voice their concerns in a supportive environment. FLMs participate in the employee voice process to not only increase communication but also develop a culture of trust and openness, which is critical for improving organisational effectiveness and employee satisfaction.

FLMs' perspectives

Some interviewees emphasised the positiveness of the implementation of employee voice, which empowers employees to have a say and people are encouraged to speak up and speak out

> Yes, we always like to implement this – whenever my employee has any ideas, I will be more than happy to implement it. I mean, you know the environment in this organisation is not like another place, where we empower all employees, from junior to senior. From junior, you can speak to managers with your bright ideas, and they will support you; this is one of the greatest

benefits of working in this organisation. So, even if I have any ideas, I don't

hesitate to send them to my line manager, and we have this open relationship

with the team. And it is also supported by the management, which is a great

thing. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

6.4.1 Organisational effectiveness in FLMs implementing HRM

Organisational monitoring of the HRM process is strongly linked to the steps HR

managers take to guarantee its proper implementation. By assisting managers in

applying HR procedures, HR managers play a crucial part in making organisational

policies a reality. This is consistent with the first research question, which looks at

how the HRM process is shaped by organisational policies. Through supervising the

deployment of HR policies, HR managers acknowledge areas for improvement,

overcome challenges, and ensure procedures are followed, promoting policy

compliance and accomplishing company goals.

Interviewees reflected on what behaviours the HR department engages in to

evaluate FLMs' ability to implement the employee voice process.

I don't think we have a specific KPI [key performance indicator] for this in the

people's performance appraisal. (Interviewee HR1)

Interviewee HR2 gave a positive example to clarify the extent to which an

organisation's effectiveness is positively embedded:

We measure the effectiveness in multiple ways. We do trend analysis on

various aspects of line management, first of all — attrition rates, grievances

coming out of the team, any disciplinary issues, any kind of concerns in terms

of performance — and also we compare that with this team when it was

handled by a previous line manager: what was the performance and with the new line management what is the performance? (Interviewee-HR2)

FLMs' effectiveness in implementing HRM in the organisation is monitored and evaluated by the HR department. Both HR managers referred to performance management as the tool that HR utilises to evaluate FLMs' engagement in terms of allowing and/or encouraging their employees to express their views.

We do have, like, a performance cycle that we do have an appraisal every year; there is a, like, midyear and there is consistent feedback given by the line manager. (Interviewee HR1)

Through the yearly appraisal and even from the participation of his employees in different platforms available in the organisation. (Interviewee HR2)

To sum up, there is a divergence of views regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of FLMs in implementing employee voice, with Interviewee HR1 saying there is no specific mechanism for measuring FLMs' performance, and Interviewee HR2 commenting that they have multiple ways of measuring this. On the other hand, their responses revealed that the organisation has established a method to evaluate and monitor FLMs' effectiveness in implementing employee voice in the organisation, including the participation of employees in having a say through appraisal performance. This does not sit well with the fact that the majority of FLMs do not see themselves as implementing HR policy concerning employee voice.

In conclusion, research shows that HR managers and FLMs are crucial in determining how HR procedures are executed. While HR managers make sure that organisational regulations are followed, FLMs frequently create and put into place their

mechanisms to deal with problems that arise daily. The interplay between formal HR frameworks and the useful realistic changes made by FLMs highlights how difficult it is to implement HRM. Gaining an understanding of how management autonomy and organisational policy affect HR results requires a more thorough examination of this process.

6.4.2 FLMs' perspectives on the implementation of HRM

This section presents a fair assessment of the consequences and perceptions surrounding the introduction of HR voice mechanisms by looking at divergent viewpoints.

A statement made by one respondent inferred that FLMs make their own decisions. The focus of the daily meeting is mostly on numbers and figures (business) and so it is essentially one-sided.

> Yes, I do meet with my staff once a week, and daily morning huddles where employees can discuss with me their views and concerns. But the main reason for the daily meeting is to discuss the business and performance and sometimes we discuss only employee attitudes and their concerns. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Despite the importance of employee voice implementation, Interviewee FLM-M4 revealed his negativity in terms of implementing employee voice within his team and section. He is aware of the whistleblowing policy of the organisation, and also of the HR portal, but has never encouraged his staff to become aware of it, far less access it.

Okay, and not for me, no I did not try that. I did not even mention that to my employees, but people have to be curious to check the portal. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

In summary, several FLMs showed negativity about the process of implementing employee voice within their department. They outweigh those who showed positivity. The reasons for this negativity are various, including perceived lack of relevance and volume of workload. Moreover, it seems FLMs do morning huddles and one-to-one meetings without any proper guidance from the HR department. Perhaps there are gaps in communication between HR and FLMs.

Furthermore, HR managers responded that FLMs play a vital role in HR practices in that they should act as HR managers in managing their staff. However, this contradicts FLMs' view that the majority of them are implementing employee voice by default or through their own initiative rather than being guided or instructed by the HR department. Additionally, FLMs play an important role in organisations in enabling employees to express their voice. The clearest finding from the FLM data analysis is that FLMs regularly provide or promote numerous channels for employees to voice their work-related issues or suggestions for improvement, such as one-to-one meetings, the open-door policy, and CEO town hall meetings.

Interestingly, the findings imply that employees have a dual preference for voicing their concerns. On the one hand, employees are more likely to feel comfortable and brave speaking up in group settings, such as the CEO town hall meetings held four times a year, than in individual encounters. However, on the other hand, some employees strongly prefer to approach their line managers directly, viewing them as the primary point of contact for raising concerns. This dual preference suggests

that, while FLMs actively promote the use of existing communication channels, the context in which these channels are provided, whether in groups or individually, substantially impacts employee engagement.

The preference either to attend a group meeting or approach a manager directly demonstrates the complex role that FLMs play in the direct voice process. It also emphasises the need for FLMs to both consider the emotional and social variables that influence employee voice, and ensure that the channels offered are appropriate for employees' diverse preferences.

This conclusion emphasises the significance of FLMs in supporting direct employee input, as well as the importance of a flexible strategy that takes into account varied employee demands and contextual factors. FLMs thus have a crucial role in facilitating the employee voice process by ensuring the availability of suitable channels of communication and being open and receptive to direct employee communication.

6.4.3 HR added value

HR activities are devolved to the FLMs to enable them to consult directly with their staff on important decisions, thereby building up trust between FLMs and employees. If FLMs are essentially undertaking all the tasks of HR, what is the added value of HR itself? To address the subject of HR function's additional value when viewed as a key factor in people management, it is critical to appreciate the complementary roles that HR and FLMs perform. While FLMs are at the forefront of people management, directly managing employees' daily responsibilities, HR professionals provide strategic leadership, advice, and oversight throughout the organisation. On following this up with HR managers, one of them suggested that.

HR's role is primarily one of guiding, coaching, and mentoring, and ultimately ensuring that FLMs undertake the proper implementation of due processes, ensuring sustainability and making sure all the policies have been applied. This supervision is essential because, while FLMs are in charge of direct management, HR confirms that departments are consistent, aligned with organisational objectives, and follow legal and regulatory standards. (Interviewee HR2)

HR adds value by providing administrative support as well as guaranteeing fairness, equity, and long-term organisational health. It provides systems such as performance management and workforce strategy, allowing FLMs to focus on people management without being distracted by processes. HR also promotes employee voice, raising issues as appropriate and cultivating an open, inclusive culture. While FLMs handle daily people management, HR ensures that it matches company goals and is fair, compliant, and sustainable. This collaboration between HR and FLMs is critical to attracting, retaining, and growing personnel, making HR vital to the organisation's success. HR has an important role in supporting employee voices, ensuring that employees are heard and valued, even if they are not completely voiced during meetings with FLMs. When employees feel silenced, it can lead to issues that senior management may not recognise. Consequently, HR is critical to building an inclusive and open organisational culture.

6.5 FLMs dealing with several employee work-related issues

It is critical to acknowledge FLMs' involvement in managing a variety of work-related difficulties to respond to research question 2, which examines how FLMs facilitate employee voice. FLMs are responsible for handling issues including workload,

disputes, and employee well-being, and are frequently the initial point of contact for employees. Because of this one-on-one communication, they are positioned to play a significant role in fostering a positive work atmosphere in which employees feel free to voice their concerns and suggestions.

Employee voice within the organisation can be either encouraged or inhibited by FLMs through their involvement in daily problem-solving and decision-making. It is vital to comprehend how they carry out these duties since it offers important insights into the wider methods for encouraging voice. In the context of employees seeking to change work-related issues (including working hours, shift patterns, start and finish times, changes to holidays, work–family conflicts, queries and issues with employee performance, and issues concerning pay and conditions), FLMs' responses were explored. The organisation has adopted both fixed and flexible working hours (seven and half hours), and employees have flexibility in when to start and finish their work.

> Working hours are fixed by HR; we can't do anything. Start and finish times, we have a system in the organisation and flexibility; for example, we normally start from 7:30am to 3:00pm, and the employee is free to start his work at 8:00 and leave at 3:30. So we give half an hour for the employees. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Shift patterns do not apply to branches or other departments. Only call centre staff work under shift patterns due to the demand of the business.

> Doesn't apply with us as a branch because we work only one shift in the morning and dislike call centre. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Holidays are flexible.

> We fix and schedule all holidays at the beginning of the year, and we have flexibility on this if a colleague is willing to swap his holiday with others – it is flexible. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

In terms of work–family conflicts, the organisation has adopted a work–life balance approach where employees can work under minimal pressure.

> We have a balance and flexibility in this point and staff only work seven and half hours per day so they can meet their family and have good family life. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

In terms of queries and issues with their performance, employees can discuss their performance directly with their FLMs.

> We discuss this point, but it all depends on employees' KPI. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Concerning issues of pay and conditions, employees can discuss this matter with their FLMs, but it is all subject to their performance and KPI evaluation:

> Again, it all depends on his KPI rate or grade. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

To summarise, the responses of the FLMs on the above points are similar in that working hours are fixed and designed by the regulatory authority in the country (Ministry of Labour). The organisation has created a system for start and finish times which embraces flexible working hours. However, this requires an agreement between the employee and the line manager: employees must complete their working hours, which are seven and a half hours.

FLMs recognise that one of the most important ways they support employee voice is through their flexibility in responding to a range of work-related issues. This is

consistent with the body of research that highlights how crucial FLMs are in creating an atmosphere that encourages employees to have a say. In addition to addressing urgent issues, FLMs foster an environment where employees feel free to voice their opinions by being adaptable and responsive. This serves to support the notion that FLMs play a crucial role in facilitating communication between staff and top management by serving as mediators to foster a more diverse and active work environment.

6.5.1 FLMs dealing with employee grievances and other issues

How FLMs handle various workplace difficulties and facilitate employee voice was investigated. This includes managing problems, settling grievances, and providing suggestions for process improvements. Understanding these factors, the researcher gained insight into how FLMs play an important role in both mediating issues and motivating employees to contribute suggestions for improving their workplace. In the context of employees approaching their FLMs with work-related issues, FLMs' responses were explored.

The following statement highlights the views and opinions of the majority of the participants when they have a problem with their role, and their capacity to undertake it effectively.

> The first thing I would do is I would examine the process that the employee was complaining about it, and also we would look at the capability of that particular employee's experience – the banking experience, the educational background, the function-related experience – and then we need to assess whether it's true that this employee at the current stage cannot perform

whatever role expected from him or her, or they might require additional training. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

If an employee comes to Interviewee FLM-M4 regarding undertaking his or her job effectively or a personal/conflictual issue with a colleague that they cannot resolve, he will consider the matter and then outline possible steps that should be taken.

Yes, it happens. Especially when you're working with bigger groups, you tend to have people from different backgrounds, different ages, different mentalities; there is diversity in the team. This diversity can add to the team and also sometimes it has its issues. It is very important to listen from both parties, and you try to bring both of them to the common ground. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

Interviewee FLM-M4 is happy to listen to what employees have to say. He recognises that, in a diverse team, there will be different visions and understandings of various matters. For him, it is important to listen to the parties and to try to get them to find common ground. He is practical in terms of employees' voice.

For such an issue or such incidents or cases, I would request my line manager to intervene. Definitely be here and to sit together with you and with the employee to listen from both sides and then he'll decide what's the problem. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

He will listen to the employee and will raise the matter with his line manager. They will then try to resolve the issue together. This indicates that the FLMs are willing to listen and be supportive, and are keen to resolve the issues raised. This is for the benefit of the organisation, but also for the good of the employees: if employees are happy, they are more likely to work well and efficiently.

This FLM is happy to receive any suggestions regarding improving the role being undertaken.

> Yes, absolutely, whatever is being suggested is being examined and studied and if there's any opportunity to improve their role and the way they're doing their job, it is most welcome. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

If an employee has a grievance, they should first approach their FLM. If the line manager is unable to settle the situation, the employee must take the agreed-upon procedures following HR policy.

> Yes, there is. It is mentioned in our HR policy. There is a grievance, they can reach to the line manager, next they can reach to department head, after that they can reach to HR. They can even reach up to the CEO. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

> All of this is carried out through the grievance process. (Interviewee FLM-F12)

To summarise, it seems that most FLMs are open to receiving approaches from their staff members on all the points raised and have suggested ways of dealing with them such that they are more readily resolved, to the satisfaction of the employee and for the benefit of the organisation. In contrast, some employees would rather raise concerns with their FLM's line manager, especially if they have issues with their FLM that they cannot resolve locally. Moreover, the points highlighted above suggest that employees are most likely to speak up under the mechanism of one-to-one meetings with their FLMs, as this affords them direct access to address the issues concerning them, and also encourages FLMs to act upon those highlighted points. Such one-to-one meetings, by their very nature, tend to be informal, thus providing

an atmosphere in which employees can be open about their concerns and feel confident to express them.

6.5.2 The importance of employees raising issues and suggesting improvements

This section on the relevance of employee voice refers directly to research question 3. Both FLMs and employees were asked about the importance of employees being able to express their views on any issues (and the subsequent resolution of concerns), demonstrating that, while their motivations may differ, they all recognise the need for employees to share their concerns. FLMs perceive it as critical for better decision-making and problem-solving, while employees consider it necessary for feeling valued and engaged. Understanding these viewpoints can contribute to a more open and responsive workplace. This also highlights the employees' perspectives on the significance of issues they raise.

A particular theme generated was that active employee participation created a harmonious working environment. All the FLMs affirmed that it is good practice, and advantageous for the organisation, to listen to employees' views. This is good both for business and for productivity. Their experience suggests that if employees are listened to and feel comfortable in their working environment, then they are less liable to leave the organisation to seek new employment elsewhere. Indeed, they are more likely to remain loyal to their present organisation.

Interviewee FLM-F3 highlighted the importance of having a say and the importance of acting on this and linked it to the importance of the employee's role and function.

It's very important. I want to know the issues that they are facing, so it will be much easier to improve, because they are on the front line and they deal with high-net-worth customers. (Interviewee FLM-F3)

An interviewee focused on positive outcomes attributable to having a say, providing an example of employees being the best ambassadors of the organisation by being happy in their workplace.

I think an employee must be able to voice their thoughts and their ideas. It is a very crucial thing for employees because, if you have happy employees, then you will have happy customers and you will have a positive impact on job satisfaction with a high level of productivity. It is very important to have your employees voice out their opinion – at the end of the day, they are the best ambassadors to your organisation. (Interviewee FLM-F7)

In summary, the importance of employees being able to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team was recognised by all interviewees. Thus, suggesting innovative ideas helps to create an approach to work which leads to reducing the workload and increasing perceived advantages for developing productivity and creativity. This is consistent with the AMO framework, as employees are given the ability to contribute ideas, the motivation to engage in problem-solving, and the opportunity to communicate suggestions through various voice mechanisms and channels.

In this regard, all interviewed employees commented on the ability to offer suggestions that can improve operational activities, noting its importance.

According to the majority of FLMs, employees need to raise work-related issues. However, if problems in the workplace are dealt with promptly, by listening to employees' views, then this will have a positive impact on job satisfaction, potentially leading to increased productivity and a reduction in the turnover rate. Furthermore, all FLMs agree that by listening to and accepting employees' suggestions for improvement, there is the potential to create a more harmonious working environment, enhance employee productivity, and engender greater job satisfaction.

Employees' perspectives

The importance of raising concerns about work-related issues was highlighted by all interviewees. This is positive, as the more employees raise issues, the more they will come up with better solutions, which is very good for the development of the organisation and employees' performance. If issues are raised to the FLMs, there is an expectation that they will find a solution: most interviewees highlighted the significance of raising issues in the workplace.

> It is important to raise, and even if someone thinks I don't have this problem of a person in front of me feeling that I am a problem maker, it doesn't matter. If you have any issue and you don't raise it, then no development in yourself and the organisation. So, we are here, paid for giving good ideas, bringing change – positive change. (Interviewee EMP-F3)

Some interviewees affirmed that it is very important to raise any issues, as they are on the front line dealing with the customer.

It is very important to raise work-related issues, as it is an integral part of the employee and employee relationship, so if there is a problem concerning work, I mean, definitely, you have to raise it. (Interviewee EMP-M7)

In summary, most of the employees responded that raising work-related issues is very important for them, as employees are the people who deal directly with customers and are accountable for making changes in the organisation. It is also important for employee–employee relations that any issues are discussed and resolved. As per FLMs, allowing employees to raise work-related issues can have a beneficial impact on the employees that affects their motivation and performance, which positively influences the level of customer service. Both FLMs and employees agreed that this is a very important practice for employees and the organisation. Why this should be so is because the banking sector is a sophisticated one in which employees desire to work, thus reaping the benefits of an employment environment infused with positivity.

In Oman, the commercial banking sector is one of the most sophisticated and developed industries in the country. The banks are characterised by their solid and competent policies and procedures for employee management and development (Al-Lamki, 2005). A developing country such as Oman requires an efficient banking sector. The National Bank of Oman is a key player within this sector, as it is one of the biggest banks in Oman, having a paid-up capital of US$288 million (NBO, 2020).

6.5.2.1 Employees raising several work-related issues

Research question 3 investigates the many forms of employee issues that arise in the workplace. It is evident from the interviews that employees consider one-to-one meetings with their FLMs a favoured mechanism to raise issues when they wish to

make temporary or permanent changes to the various issues already detailed in Section 6.5. However, it is acknowledged that some of the factors are beyond FLMs' capacity, that is, those fixed by the HR department or labour law in the country, such as working hours.

> See, I will take working hours and start and finish time together because this is again part of the rules or laws that we have in the country. You know, you can't do anything about that. However, for start and finish times I talk to my line manager, and we have a flexibility of time – I think it is one-hour flexibility. If you have a specific time then you must explain the reason to the line manager. Shift patterns don't apply to our department; we only work the morning shift [normal working hours]. Changes to holidays: we are a team of four people, including our line manager, so at the beginning of the year we give our tentative dates, and we have the flexibility to change if there is an agreement between other employees. Work–family conflicts, also my line manager, that is work–life balance, I can see that, and the organisation also is very supportive. (Interviewee EMP-F3)

In summary, in all cases, the interviewees reported that employees approach their FLMs directly for any work-related issues. They could affect any permanent or temporary changes within the scope of their powers. It is recognised, however, that Omani labour law and the HR department fix some issues. Furthermore, FLMs are keen to resolve any issues as they recognise the value to the organisation of employees' views being considered. This viewpoint is consistent with the literature on the value of incorporating employee feedback to encourage a more harmonious workplace, enhance productivity, and boost employee satisfaction.

6.5.2.2 Employees raising grievances and other issues

This section connects to research question 3 by investigating broader organisational issues raised alongside employee complaints. Further analysis shows, in interviews with employee-level participants, that it is apparent that they approach their FLMs first for any work-related issues. During the data collection process, they were asked what happens when they have a problem at work. For example:

- A problem with their role, and their capacity to undertake it effectively
- A personal/conflictual issue with (a) colleague(s) that they cannot resolve
- An issue with their line manager that they cannot resolve
- A grievance at work.

The focus on going directly to the FLMs is evident in the following responses, in which employees discuss how they approach their FLMs first for the above-mentioned work-related issues, which are embedded in their work. The majority of interviewees affirmed that they would speak to their FLM about all issues apart from when they have a problem with their FLM.

> I will speak to my manager and explain to her what sort of challenges or problems I'm facing in doing this. (Interviewee EMP-F4)

> If the issue is with my line manager, I will go to the head of the department. (Interviewee EMP-M1)

One participant highlighted how she tackles a personal/conflictual issue with a colleague that she cannot resolve.

First of all, I will try to solve it with my colleagues because we are one team. If nothing happened, then I will approach first my shift in charge to solve; otherwise, he will raise it to the line manager. (Interviewee EMP-F2)

And if she has a grievance at work:

For this issue, the HR department has a form to fill up, but, first of all, sure, I should speak to my line manager, and he will ask me to fill up the grievance form from HR and they will investigate the case. (Interviewee EMP-F2)

In summary, most employees prefer to speak directly with their FLMs if they encounter work-related issues. However, they prefer not to speak to their FLMs if they have a problem or issue with them directly. In such cases, employees prefer to speak to their FLMs' superiors to resolve the issue. The preferred solution is to encourage employees to speak to their FLMs directly in a friendly and open way. This emphasises the importance of FLMs properly responding to employee feedback, aligning with research on open communication, and resolving workplace concerns. In the framework of AMO, this implies that employees must have the ability to address concerns directly with their FLMs, as well as the chance to engage in open communication. When employees believe they are unable to resolve issues with their FLMs directly, they are more likely to escalate the situation. Organisations can improve employee motivation and provide them with the opportunity to engage in productive dialogue by creating an environment in which employees feel empowered and encouraged to discuss concerns with their FLMs, resulting in a more effective and supportive work environment.

6.5.3 Opportunities for employees to raise issues at work

Research question 3 focuses on how employees can have more flexibility to express their views at work. Employees can communicate their concerns through a variety of channels, including regular HR visits to branches and the CEO town hall, in which employees can ask questions and report concerns. These strategies promote open communication and make everyone feel included.

Based on the responses of FLMs, the organisation has provided opportunities for employees to raise work-related issues. In this regard, Interviewee FLM-M1 noted that they do have visitors from top management to see if they have any issues. As well as other channels that are available to employees to enable them to raise issues, the organisation sends out representatives from the HR department to interior branches to hear the opinions and concerns of employees.

> Yes, sometimes we have visits from the management along with the HR department to listen to employees. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Another emphasised in detail the significance of the CEO's town hall in raising employees' work-related issues.

> I think it depends on who you're raising to. If you talk about the CEO's town hall, that's even an organisation providing enough opportunities, because that's a good opportunity to raise whatever you have if you cant raise it with your line manager. I know people who went to speak directly to the CEO about the promotion and the work environment, and it was taken seriously. Things have changed and, further, people in the organisation went and spoke to the CEO about the pay or the work environment or whatever and serious action

was taken from the CEO and GMs [general managers]. So, if your line manager is not listening, it's an open door to go speak to the higher management again. (Interviewee FLM-M5)

Opportunities are available for raising concerns, but issues may not always be taken seriously or resolved to the satisfaction of employees.

Now, I think they do provide opportunities, but whether or not these issues are addressed or worked on I'm not quite sure. I don't know, but the opportunities are available for everyone. Opportunities are available through different channels. (Interviewee FLM-F10)

Another participant also focused on the importance of providing support to employees when they face any issues at work, and she is sufficiently confident that she can address emerging issues by herself. She does, however, point to the whistleblowing mechanism whereby employees can confidentiality and anonymously raise concerns directly to the HR department.

I believe it's purely on how the line managers are managing their team. Personally, I welcome any feedback to be shared, so the issue is the result, and the same feel with my line manager, where I can also discuss with her whatever issue we face and get the needed support from her. Our organisation provides enough opportunities that, there is a thing called whistleblowing. This is also in the HR manual, whistleblowing – you anonymously highlight the issue – but to be honest we didn't reach the level of sharing our problems with HR or our general manager, because we always try to resolve it internally. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

From the above, it is clear that whistleblowing is a specific type of employee voice that involves reporting certain activities or incidents to senior management that might be immoral, illegal, or harmful to individuals or the company. It helps promote concepts of accountability and transparency within the workplace.

In summary, FLMs are confident that various available channels enable employees to speak out. Such channels include encouraging employees simply to speak to their FLMs, then use various other channels to raise issues with higher management. The bank has provided sufficient opportunities, complying with the AMO framework by ensuring that employees have the opportunity to express their views via structured channels. However, employees need to raise critical issues and follow the proper channels, starting with their line manager. They should, firstly, talk with their FLM, then the divisional head, then go to HR, and, as the final step, approach the CEO if there are inadequate results. Sufficient opportunities are available, but there should be a sequence that seems logical.

The CEO town hall is the most well-known channel provided by the organisation, whereby employees may raise their concerns directly with the CEO if they feel their FLMs are not acting upon them. Some concerns have been expressed that employees are not adequately listened to by their FLMs; others articulated that, in their banking culture, they are encouraged to speak up and to listen to each other.

In addition to the above responses, only two interviewees commented on the organisation not offering sufficient opportunities for employees to raise issues at work.

We suggest having regular region-wise visits to interior branches, HR and senior management to listen to employees' needs and to improve employees' approach towards expressing their views and concerns. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Interviewee FLM-M1 responded that there are some visits from the management, but he suggests that there should be regular visits to the interior branches. The above quote illustrates that interior branches require an extra visit from the management side because employee voices are not being sufficiently encouraged.

6.5.4 The impact of employees raising issues and concerns on their attitudes and behaviours and on the organisation

This section relates to research question 3 by examining how employees approach their FLMs with issues at work and if FLMs can solve the issue to the employees' satisfaction. The impact of employees raising issues and concerns on their attitudes and behaviours and on the organisation was explained by different interviewees.

Employees always feel satisfied and happy when I solve their problems. Yes, it is always good for the organisation because, whenever employees are happy, they will engage more with their work and increase their job satisfaction. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Another interviewee added that their employee's situation was resolved, and the employee felt more confident, self-assured, and able to do their job. This led to enhanced employee loyalty towards the organisation, resulting in good work.

They are more independent of themselves; it's improved their productivity. Their behaviour was good and loyal to the organisation. It is instead of doing

one project at a time, they do two projects at a time run by two people, and was good for the organisation as well. (Interviewee FLM-M5)

In contrast, there were examples of FLMs not being able to resolve an issue to employees' satisfaction. When Interviewee FLM-M1 was asked how he dealt with feedback from employees, what their reaction was, and what the impact was, he responded: "I tell them it is beyond my control, but I will try my best to solve it." Employees were "Of course, not happy", which consequently impacted their attitude: "Their attitudes were negative." This was not good for the organisation: "No, because whenever employees are satisfied, they will work hard, which is good for the organisation itself."

Interviewee FLM-F3 commented: "I tell them it is under process." Their reaction: "They were not happy." The employees were not satisfied with the FLM's response, which consequently impacted their attitude negatively: "This is the thing, as I told you, the sales of new to the bank are decreased", and "Obviously, [this] wasn't good for the organisation."

Interviewee FLM-M11 claimed that they work in a very busy environment. Most of the employees are very organised in the bank. Everything is dealt with professionally because they appreciate their work and wish to serve the organisation fully. According to him, it is one of the oldest banks in the country, employees work systematically, and everything functions smoothly.

> No, I don't recall any example. I didn't face a major issue or a major complaint. It's always a minor challenge and we work on them. We are in a very busy environment and work in a very organised and old bank in the country, with a very good system, so everything is smooth here. (Interviewee FLM-M11)

In summary, All FLMs affirmed that their employees' behaviours and attitudes were positive when they were able to resolve their work-related issues, which is perceived to be good practice for the organisation. On the other hand, employees' behaviours and attitudes were negative when their FLMs were not able to resolve the issues to their satisfaction, which impacted their morale and thus the business. Therefore, it can be argued that hearing and acting upon employees' issues is essential for organisations to maintain employee loyalty and retention rates. This is especially important for long-established organisations, which frequently have well-defined protocols to make things function efficiently. According to the research, such consistency and compliance not only promote effective operations but also increase employee satisfaction and loyalty.

6.5.5 Common issues raised by employees

The starting point for discussion during the interviews with HR managers was to understand, from their perspective, the key issues raised by employees in the organisation, as this approach would provide a better understanding of the issues about which employees wish to speak out.

> I would say it is the promotion because there is a lack of progression. This is one; there is no clear career path available. So that is missing somehow. People mainly talk about promotions and salary adjustment as one of the most common queries that used to come to us. (Interviewee HR1)

> If you look at the employee engagement survey results that we have had in the past two to three years, one of the most common trends which have come out is basically communication, which is one aspect whereby they do feel that communication from the top level to the bottom, the most level, needs to be

looked at, that is one. Secondly is rewards and conditions, because, to be honest, we don't have a very robust employee value proposition in place to cover a large audience or the real performance. (Interviewee HR2)

In summary, the unavailability of suitable career paths in the organisation has resulted in employees constantly requesting promotions. Furthermore, there is a gap in communication from senior management to employees that causes concern as to whether, at the HR level, employees could trust the management to hear and act upon their voice.

6.5.5.1 Pay and working conditions

The HR managers added that the most common areas in which specific views are expressed are immediate work tasks and team organisation, pay and working conditions, and individual personal issues and grievances. Among these, the most common theme to emerge was the concern of pay and working conditions.

I think it's pay. Salaries. I think that might be a common trend. (Interviewee HR2)

To address concerns over pay and promotion, the organisation responded by adopting a market survey approach to comparing pay scales.

Yes, if there are complaints, we do go for the market survey. We compare our pay structure to the market. We have done this about five years back, when people had raised concerns that they are not being paid as per the market. The bank had done a market survey through an independent consultant. Yes, and the basis of the outcomes of the reports of the study, people has been given an increase in their salaries. (Interviewee HR1)

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In 2019 we had a lot of heat coming out, saying that our pay scales are low pay scales, so we acted upon it. We appointed a consultant to do a salary benchmarking survey to compare our salaries to other banks'. (Interviewee HR2)

In summary, the use of market surveys ensures equity of salary across the sector such that this organisation is paying its employees at the same level that other similar organisations pay their employees. Employees doing a similar job will receive similar pay across the sector. This helps maintain a competitive edge and assures employees that the organisation does value their contribution.

The way HR finds out about the three main concerns of employees, as indicated, is through visits to employees in different departments and branches, an annual survey, and a one-to-one approach through which they can speak directly to employees and receive first hand their ideas and concerns. If common themes emerge, these are acted upon.

We do visit – we are very much open to staff. We have an open-door policy, we do visit staff, we sit with them during that meeting. We also receive such complaints and also see such sort of requirements, and then we go with the feedback if there are common concerns. (Interviewee HR1)

In summary, through these channels and mechanisms, employees can express their views. However, it falls upon the organisation itself to act on these views for the overall welfare and contentment of the workforce. The literature supports this by demonstrating that when managers respond to employee feedback, it increases work satisfaction and overall morale. Effective response to employee concerns

promotes a positive work environment and increases employee engagement and retention.

<u>FLMs' perspectives</u>

Requesting promotion and salary increase is one of the common issues raised by employees.

> Request for promotion. This also depends on other aspects – any promotion depends on the budget of the department and the management will have to decide whether they will allocate it or not, so this is out of our hands as line managers. But, from our end, we will do the recommendation to the management; the recommendation is highlighted during the performance review. (Interviewee FLM F2) Recognition in some areas and promotion. Recognition means appreciation from the management. So, promotion and salary are concerned as a classical work-related concern. (Interviewee FLM F10)

To sum up, FLMs highlighted that employees' requests for promotion constitute the greatest work-related concern brought to them. Some staff feel dissatisfied after having been overlooked for promotion. In this regard, the organisation must adopt a robust system for making available career paths and intensifying the communication aspect, such that these issues are addressed promptly, to reduce employee turnover rate.

Communication is important for employees as are channels of communication for their voices to be heard. Employees feeling valued is essential, being able to

communicate their views is important, and career paths and equitable salaries help retain them. Most FLMs are concerned that the voices of their employees are facilitated and heard. Most employees are content to approach their line manager in the first instance unless their concern is with their line manager, in which case they tend to escalate their concern to a higher managerial level.

Communication is also important to HR, although there is some concern from employees that HR either does not hear their voice or is unwilling to act upon it. When employees' voices are heard, there is the potential for enhanced job satisfaction and increased productivity. However, when employees perceive that their voices are not heard, then the opposite may happen: job satisfaction and productivity may decrease leading to potential increased turnover of staff. On the whole, FLMs are content when their employees' voices are heard. Overall, the organisation functions well when staff are content in their working environment and can maintain a balance in their work and family lives.

6.5.5.2 High workloads

This section aims to explore what issues are reported to FLMs and if these work-related concerns are wide and varied or if there is an element of commonality. The majority of the respondents mentioned that the workload of employees is regarded as a common concern and the second most common work-related issue is promotion and salary.

The main concern for Interviewee FLM-M1 was insufficient staff numbers, leading to staff having unacceptably high workloads:

A shortage of staff … the rate of the business compared to the volume of the staff, because they have workload, and their salary. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

Another interviewee added that employees complain about doing work tasks manually causing pressure on their workload. For this reason, they feel their pay scale should be higher due to the heavy workload.

The most common is payment. People always feel they're underpaid because of the type and how they do their job. It is a basic way of doing it. (Interviewee FLM-M5)

In conclusion, employees frequently regard workload as a major issue, and it is typically too much for FLMs to handle alone. While managers can tackle many day-to-day problems, addressing workload concerns frequently necessitates larger adjustments or additional resources, according to studies on how businesses perform. Effective workload management often requires structural changes as well as higher-level support, emphasising the importance of a comprehensive approach that goes beyond individual managerial actions.

6.5.5.3 Other concerns

Other FLMs mentioned different employee concerns. When new tasks or systems are deployed, it seems insufficient thought is given to fully explain how the new setup will function. Therefore, employees feel disorientated and confused and restrained in even asking questions to address this.

If the issue is getting repeated time by time, and you are listening to the same thing over time, then you don't have anything new to provide it. If someone is talking about automation daily and you know you're having budget

constraints. You need a lot of force or management approval or a good budget to execute such projects, which is not happening due to the Covid-19 outbreak. However, these initiatives are parked aside, but employee complaints will never be parked aside – you will keep on hearing them. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

In summary, employees ask their FLMs for clarification on performing their job, which suggests that they do not have a sufficiently robust induction and training to do their job effectively. Furthermore, employees habitually complain about issues that are beyond the control of FLMs. Such issues require management approval before they can be addressed. However, the management has effectively mothballed some projects due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, these findings indicate that employee voice is not completely supported within the organization. Because there is no KPI for voice, employees may believe that having a say is not valued because it has no impact on their performance reports. FLMs state.

I don't think we have a specific KPI for this in the people's performance appraisal. (Interviewee HR1)

implying that voice is not regarded as a formal component of evaluating employee performance. Furthermore, limited promotion chances lead employees to believe that expressing their views will not benefit their careers, discouraging them from voicing their ideas, suggestions and concerns. One FLM stated, that.

I would say it is the promotion because there is a lack of progression.

(Interviewee HR1)

emphasizing how a lack of growth routes demotivates staff from having a say. FLMs also state that they are confident in the several channels provided to allow employees to have a say; however, employees may disagree if they do not see genuine action or results due to their contributions. Employees may feel less motivated to contribute if their voices are not linked to specific objectives, career progression, and effective follow-through, thus restricting ideas that could help and drive innovation in the firm.

6.5.5.4 Confidence of employees in raising issues

This section discusses research question 3. According to the data, when employees raised concerns, they displayed a strong feeling of self-assurance. They regularly reported feeling confident in raising work-related concerns without fear of repercussions. This sense of comfort in voicing their opinions to a workplace culture that values openness and trust allows employees to participate more freely in discussing their experiences and concerns. Employees' confidence in raising issues emerged in all of the interviews.

> No, never concerned, because if I don't express myself, then what is my use? There is no use of me being here, around. Even if there are consequences it doesn't matter, so I don't worry about the consequences. I am confident as long as I express my grievances, and should be in a proper way through routes and in a proper manner. (Interviewee EMP-F3)

> I never thought about the consequence. The organisation values its employees, and one is empowered to raise their voice. We should be confident, so I don't see any reason why one should not raise their voice. (Interviewee EMP-M7)

In summary, employees stated that raising work-related issues is vital for improving the work system. Especially, they feel confident in raising issues with their FLM, particularly those that aim to resolve any conflict. This approach suggests that the organisation is fertile ground for allowing and encouraging employees to speak out on issues of importance to them without any risk of negative consequences.

The findings show that the firm has fostered a culture in which employees feel comfortable raising issues without fear of retaliation. Employees believe they have the right to address their concerns through appropriate channels, which increases their confidence in doing so. This openness represents a trusting environment that fosters communication.

In terms of the AMO framework, this confidence corresponds to the idea that employees are given the ability to express themselves via open, accessible channels, while management encourages them to do so by providing a safe and supportive atmosphere. FLMs also assist by strengthening these channels and ensuring that employees can express their views to increase engagement and participation.

6.6 FLMs dealing with employees' suggestions for improvements

In terms of research question 2, which investigates how FLMs implement employee suggestions, the data demonstrates that FLMs generally have a positive attitude towards staff contributions. Suggestions that provide real improvements to work procedures are not only recognised but frequently implemented when practicable. Also, FLMs encourage employee input, recognising that attempts to improve operational efficiency or solve workplace difficulties contribute positively to the overall function of the organisation. This attitude demonstrates a managerial

receptivity to ideas that promote innovation and progress, which aligns with the larger goals of business success and employee engagement.

> I will study the suggestion and if the suggestion is within the bank policy and valuable then I will take them to my regional manager for his approval. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

This FLM is supportive of his employees and is keen to put forward their suggestions to the regional manager for review, assessment, and implementation if the suggestions have merit and sit within the overall policy of the organisation. The FLM himself will decide if employee suggestions have worth and value.

Another FLM considers teamwork to be a positive initiative. Working together and focusing on tasks, new ideas and suggestions potentially emerge.

> It is welcomed, and if it is effective, we would implement it and follow it; anything to enhance the work is considered as a positive initiative from the employees. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

> The first thing is communication because communication is the key to leading to providing goals, first of all giving them chances to communicate their ideas and goals, and always I keep saying every staff member has their extreme skills. (Interviewee FLM-F6)

Because communication is the key to the team working and to the pursuit of team goals, these goals can be realised or enhanced by embracing suggestions for improvement.

In summary, all the FLMs interviewed are happy to receive suggestions from their employees; however, if they do not act upon these, then nothing new happens, and

no benefits are realised. While FLMs rightly welcome suggestions from employees, it is equally right that these should be subject to study by both their peers and their manager, to identify what will truly benefit the organisation in the longer term. Ultimately, for positive change to take place, words should be transformed into action.

6.6.1 FLMs encouraging employees to suggest improvements in the workplace

This section explores how FLMs actively encourage employees to share their opinions and ideas and participate in decision-making. The findings demonstrate that managers establish an open workplace, allowing employees to exchange ideas. This method improves motivation and engagement by demonstrating a commitment to a participative workplace where employee contributions are recognised and important to organisational progress. It is evident from the interviews that FLMs encourage their employees to put forward suggestions for improvements in the workplace. The following statements explain how FLMs do this so that employees can make suggestions.

> I strongly encourage employees to do that, and I motivate them on a personal level. (Interviewee FLM-F10)

> The first thing I would like to do in this one is build trust. Trust is most important between us and makes the employees satisfied and make him happy. Because all the companies do this, they encourage, like, they give every opportunity for everyone to do it. Like, maybe because they give motivation and employees would be more motivated to put in their suggestions. (Interviewee FLM-F6)

In summary, the above responses suggest that employees are the main source of ideas for overall improvement and therefore their suggestions are vital, as they offer the principal means of improving the organisation. The link to productivity was the focus of another interviewee who proposed that employees' suggestions for improvement would make them more productive in their work and would reduce the FLMs' need to constantly monitor their staff. Furthermore, if employees are organised in this way, they will be more able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their present working experience and environment and will be best placed to offer suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, encouraging employees to offer suggestions is good, overall, for team morale and motivation.

According to the AMO framework, allowing employees to make suggestions boosts their motivation and engagement. When their suggestions are implemented, they feel more involved and contribute to the organisation's overall success.

6.6.2 Opportunities for employees to suggest improvements in the workplace

This subsection investigates the options the organisation offers for employees to contribute suggestions, through different mechanisms and channels that are available in the organisation. These mechanisms ensure that employees can participate in continuous improvement efforts, encouraging an open and innovative culture. FLMs encourage the use of these channels, demonstrating the organisation's commitment to employee involvement.

It is evident from the interviews that the tools, channels, and mechanisms are the same for raising issues and concerns. The following comments attest to the positive approach of the management in providing opportunities for employees to make

suggestions to improve their work, the work of their team, and the work environment.

> I feel it is flexible and open, together, suggestions and raising concerns. We have town hall meetings with the CEO, or if someone wants to speak to HR, it is not like a closed thing; they can easily open up and speak to them. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

> We do have equal opportunities and high opportunities, also to report whatever we feel or whatever we think it has to improve our working environment or whatever we are performing in the office. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

In summary, the opportunities provided for employees to suggest improvements in the workplace are essentially the same as for bringing forward concerns or complaints. The same mechanisms and channels are available for both. The only exceptions are incident reporting and whistleblowing, with special channels being available for addressing these. Also, the CEO's town hall and senior management visits to different units and branches encourage employees to raise suggestions for improvement.

Except for incident reporting, the organisation provides numerous opportunities for employees to suggest improvements and raise concerns. This is consistent with the literature on participatory management, in which formalised opportunities for employee voice are vital. Based on the AMO framework these opportunities boost employee motivation and engagement, hence promoting continual organisational development.

6.6.3 The impact of employees' suggestions for improvements on their attitudes and behaviours and on the organisation

This section explores the extent to which FLMs consider the impact on the organisation of employees suggesting improvements related to their tasks, work team, or working environment.

> They are adding a lot of value to enhance the process within the bank. This is also appreciated by external auditors – when they come and check those reports, they always say that we are performing our job to a very good standard. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

> This was good for the employees, as well as the team and their morale and the organisation. (Interviewee FLM-M11)

On the other hand, there were examples of FLMs not being able to implement employees' ideas about improvements to the employees' satisfaction.

> We are not getting new customers to the bank. … The impact on their behaviour was negative because they were hoping to get the system where they can do the opening new accounts quickly, and not good for the team and the organisation. (Interviewee FLM-F3)

Another interviewee stated that, again, because of budget restrictions, ideas put forward were rejected.

> I was very honest with my team and explained to them that, due to the budget restriction, the management did not approve the idea. (Interviewee FLM-M9)

In summary, the impact on the organisation of employees suggesting improvements is positive regarding employees' attitudes and behaviours. Staff members' behaviour is positive when they are listened to, and the outcome is also positive. For instance, the sales of credit cards have greatly improved, and this is good for the team and the organisation. Employees were happy because customers were satisfied with the changes in practice that had been implemented, and they were sharing this on Twitter. This was beneficial for both the team and the organisation as it enhanced employee loyalty towards their organisation. On the other hand, staff had hoped to get a system to open new accounts up and running quickly. Because that did not happen, they felt demotivated. This was not so good for the organisation or the team.

This approach stimulates growth, adds value to the organisation, and encourages employees for the future. Concerning employee voice, when employees feel that they are heard and their suggestions have been acted upon, they feel satisfied, and their satisfaction enhances their performance, benefiting the organisation. On the other hand, there were examples of FLMs not being able to implement employees' suggestions to their satisfaction, and this impacted negatively on their attitude and behaviours. This suggests that employees' feasible suggestions should be routinely considered, evaluated, and implemented if useful. Engaging with the literature on participative management and the AMO framework reveals that effective execution of viable suggestions is critical for retaining employee motivation and establishing a positive organisation culture.

6.6.3.1 Confidence of employees in making suggestions

This topic addresses research question 3 by analysing employees' willingness to provide suggestions to their FLMs. Employees often feel comfortable expressing their views, indicating a positive attitude towards managerial openness. This confidence complements the literature on employee voice and the AMO framework, as faith in the acceptability of suggestions boosts motivation and engagement.

The data revealed that the interviewees do feel confident in making suggestions in their organisation. Therefore, employees should be encouraged to come up with good ideas, and suggest these to their FLMs, and understand this as being an integral part of their job, because suggesting such ideas is essential to the development of the organisation.

> More confident – I put a suggestion and if it's taken up, this boosts my confidence that you know that your word has been taken into consideration and action has been taken. (Interviewee EMP-F4)

> Yes, the more we suggest, the more our employees' productivity will be enhanced. I am always confident. (Interviewee EMP-F5)

In summary, it is evident from the above responses from employees that they are confident to suggest improvements to their FLMs as this practice helps to enhance employee productivity, because employees feel their suggestions have been heard and they have been valued by their FLMs. Providing significant opportunities for employees to contribute benefits both them and the organisation.

6.6.3.2 Effective suggestions proposed by employees

This section investigates employees' perceptions of how their suggestions are managed. It was identified in the interviews that some of the employees' suggestions are better received than others.

> I would say some of them, especially those are related to the business improvements. (Interviewee EMP-F3)

Conversely, interviewees revealed some suggestions that are least likely to be taken up.

> Working hours, because it has been fixed by labour law. (Interviewee EMP-F3)

> Everything related to the business. Other than that, I don't think it will be considered. (Interviewee EMP-F9)

In summary, on the one hand, according to the employees, only feasible opinions and ideas, and those that increase business performance, will be taken up, especially those suggestions that help to increase profit and reduce the cost of the business. On the other hand, any suggestions that require board approval are less likely to be taken up. Moreover, employees can still bring forward a range of suggestions, but these will not have as great an impact as the more feasible ones.

Although opportunities for employee participation are provided, the selective adoption of suggestions can have a negative impact on motivation, particularly when non-revenue-generating ideas are ignored. This dynamic is consistent with the AMO framework, in which the opportunity to participate exists, but the emphasis on profitability may restrict the overall influence on employee involvement.

6.7 FLMs as informal voice champions for employees to raise issues and suggest improvements

This section includes data from both managers and employees, emphasising that FLMs are often the initial point of contact for issues and suggestions. The findings investigate how FLMs manage these inputs and how employees evaluate their responsiveness, providing insights into the dynamics of employee voice within the firm. This should be the first step because HR will not know the specific issues or details of the department. However, employees do not always follow the proper procedures; some go directly to HR or even the CEO with their ideas if they think they are good. Some interviewees' responses reflect that employees approach their FLMs first.

> We do not encourage such practice that the people exclude or disrespect their managers, because this would disturb the harmony of the organisation. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

> Some of the staff especially. Let's say they like to show to the management that they have a good idea, so they can overcome sometimes even their superiors and go to the top level, such as the general manager, or even the CEO if the employee can approach his office and always possible. They try to pitch their ideas, and this is happening. (Interviewee FLM-M11)

In summary, despite the availability of other effective channels including the CEO town hall, the FLM is the first point of call for employees to suggest their ideas. This should be the first step because HR will not know the specific issues of the department, whereas the FLMs do have such knowledge. Furthermore, FLMs know

that when employees take their suggestions directly to them, they themselves will get the credit for it. This is consistent with the literature on employee voice, which emphasises the importance of FLMs as major facilitators of communication. The AMO framework emphasises that efficient manager responsiveness is critical for maintaining employee motivation and engagement, highlighting management's role in addressing employee demands.

6.7.1 Motivation for employees to approach FLMs

This section investigates why employees regularly approach their managers first with concerns and suggestions. To offer a comprehensive understanding, FLMs and employees were interviewed. In addition, the reason why employees approach their managers first to suggest improvements is due to their feeling comfortable in doing so. It is important that employees feel confident in approaching their FLMs to make suggestions for improvement. In this regard, the majority of FLMs confirmed that they encourage their employees to share their knowledge and ideas and therefore employees feel comfortable expressing their views. The following quotes illustrate these views.

> They would openly approach me for whatever advice they need, and I don't have a glass window between myself and the employees. (Interviewee FLM-F7)

> I don't think anyone would have a problem or feel uncomfortable expressing their ideas or suggestions for improvement. I think I'm very approachable and I'm always ready to listen to whatever anyone has to say. (Interviewee FLM-F10)

Conversely, other FLMs presented different views regarding employees approaching their FLMs to suggest improvements.

> Maybe some employees don't desire to come to me and speak. Maybe because of their personalities, maybe because they feel that I might not be listening to them. (Interviewee FLM-F3)

> Not all employees would have the same courage or let's say same confidence to come and speak up and speak out their mind. They might be not afraid, but they might feel that there would be a different face … of rejection. I mean a lot of people; they are afraid of rejection. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

Employees feel comfortable approaching their FLMs with suggestions because they feel that their FLMs are approachable and maintain an open-door policy. FLMs themselves are keen for their employees to offer feasible suggestions for improvement as this reflects positively on them. When feasible suggestions come forward and are acted upon, there is the possibility of genuine improvements taking place in the operation of the organisation. Often such improvements come from the level of employees, i.e. from the bottom up. On the other side, the FLMs' observation that certain employees are unwilling to approach them because of attention issues or personality differences highlights impediments to effective communication. According to research on employee voice, perceptions of management receptiveness can influence employees' eagerness to communicate work-related issues or suggestions. In terms of the AMO framework, FLMs encourage employees to share their concerns by creating a supportive environment and providing clear information on how to raise issues, thereby increasing their ability to speak out. They also motivate employees by demonstrating that they value

feedback and are willing to listen, which fosters trust and confidence. Furthermore, FLMs provide opportunities for employees to share their ideas through an open-door policy, regular meetings, and casual conversations. This strategy improves communication, and increases job satisfaction.

Employees' perspectives

This section investigates why employees often approach their managers first with concerns and suggestions. Employee and FLM feedback help to reveal the reasons for employees' preferences and the dynamics at work. Employees tend to follow proper channels to raise issues. They are encouraged not to jump directly to a higher level; therefore, the FLM is the first point of contact, then the head of the department, and then HR. Most of the respondents made comments to this effect.

> Yeah, if there are any problems, I will talk to my manager, then the head of the department, and then the last level is HR. My first approach is my line manager because I think my line manager always listens to and acts upon my grievances. (Interviewee EMP-M1)

> My line manager first. If nothing happened then head of the department or otherwise HR department. (Interviewee EMP-M2)

In summary, according to employees, they directly approach their FLMs for both problems and suggestions. This suggests that FLMs have a good relationship with their employees and employees tend to prefer to speak to their FLMs directly either for raising work-related issues or to suggest improvements. FLMs are the primary point of contact. This is consistent with the literature on employee voice, which

highlights the importance of effective managerial participation in encouraging communication and establishing an open, responsive workplace. In conclusion, employees prefer to approach their FLMs first with issues and suggestions and they value their approachability and open-door policies. This is consistent with the perspective of FLMs, who are eager to hear and act on employee suggestions for improvement.

6.7.2 Examining employee experiences through FLMs' engagement with work-related issues

The HRM process involves the implementation of HRM practices by FLMs. Therefore, it is essential to explore employees' perceptions of approaching their FLMs with one of the above-mentioned work-related issues (Sections 6.5.2.1 and 6.5.2.2), and whether the FLM was able to resolve or deal with the issue to the employees' satisfaction. Most interviewees stressed that they felt positive towards their FLMs when they were able to solve the issues to their satisfaction.

> My line manager is always approachable, and I can depend on and always solve problems in his capacity and, overall, I am satisfied because I have received positive feedback. The organisation or the management, I can say, is always supportive. That's why we have those platforms that I have mentioned previously, to make sure that employees are satisfied because the HR department always tries to get the issues from the employees into account. (Interviewee EMP-M2)

On the other hand, interviewees had differing views towards their managers and their organisation regarding how much their views were heard when the FLMs were not able to resolve an issue to their satisfaction. The most surprising aspect of the

data is that all interviewees except one described there being an issue that the FLM was not able to resolve or support.

> Yes, I wanted an extra employee, as we have too much workload, and I approached my line manager, but she said now we can't hire extra staff and that's because of our HR department. She did whatever she had to do, but in the end, it's on the HR decisions. At the end, my views have not been considered. I was not very happy. Because they're not hiring more people and, you know, the pressures will be high. (Interviewee EMP-F4)

In summary, most of the employees agreed that their FLMs are supportive and approachable when they wish to raise work-related issues. However, while FLMs play an important role in handling employee concerns, some issues may require escalation to specialised departments, such as HR.

6.8 Factors hindering FLMs in implementing HRM

This section investigates the barriers to FLMs' ability to successfully manage and implement the voice system. Data acquired from both HR managers and FLMs reveals many problems that restrict their capability to support and enable employees' ability to share their opinions and ideas. In the interviews, it was observed that the FLMs lack the necessary skills and knowledge to implement HR practices.

> I think not from a policy and procedure perspective, but more from a mental perspective. See, people are always unsecured about their position, which is sad. People should be secure about their positions, people should be comfortable in what they're doing, but sometimes what happens because of

a lack of local talent in the market is whether you trust somebody into a managerial or leadership position. Now, once the person walks into that position, he or she becomes quickly aware of these weaknesses or areas of development which he tries to be defensive about this, and the voice of employees is one such area which is very sensitive. So, yes, there are mental barriers, see, the line managers will face in terms of not allowing their staff and they try to have a very centralised power but it doesn't work for a long time. They have to break those powers, into the kind of a delegation matrix. So, I won't say policy or procedure blocks anything but, yes, the mental attitude and the leadership traits of certain line managers do. (Interviewee HR2)

In summary, if the FLMs have been provided with the right tools, resources, and skills, and have the correct approach and have been given sufficient time to devote to managing people and practising their management in the right ways, then there should not be any barriers that discourage them from allowing and encouraging their employees to express their views. This emphasises the importance of ability, as providing FLMs with the required skills and resources is critical to effective employee voice facilitation. There is recognition by HR that they have employed people with insufficient skills to be effective FLMs, who have then covered up their deficiencies. Because of these deficiencies, some FLMs are unable to fully implement HR policies. An important consideration is the mindset of FLMs. There may be mental barriers in FLMs feeling insecure about their position and trying to hold back on implementing HR policies to hide their failings, inadequacies, and lack of suitable skillset. This demonstrates the importance of motivation, as addressing insecurities and boosting confidence through training and assistance can enable

FLMs to be more open about implementing HR regulations. Suitable training in the effective implementation of HR policies may help alleviate this problem. However, as it stands, this lack hinders some FLMs from facilitating employee voice fully and effectively. Allowing FLMs to develop and implement strong management skills, such as committed time and supportive tools, can help them encourage employee voice more effectively.

Furthermore, the HR managers' responses showed that FLMs can have a lesser desire to implement employee voice due to a lack of experience in the situation or their basic inability to manage people effectively in some situations.

> I don't think so. No one wants to get into the complex. So that it's all about how you handle the conflict or else give the right feedback to the staff. That's all that I believe in. That's one way of doing things but it's based on experience. (Interviewee HR1)

> Not really, no straight answer. There are line managers who will try to play gods. Yes, there are line managers who are a hindrance to this whole cultural shift that you want to do. Why? They are a hindrance, as I explained earlier: insecurities, incompetence, and they can't lead people. (Interviewee HR2)

A primary reason why FLMs have been unable to execute HR tasks or fully follow HR policy on employee voice is that they have not received any formal training and support in the process of enabling employees to have a say. Despite the stated importance of encouraging employee voice, the interviews revealed that the organisation provides no specialised training in this field.

> We do train the line managers to ensure that they are also aware of how they rate their employees and how would they like to entertain their queries and

questions, how they like to look at their areas of potential areas and development areas that they can look at, and there are channels, line managers equipped with the knowledge, but I don't see that we have had any specialised training in this area. (Interviewee HR1)

FLMs should be encouraged to enable their employees to have a say. See, having such [training] courses would encourage people. (Interviewee HR1)

As noted from the above responses, there are many factors contributing to the ineffective implementation of HR practices by FLMs. These include a lack of training and support. Appropriate training would, in itself, contribute to the successful implementation of HR practices. The following responses reveal whether the FLMs agree that they need to be trained in HR to encourage their employees to express their views. Interviewees HR1 and HR2 have different points of view.

I would tend to say not all but there could be some. But I don't think that all would agree with that concept, because they feel that they know how to deal with people by nature. (Interviewee HR1)

Yes, I think there is a dire need of people to, FLMs to become HR managers, which they have to become because, at the end of the day, it doesn't matter if people and every person has got all staff reporting to him … he should be an HR manager also. (Interviewee HR2)

In summary, a principal reason why FLMs have not been able to wholly execute HR tasks or fully implement HR policy on employee voice is that they lack formal training and support in the process of enabling employees to have a say. Despite the stated importance of encouraging employee voice, the interviews revealed that the organisation provides no specialised training in this field. It should also be noted that

there are other barriers to FLMs executing HR tasks including FLMs' personal insecurities, perceived incompetence, and lack of ability to lead people effectively.

<u>FLMs' perspectives</u>

FLMs must have sufficient formal training to become competent implementers of HRM practices in the workplace. They should also receive informal support to encourage employees to speak out and to know how to respond appropriately. In the interviews, it was found that FLMs lack the necessary knowledge on performing HRM.

> I didn't receive such training. But informal support I have got by my line manager. She always guides me, even if there is anything to enhance with the way I manage my employees. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

Interviewee FLM-F7 affirmed that, although the organisation provides different types of courses, there is no course related to employee voice.

> So much training is there, for example, leadership and time management training, but specifically about encouraging employees to speak out and to learn how to respond appropriately, no I have not. But informal support is always there. (Interviewee FLM-F7)

Additionally, one interviewee mentioned the importance of providing courses.

> I think there's a need for line managers because they haven't been in that role before, and it's also important for them to be aware of how people are different to communication. You need to have different communication styles with different employees: some might appreciate you being blunt, some might

want you to be a bit more diplomatic when it comes to telling them the process, they didn't perform well. (Interviewee FLM-F10)

All the FLMs affirmed that it is good practice for them to undertake courses in how to encourage employees to have a say. And some of them have confirmed that they have received some degree of informal guidance and support from their managers, which was sufficient for most tasks in this field. However, most FLMs have not received any formal training in employee voice even though this is generally perceived to be a positive step in enabling FLMs to enact HR policies.

There is general agreement from HR and FLMs that training is essential, although it has often proved to be inadequate. There are also various other reasons why FLMs fail to be effective employee voice facilitators, including role confusion, lack of resources, and heavy workloads. In this regard, FLMs were found to have a more limited ability to practice HRM tasks.

The data showed that FLMs frequently lack formal training and support in facilitating employee voice. Where training is provided by the organisation, it is not specifically in the field of employee voice. However, FLMs report that they receive informal support from their line managers, which motivates them to perform HRM tasks, if not adequately equipping them.

Furthermore, the data revealed the FLMs' willingness to handle employees' voices effectively, including addressing employee grievances and other work-related issues referenced in the study. By providing the required tools, resources, and training, the organisation improves FLMs' ability to successfully manage employee voice and professionally implement HR policy. Moreover, the data revealed that FLMs encourage and motivate their employees to bring forward feasible suggestions for

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improvement and other work-related issues. This indicates motivation since FLMs actively promote a supportive workplace in which employees feel encouraged to contribute and engage in meaningful discourse. Furthermore, contextual mechanisms and channels that enable employees to have a say are created and adopted by the organisation, whereby the employees have the opportunity to express their voice either to raise issues or to suggest improvements. These accessible channels allow employees to express their views, reinforcing the organisation's commitment to promoting employee voice.

On the other hand, it is found that FLMs are defensive about their ability to make changes to formal structures due to workload, time constraints, lack of training, role ambiguity, lack of full awareness of HR policy, and available employee voice channels and mechanisms. Also, FLMs have a lack of experience because they are new in their role and have not built up sufficiently positive relationships with their employees, with a consequent lack of trust.

Regarding workload, many FLMs already feel overburdened by the workload they presently have and cannot see where extra capacity in this regard might come from. Something similar may be said regarding time constraints in that there is little extra time in their schedule that they might be able to devote to matters regarding changes to formal structures. Concerning training, many FLMs have received no formal training with regard to implementing change as envisaged, while others are unsure what exactly is expected of them, thus leading to role ambiguity. Some FLMs simply lack experience or awareness of how HR policies and systems are implemented and have expressed a lack of knowledge of available employee voice channels. This could be because they are relatively new to their role or lack

enthusiasm to learn and deepen their understanding of their role, or simply because they are insecure in their role. In addition, it can be argued that a lack of trust between FLMs and employees proves to be a hindrance to the aspiration for change.

Furthermore, FLMs play an essential role within the organisation, performing as the bridge between top management's strategic vision and the operational performance of the employees. FLMs' efficacy and management styles are significantly influenced by their job functions, educational background, experience, level of training, and connectivity with top management. This study found that head office-based FLMs have a greater openness towards strategic goals, decision-making power, and the capability to enable employee voice via different mechanisms and channels, including an open-door policy, regular one-to-one meetings, and daily meetings. On the other hand, branch-based FLMs frequently encounter challenges on account of restricted access to information, limited decision-making power, and geographic distance from senior management, which might hamper their ability to facilitate employee voice effectively.

Moreover, educational background distinguishes between FLMs, with well-educated FLMs having enhanced conflict-handling skills and efficient communication competencies, whereas less-educated FLMs might rely heavily on practical experience and standard practices, possibly facing communication disputes. Furthermore, hierarchical position plays a critical role: senior FLMs at the head office embrace a wider impact, better resource management, and closer support with strategic goals, while junior FLMs at the branch level frequently function with restrained scope, experience separation, and face resource limitations.

It can be argued that senior FLMs and those who are close to the senior management have greater capability and power. This increased authority provides them the privilege to create a better environment for employees where they feel more comfortable expressing their work-related issues and suggestions for improvement, and have influence in implementing organisational policies regarding employee voice, mediating conflicts, acting upon their employees' concerns, and also influencing the adoption of employee suggestions. In contrast, junior FLMs are less aware of HR policy and the channels of communication, and have less power to act upon their concerns and less influence to promote employee suggestions for improvements. Furthermore, it has been noticed that employees who have been supervised by expatriate managers are less confident to participate due to their managers' domination and unwillingness to allow them to have a say (from the perspectives of employees in the findings).

Furthermore, while FLMs act as a bridge between HR policy and employees, there may be some factors that constrain this: role ambiguity and time and workload constraints, and the fact that FLMs may not have fully formed meaningful relationships with employees. When these factors come into play, the 'bridge' may not be fully formed and thus HR policy may not be adequately communicated to employees. Also, available channels of communication may not have been conveyed to employees.

6.9 Relationship between employee voice and other workplace/HR issues

6.9.1 Relationship between employee voice and staff engagement with their work

This section investigates the link between staff involvement in their work and their engagement in employee voice. By examining findings from HR managers and employees, the analysis indicates how employees' level of involvement influences their readiness to provide ideas and suggestions. This knowledge focuses on how work engagement affects the effectiveness of employee voice mechanisms and organisational communication. The interviews revealed that there is a relationship between employees' ability to raise their concerns about work-related issues and suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team, and how they engage with their work.

> I think it's a direct correlation that if the employees feel that they have platforms to raise their concerns. If they have platforms with senior management or middle management at various levels, especially the junior staff, those concerns will be addressed and those concerns will be looked at, although we might not be able to resolve issues – if we go back to them and explain to them the situation, make them understand. It has a direct correlation with the productivity efficiency of the staff – they feel more wanted; they feel more loyal to the organisation. (Interviewee HR2)

To sum up, according to HR managers, employee engagement will be higher when employees are allowed to express their voice. This viewpoint emphasises the need to provide channels for employees to express their thoughts to improve overall.

<u>Employees' perspectives</u>

All interviewees without exception believed that allowing them to have a say encourages them to be more engaged with their work.

> I feel more engaged because, first of all, I feel I work with a great team and our line manager is supportive. That's why I always feel that I am engaged with my work and try to do things in the right way. (Interviewee EMP-M1)

> A huge impact I would say – it's very important and critical to me, so it makes me highly engaged with my work. (Interviewee EMP-F5)

In summary, offering suggestions makes the employees more engaged with their work. Furthermore, the more employees are engaged, the more they are likely to improve the business through their own enhanced productivity. Also, this potentially enables employees to become more eligible for promotion, which enhances their careers. Both HR managers and employees believe that allowing employees to express their views increases engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty, highlighting the need for good communication channels in the workplace. According to the literature, when employees feel heard, they are more likely to be engaged and satisfied with their jobs, emphasising the necessity of having robust channels for employee feedback.

6.9.2 Relationship between employee voice and job satisfaction

This section investigates the relationship between staff involvement and engagement in employee voice. HR managers' and FLMs' insights illustrate how employee participation in work affects their willingness to express ideas and overall job happiness.

In this context, both respondents from the HR level agreed that employees being able to raise their concerns about work-related issues and suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team affects job satisfaction to a high degree. Thus, the bank has created various channels to allow and enable employees to speak up.

> I will say to the highest degree if the management takes the staff voice seriously. I mean, to implement any feasible ideas been suggested by them, then yes there is a correlation. (Interviewee HR1)

> I would say to the highest degree, and this approach has made them more satisfied with their job. (Interviewee HR2)

Taken together, these results suggest that there is a correlation between employee job satisfaction and employees being able to express their concerns or offer their suggestions, but only if the FLMs or management take those suggestions into account. Therefore, employee voice is essential in the workplace because its implementation enables employees to both take ownership of their work and bring a valuable contribution to it.

FLMs' perspectives

The starting point for discussion during the interviews was to understand whether or not employee voice has an impact on employees' satisfaction with work. Overall, there is agreement among the interviewees that employees tend to be satisfied with their work when they are listened to by their FLMs. All FLMs confirmed that there is a relationship between employee voice and job satisfaction except Interviewee FLM-F2, who remarked that some employees will never be happy, while others are easy

to please – it all comes down to their outlook and personality and their attitude towards their work.

In this regard, interviewee commented that employees tend to experience job satisfaction and show loyalty towards their organisation when they feel their voice has been heard and their views are acknowledged.

> Yes, there is for sure. My employee was satisfied – that's why she got lots of business to the bank. So, it's the same as if the staff speaks about the satisfaction and this staff is satisfied, for sure [the] organisation will get the benefit out of it. (Interviewee FLM-F3)

Interviewee FLM-F3 proposes a general principle, that if the employees are happy in their working environment, and experience high levels of job satisfaction, they are more likely to be productive. This brings two benefits: it benefits the organisation because employees are working to full capacity, and it benefits the employees themselves, as it provides job satisfaction.

In summary, most of the FLMs affirmed that employee job satisfaction is enhanced due to their ability to express their views and work-related issues in the workplace. This makes them feel that they are valued, which will, in turn, increase their loyalty to their organisation. Therefore, there is a correlation between employees having a say and their job satisfaction. It is evident that employees do not need to wait for the results of what they have suggested to come to fruition, but that the more important aspect is that they have been listened to and heard. This leads to an increase in their level of job satisfaction.

If employees feel that their voice has been listened to, they will engage positively with their work. This results in a high degree of loyalty to the organisation. In

addition, what is important is not just maintaining an open channel to enable employees' voices to be heard, but addressing and acting upon their concerns and issues.

Only one FLM had a different view, that not all employees who speak out are satisfied. She suggested that there might be other factors that hinder employees from attaining job satisfaction, including financial and other considerations. She also suggests that, while dissatisfied, employees are less likely to have positive engagement with their work. Both FLMs and employees have similar views that when employees are satisfied with their work and feel valued, listened to, and appreciated, they will engage positively with their working environment. According to research, providing opportunities for employees to share their ideas and concerns leads to increased satisfaction and a greater connection to the firm. This, in turn, increases productivity and fosters an enhanced well-being and cooperative work environment. Effective employee voice systems are critical to attaining these objectives, contributing to a more amicable and productive workplace atmosphere.

6.9.3 Relationship to employee staff turnover

This section examines the relationship between employee turnover and management practices using interviews with HR managers and FLMs. By investigating their viewpoints, this study aims to gain a better understanding of how different management practices affect turnover rates and the consequences for organisational stability.

> You know the initial direct correlation because if we don't address the concerns of the staff, that is, dissatisfaction levels have been high, and if the dissatisfaction levels are high then the turnover rate will go up because good

people will leave you. The biggest risk of any organisation today, I would say, if you had good people suddenly become silent, that is I think one of the biggest indicators that it is not an engaged culture. So, you need to watch out for these signs. (Interviewee HR2)

The HR managers have different views. One mentioned that there is not necessarily a relationship between employees expressing their views and employee turnover. The second articulated that there is indeed a direct correlation because employees' dissatisfaction levels are higher when their voices are not being heard. This may lead to lower job satisfaction and may encourage them to seek alternative employment.

FLMs' perspectives

Most of the FLMs interviewed affirmed that there is a correlation between employees being able to voice their concerns or suggest improvements and their turnover, except one participant who does not recognise such a correlation.

I think any expressive employee allows you to understand the requirements; you can involve them in many different areas at work. They will be able to grow away faster than an employee who is quietly performing the day-to-day job and not showing interest to learn more. So, if you find from your employees one of them is always bright and asking and wanting to do more, you will focus on that person. (Interviewee FLM-F2)

If the views of employees are respected, and if employees are encouraged to speak up with their ideas and concerns, then they are more likely to be loyal to the company. A bright person who is eager to express their voice will progress in their work.

Some employees will not think of moving if they are comfortable with their working environment. Sometimes depends on, there was the reason for moving is just financial. So, expressing their views will make staff feel comfortable in their working environment and they will feel he's heard, and he is essential asset to the organisation, and they will not feel that he needs to, let's say, hunt for another job. (Interviewee FLM-M11)

The following quote attests to negative views towards the relationship between employee voice and work satisfaction.

This is a choice that the employee can take by his own decision, so I believe there's no connection to it. (Interviewee FLM-F6)

A different view was expressed by Interviewee FLM-F10.

I wouldn't say there's a direct connection – there might be some indirect connection. I think the problem isn't about the ability to express their views; I think it's them being heard. Even if they express their views, are they being heard, something being done about whatever they have communicated the way they've raised? I feel like, if their suggestion or whatever they say falls on deaf ears, I feel like, yes, that does play a role in the staff turnover and having them quit or move to another organisation. (Interviewee FLM-F10)

In summary, according to FLMs, there is a connection. Most affirmed that if employees cannot express their views to their FLM, they would approach the HR department instead. Because this facility exists, employees may feel valued in that they can be assured that they may approach HR at any time with any concerns. FLMs also suggest that there is a direct correlation between employees having a say and employees' happiness/contentment or job satisfaction, whereby contented

employees are likely to be more productive and, conversely, discontented employees will not work well.

Moreover, employees often have financial motives or incentives for moving jobs. However, if staff feel comfortable in their working environments and feel they have been listened to, and thus regarded as an asset to the organisation, they may be persuaded to stay and not seek alternative employment. This is consistent with the research on turnover, which highlights the importance of efficient management practices such as supportive leadership and clear communication in decreasing turnover and ensuring a consistent workforce.

6.10 Employee voice in the appraisal process

The importance of employee voice in performance appraisal raises questions about whether relevant criticism is truly allowed or if sales targets are prioritised. This directly relates to research question 1, which investigates whether organisations have formal procedures for employee involvement during appraisal reviews. Research question 2 explores how managers manage these policies and implement them effectively, and research question 3 examines whether employees can actively engage and express their views. Interviews with FLMs and employees highlight possible gaps in how these mechanisms are executed in practice, particularly with a focus on sales performance.

Further analysis of the interview data indicates that employees can discuss matters with their FLMs, such as raising issues, problems, or grievances at work; discussing changes in working conditions; or making suggestions to improve their work, the work of their team, or the working environment.

> In the appraisal, there is a section within the HR system where the employees can raise their issues/problems and the request first goes to the line manager and then to the HR department. That means employees' views will reach HR at some point. (Interviewee FLM-M1)

The points mentioned show that the interviewees consider the appraisal process to be the right forum for the staff to speak up about issues they wish to raise, problems they have encountered, and changes in working conditions, or make suggestions they wish to put forward regarding improving their work.

On the other hand, Interviewee FLM-M4 disagrees that the appraisal process is an appropriate forum for employees to raise issues and suggestions.

> Raising issues, problems, grievances at work, I don't think so. Grievance has its mechanism of reporting; this normally does not happen under the appraisal review because we focus on performance. It happens throughout the year as an employee. You need to come up with a new idea that would improve your turnaround time or the work environment or the quality provided, so, particularly will not come under the performance appraisal. However, it would come throughout the year, initiatives which would be highlighted by the employee. (Interviewee FLM-M4)

Employees' perspectives

The analysis of the interview data indicates that only approximately one-half of interviewed employees can discuss with their line managers matters such as:
- a problem with their role and their capacity to undertake it effectively
- a personal/conflictual issue with (a) colleague(s) that they cannot resolve

- an issue with their line manager that they cannot resolve

- suggesting an improvement in the way their job or team's role is undertaken.

For example:

> Yes, the first 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning of the appraisal, line manager gives us a chance to talk and raise issues or suggest improvements. If you have an issue, complaint, or suggestions, he will give us a chance to talk and want to raise something, then he will start the appraisal. (Interviewee EMP-M1)

> Let's say 70 per cent is to the KPI. Okay, however, there is still room that you can discuss all of these points. (Interviewee EMP-F5)

The other half of the employees said they discussed only KPIs and performance with their FLM during the appraisal process, but nothing relating to the above-mentioned points.

In summary, raising issues and suggesting improvements are continuous processes in the organisation, and therefore employees do not have to wait for the appraisal to do so. The question of employee voice during performance appraisal elicited varying responses. Some participants claimed that employees are encouraged to share their views, while others stated that the reviews are entirely focused on numerical performance criteria. This contrast highlights the differences in how employee feedback is included in performance reviews.

6.10.1 Feedback from post-appraisal reviews: Assessing the role of the employee voice process

Employees are given meaningful feedback by FLMs regarding the issues they have raised and the suggestions they have forwarded during the appraisal process.

Yes, after taking the views and opinions of the staff, for example, moving an employee from this centre to another centre … why not? We plan, and we make rotation, all this, happen. (Interviewee FLM-F3)

If the issues raised fall outside the scope of FLM competency they can be escalated.

If raising issues and suggesting improvement, if it is in our hands to make a change to improve, then we will consider; if it's not our hand, will always tell them, we try to take it to the concerned team, if it's HR or whoever, and we'll get back to you with the answer. (Interviewee FLM-M5)

The majority of FLMs suggest that the appraisal process provides the right context for employees to be able to express their voice. However, while some FLMs said feedback was forthcoming from HR after the appraisal process, others stated that no such feedback was forthcoming. Thus, there is perhaps an inconsistency of approach on this topic from HR, or maybe these FLMs are somewhat lax about following up on the post-appraisal feedback process from HR, or it could be that they do not agree that the appraisal process is the appropriate place to raise employee voice issues in the first place.

Employees' perspectives

In the final part of the interview, respondents were asked about the extent to which appraisal is the right place to raise concerns and to receive a positive response. Different participants had different views in this regard.

It's a good place to discuss some issues, like discuss queries and issues with your performance, but it is not the right place to discuss the working hours

and shift patterns. Regarding the positive response, it is again depending on the concern that you have raised. (Interviewee EMP-F3)

We can especially discuss queries and issues with our performance. In appraisal, we prefer to discuss our KPIs, basically. Do they receive a positive response? Yes, of course. If such, as soon as … they would appraise the like, it's then in the system; we have an HR system. (Interviewee EMP-F4)

In summary, some employees agree that the appraisal process provides a suitable context to raise issues concerning employee voice, while others think it is an inappropriate context, preferring to focus solely on KPI and performance evaluation. It seems sensible that HR should guide this to standardise the practice of FLMs and the expectations of employees. To overcome this, HR should establish systems for balancing performance reviews and employee feedback. Engaging with literature on employee voice and performance management emphasises the importance of inclusive review systems that incorporate both viewpoints, aligning with best practices for increasing work satisfaction and organisational effectiveness.

6.11 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has discussed the analysis of the qualitative data collected from three different levels (senior HR managers, FLMs, and employees from different departments and branches) from one of the leading banks in the Sultanate of Oman. Therefore, this chapter presents various important findings. Some of these revealed the similarity in the responses of the three parties; however, some findings show a disparity in their responses.

(1) There was a contradiction in the responses concerning the availability of the policy, vision, values, or written documents that discuss the organisation's attitude to employees' views and employees having a say.

(2) Some FLMs retain broad knowledge about the organisation's policies in employee voice and dynamically achieve the required HR responsibilities by effectively encouraging their employees to participate. Conversely, other FLMs show a lack of knowledge in this regard.

(3) Both HR managers and FLMs ensured the importance of employees expressing their views as it directly promotes their productivity and fosters their loyalty.

(4) Channels and mechanisms for employee voice: It was found that the organisation has adopted multiple efficient mechanisms and channels to encourage employee participation and ensure their voice is heard. These channels include face-to-face meetings with staff, daily huddles with staff, the implementation of an open-door policy, CEO town halls, emails, and WhatsApp groups and Facebook at Work. The purpose of implementing these channels is to create a harmonious working environment where employees feel valued. However, the most effective channel is the FLMs themselves. From the interviews, it is understood that employees prefer to approach their FLM directly for raising issues and suggesting improvements.

(5) FLMs' role in implementing HRM: FLMs have a role in implementing HRM, as per HR managers' perceptions. In this regard, a significant number of FLMs have effectively implemented HR policies, acting as HR managers in which HR practices are devolved to them. However, opposing data from FLMs revealed that there is frequently negative regard for implementing HR policies. It is worth noting that FLMs play a vital role in implementing HR policies effectively.

(6) Organisational effectiveness in FLMs implementing HRM: The data revealed that there was a difference in the responses regarding organisational effectiveness in FLMs implementing HRM. One HR manager asserted that the organisation has an effective and structured method of evaluation for FLMs' implementation of HRM. However, the other HR manager noted that there is no specific mechanism for determining this, and stated also that the organisation monitors this through employees' participation in different events and through the appraisal performance review.

(7) Factors hindering FLMs in implementing HRM: It was noted by the HR managers that FLMs lack the right tools, resources, skills, and mindset to implement HRM effectively. Moreover, they strongly affirmed that the bank has hired managers with insufficient skills to manage people because some FLMs are simply incompetent, being unable to implement HR practices, and some also experience role ambiguity. They also cite lack of resources and heavy workloads as risk factors. This is due to insufficient formal training and support. Similarly, FLMs noted that they have not received adequate training, but have received informal guidance and support from their superiors. Some FLMs, though, commented that it is good practice for them to implement HR practices in terms of promoting employee voice.

(8) FLMs dealing with employee grievances and other issues: It was revealed by FLMs that the bank maintains a degree of flexibility in terms of the work-related issues mentioned in Section 6.5, and this has an effect when employees engage their voice with their FLMs. Thus, employees prefer to approach their FLMs directly for any issues mentioned, because they believe their FLMs to be supportive and approachable, thus enabling them to effect permanent or temporary changes within

the scope of their managers' powers. It is recognised, however, that some issues are fixed by Omani labour law or the HR department. It was also revealed that employees' behaviours and attitudes were positive when the FLMs were able to resolve their employees' work-related issues. This is perceived as best practice within the organisation. On the other hand, employees' behaviours and attitudes were negative when their FLMs were not able to resolve their issues to the their satisfaction. This, in turn, had a negative impact on their morale and their engagement with their work, and thus the business of the bank.

(9) FLMs dealing with employees' suggestions for improvements: FLMs strongly encourage their employees to advance their suggestions for improvement, and employees are confident to do so. These suggestions should be considered and acted upon if deemed to be constructive, otherwise there is no benefit in employees forwarding suggestions. Also, employees consider their FLMs to be approachable through FLMs maintaining an open-door policy and the organisation providing an open-plan, open-space seating structure. In this way, the bank encourages employees to suggest improvements. Therefore, FLMs tend to be encouraging of their employees to suggest improvements in the workplace, because employees are perceived as the main source of ideas, and thus their suggestions are critical for improving the workplace as this practice enhances employee productivity.

Moreover, when employees feel that they are heard and their suggestions have been acted upon, they feel satisfied, and their satisfaction enhances their performance, which benefits the organisation. Conversely, if FLMs are unable or unwilling to implement employees' suggestions to their satisfaction, this impacts negatively on their attitudes and behaviours.

(10) FLMs as informal voice champions for employees to raise issues and suggest improvements: Regardless of the availability of other effective mechanisms and channels, mentioned in Section 6.3, for employees to express their voice, the FLM remains the first point of contact that employees approach to suggest their ideas. This is due to employees feeling comfortable in doing so. Furthermore, employees feel comfortable approaching their FLMs with suggestions because they feel that their FLMs are approachable and they maintain an open-door policy. This suggests that FLMs have a good relationship with their employees and employees tend always to prefer to speak to their FLMs directly for either raising work-related issues or for suggesting improvements.

(11) Relationship between employee voice and other aspects, including staff engagement with their work: It is evident that allowing employees to express their views makes them more engaged with their work. Concerning job satisfaction, the findings show that there is a correlation between employee job satisfaction and employees being able to express their concerns or offer their suggestions. Regarding staff turnover, the data revealed that there is a direct correlation between employees having a say and turnover rate. It should be noted, however, that employees often leave their organisation for financial motives. However, allowing employees to participate will make them feel valued and loyal and may convince them to remain within their present employment.

(12) Employee voice in the appraisal process: On the one hand, the majority of FLMs confirmed that the appraisal process provides the right context for employees to express their views. On the other hand, some employees commented that they discussed only KPIs and performance with their FLM during that appraisal process,

but nothing related to the issues mentioned in Section 6.10. Furthermore, in terms of the feedback FLMs receive when employees raise issues, some FLMs noted that such feedback was forthcoming from HR after the appraisal process, while others stated that no such feedback had been received.

Furthermore, the theoretical background associated with qualitative data analysis was explained as well as the adoption of manual thematic analysis. Following this, the process of generating the initial themes was detailed. Finally, the findings derived from the open-ended questions of the semi-structured interviews were reported.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This discussion chapter examines the research findings, concentrating on how HR managers, FLMs, and employees help to facilitate employee voice in the private sector. The main aim of this study is to fully explore how the direct employee voice process is formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say by expressing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions. It is also concerned with how effective FLMs are in facilitating employee voice. The AMO framework is used to better understand the interactions between line managers and employees, focusing on how each group interacts to promote successful voice mechanisms.

The findings show that HR managers implement supportive policies, while FLMs foster an environment in which employees can express their concerns and suggestions. The assistance offered by FLMs also influences employees' ability and motivation to engage in voice. By exploring these interactions through the AMO lens, this chapter emphasises the need to align managerial practices with employee demands to improve employee voice within the organisation.

To attain the aim of the study, Chapter 6 presented the findings of the data collected from the interviews with employees of a banking sector organisation, concerning the following study research questions:

1. What is the impact and effectiveness of the direct employee voice process in organisations?

2. To what extent does the role of FLMs facilitate the direct employee voice process?

3. From the employees' perspective, what might enable them to express their voice and have a greater say in their workplace?

This chapter examines the results regarding the impact and effectiveness of the employee voice process in organisations and the extent to which the role of FLMs is to be voice facilitators, and provides employees' perspectives on the employee voice system in the organisation.

7.2 Employee voice policies and practices

Following the analysis and presentation of findings of all levels that participated in this study – HR managers, FLMs, and employees – the themes that emerged address the three research questions. The findings of HR managers reveal that the organisation already has a policy set in place to enable employees to speak up. As mentioned in the literature review, Lavelle et al. (2010) defined employee voice in the context of employees and organisations as "any type of mechanism, structure or practice, which provides an employee with an opportunity to express an opinion or participate in decision-making within their organisation" (p.396). The results of a study carried out by Marchington (2015) showed that an organisational culture in which the CEO dynamically promotes a shared vision and open agenda is a positive thing, and that there should be a policy to devolve HRM to line managers. His study showed how important it is for organisations to have a clear policy through which line managers become the effective facilitators of HRM. Thus, the devolution of HR practices to FLMs becomes part of the organisations' overall strategy, and organisations benefit considerably (Renwick, 2003).

The HR managers' data revealed that the organisation that is the locus of this study has introduced policies and practices to encourage employees to express their views via various forums, mechanisms, and channels. Through these, employee views are evaluated, and decisions are taken as to whether, or not, to act upon them. However, some concerns cannot be addressed, as they are subject to the various local laws and customs in place within the country, such as working hours, which remain fixed in law.

On the one hand, the qualitative data of the FLMs reveals through the statements provided by several respondents that the HR policy regarding employees having a say is not being taken seriously, or its implementation is not being actively encouraged in the workplace. This represents a lack of awareness as opposed to inconsistent implementation of the organisation's policy. However, on the other hand, it was observed that HR managers, some FLMs, and some employees in the organisation agreed that the policy, vision, values, or written documents that discuss the organisation's attitude to employees' views and employees having a say are designed and delivered effectively.

The findings from the employees suggest that there is a contradiction, where some said there is a policy regarding employees speaking up, while others stated there is no such policy. However, both HR managers and some FLMs confirmed that there is such a policy. In this confused state, it can be argued that the organisation must concentrate more on employee refresher courses and on sending online alerts concerning the organisation's latest policies. According to most employee respondents, there appears to be a lack of effective communication between management and employees, and it is unclear to employees whether or not an

employee voice policy document exists; and even where it does, it seems employees are not necessarily made aware of it.

According to the secondary data obtained from the organisation's website, the organisation firmly believe that people are their biggest asset. And they go a long distance to take care of them. The strategic pillars of HR Group are Talent Acquisition, Staff Engagement, Learning Organisation, Performance Management & Accountability, Leadership & Talent Development and HR Service Excellence. Although the above discussion may be regarded as a policy statement concerning the company's care for its employees, it does not refer specifically to the implementation or encouragement of employee voice. And although it references staff engagement, this does not equate to the provision and facilitation of effective employee voice channels and mechanisms.

Although the HR managers stated that there is a specific policy regarding the implementation of employee voice, no evidence for its existence was provided by the bank, due to issues of confidentiality in providing such documentation. If such documentation exists, then there should be more effective means of disseminating and highlighting it throughout the workforce via the communication channels provided by the organisation.

As noted earlier, the study evaluated the organisation's effectiveness in adopting an employee voice policy that enables employees to have a say in the organisation. It also emphasised the HR managers' perceptions regarding employee engagement and whether or not employees ought to have a voice. The data revealed that the HR managers claim that it does matter to employees that they have a say, because potentially it makes them more loyal to their organisation. This finding is in line with

Marchington's (2008) study, which emphasised that employees would only remain in their jobs if their voices were heard, as this is considered to enhance loyalty to their organisation. From this perspective, Gollan & Wilkinson (2007) note that employees can be trusted to participate in essential workplace decisions that will lead to better productivity and efficiency.

7.2.1 Employees' ability to access the organisation's policy on employee involvement

The data analysis in Chapter 6 of FLMs and employees indicates that the organisation's policy regarding employees having a say is accessible to all employees, and that the organisation has designed a special HR website (intranet portal) to which all employees can gain access. Also, it was found that this requires employees to be proactive in accessing it, as the document itself is very large.

The literature stresses the importance of FLMs in the implementation of employee voice and in encouraging employees to be highly involved and engaged with different mechanisms and channels that enable them to express their views and raise concerns. Therefore, FLMs are responsible for keeping their employees updated regarding organisational policies related to their work. This was supported by Lowe (1992), who found that FLMs are responsible for not only achieving HRM goals but also ensuring that their employees are committed to the view of the organisation, so that their role includes people management rather than purely technical responsibilities. In this regard, Gilbert et al. (2011) argued that FLMs are the first level with managerial responsibility with whom employees interact regularly and who are responsible for attaining core business objectives and directly influencing their subordinates' motivation, commitment, and discretionary

behaviour (Gilbert et al., 2011). The employee recognises their FLM as a good leader based on their overall interaction with their department/team (Kilroy & Dundon, 2015).

Another relevant finding from the employees is that they can access the organisation's policies and one employee mentioned that he had read the policy a long time back, which implies that there have been no follow-ups or alert messages from HR to keep employees updated. Furthermore, it can be recommended that the organisation must put in more effort, via line managers, to make employees aware of policy documents including those about employee voice, because employees are in direct communication with their line managers. It can be argued that such policies should be easily accessible, for instance, on employees' computers. Furthermore, it is also FLMs' responsibility to encourage and motivate their employees to be proactive in identifying any policies that relate to their work.

Concerning the size of policy documents, it would be interesting to explore what encourages some staff to read such policies while others don't, and to consider what possibly needs to be changed to encourage all employees to read them. Information must be made more concise for it to be more easily accessible. It can be argued that the HR department should be more judicious, and just send down the paragraphs related to employee voice.

7.2.2 Employees' engagement with the organisation's policy on employee involvement

The theme of how employees engage with employee involvement channels and opportunities developed looking at the organisational approach to the impact and

effectiveness of adopting an employee voice policy that enables employees to have a say in the organisation. In this regard, the HR managers claimed that it does matter to employees that they have a say, which makes them more loyal to their organisation and increases their job satisfaction, because they feel they are working in a professional working environment that recognises that they have something important to say and is willing to listen to their voice. This is likely to increase their efficiency and productivity.

The debate on employee engagement with the policy on employee involvement is shown in the different responses of FLMs. This finding also suggests that employees having a say has the potential to enhance the productivity of the organisation and that employees engage with the voice process 'all the time'. Additionally, employees' responses regarding employee involvement have been specifically elaborated (see Section 7.10.1).

7.2.3 FLMs' viewpoint of the organisation's policy on employee involvement

The data from Chapter 6 revealed that while some FLMs seem to have a high level of involvement with HRM functions, other FLMs appear unaware of the existence of the HR policy document. Therefore, some FLMs are supportive and have the enthusiasm to ensure their employees are familiar with HR policies related to employee voice and are encouraged to make use of them. The debate on the FLMs' thoughts on the organisation's approach to seeking its employees' views was further discussed during the interviews. The analysis of the FLMs' interview data further supported the contention that it is advantageous to the organisation to enable and facilitate employees to have a say. Moreover, when people's voices are heard by their FLMs, they feel pride in their work, thus leading to increased productivity and

greater loyalty to the organisation. Moreover, such employees feel that they and their work are valued through their contribution being recognised and appreciated. Loyalty and commitment flow from employees when their contribution is acknowledged and affirmed.

The FLM findings further supported the notion that the extent to which employees are satisfied when their voices are heard, or otherwise, impacts directly on the service the customer of the bank feels he or she has received. Contented, highly motivated employees who know their efforts and voices are valued by their organisation will strive to do their best for their clients/customers. This finding is in line with previous research which states that employee participation has a positive effect on employee commitment, which leads to increased job satisfaction for the employee, increased profits for the organisation, and enhanced service and increased benefits for the client/customer (Bhatti & Qureshi, 2007). Also, employee engagement has a connection to several positive outcomes, from absence and retention to customer satisfaction and productivity (Rayton et al., 2012). In the same vein, the findings of Bashshur & Oc (2015) support the idea that, as employees' voices are acted upon, customers are more satisfied with the quality of service they receive, which results in a greater level of service performance overall in the organisation.

7.2.3.1 Level of employee contribution

According to HR managers, employees are encouraged to contribute to how the workplace is managed over three distinct levels, or a combination of these: local teams, divisional level, and organisational level. The organisation is open to staff from all levels being able to contribute by offering suggestions and opinions. There

are no restrictions in this regard and therefore the organisation is encouraging employee voice, which potentially will benefit the organisation and its employees. The employee data revealed that employees could contribute via different levels for raising issues: employees could approach their FLM, the head of the department, and then finally HR.

Evidence from employee responses (Section 6.3.1) showed that a better understanding of how employees can contribute to the way the workplace is managed can be gained from viewing the mechanisms and channels made available in the organisation; from how employees, as well as FLMs, interact with the CEO in the town hall; and from the fact that employees wish to make temporary or permanent changes to any of various issues (working hours, shift patterns, start and finish times, changes to holidays, work–family conflicts, queries and issues with employee performance, and issues concerning pay and conditions). This occurs through the three distinct levels or a combination of these, of local teams, divisional level, and overall organisational level.

7.3 Employee voice mechanisms and channels

Literature on employee voice processes very often emphasises the importance of voice mechanisms and channels as key factors for enabling employees to raise issues and suggest improvements, which in turn positively impacts employees' ability to have a say on work-related issues in the workplace. Various researchers (McCabe & Lewin, 1992; Dundon et al., 2004; Boxall & Purcell 2011; Marchington & Suter 2013; Wilkinson et al., 2013a) have identified several formal and informal voice mechanisms and channels including:

• Grievance processes • One-to-one meetings • Speak-Up programmes • Email • Open-door policy • Empowerment by supervisors • Self-managed teams • Upward problem-solving groups • Attitude surveys • Staff meetings • Team briefings • Consultative committees • Works Council • Informal discussions • Word-of-mouth • Empowerment by a supervisor.

The data from different participant levels revealed that the organisation has adopted and created a variety of mechanisms and channels to allow employees to express their views.

Furthermore, the HR managers' data revealed in detail the communication mechanisms and channels in the bank, including email as the main channel that the bank uses for all types of communication with work-related issues; Facebook at Work; TAWASUL, to which the bank sends all the messages they want to reach all employees; a quarterly town hall with the CEO; yearly employee engagement surveys; and morning huddles. Also highlighted was the role of line managers in implementing an open-door policy and one-to-one meetings, which enable employees to feel encouraged to express their voices.

FLMs elucidated the available communication channels as email, the internal Facebook at Work through which various employees from different departments may post their ideas, weekly one-to-one meetings with employees, the open-door policy, and yearly mandatory employee surveys. Other mechanisms include daily huddle meetings and the quarterly CEO town hall. It is found from the FLMs' data that, although employees utilise different mechanisms and channels to communicate, the most appropriate channel to express voice is through line managers or department heads. Employees can also access the HR department via

an alternative channel. Thus, one-to-one meetings with line managers provide the most accessible channel; employees can talk to their line managers, whose doors are always open. This finding is consistent with those from previous studies on FLMs' essential role in delivering HR services, as FLMs are the link between the developed policies from the HR department and their impact on employees, as well as their performance (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003).

In addition, the FLMs' findings show that leaders sit with their staff in an open-office environment. Therefore, participants revealed that there are no obstacles and barriers, and that an open employee voice is encouraged. It is found that this 'open approach' is less about supervision and more about encouragement and support. There may be few physical barriers, but other types of barriers may exist, including the mentality of some FLMs who do not favour an open-door approach to dealing with their employees, and who therefore prefer to keep them at arm's-length. Also, employees' personalities or conflicts that already exist between the manager and the employee may be at play.

Such free communication is generally good as it motivates the staff to speak up and encourages the development of new thoughts and ideas. The 'dynamic culture' will potentially encourage and motivate the more 'go-ahead' employees to speak up. However, this same openness may seek to silence the quieter or more reserved employees who do not like to speak out publicly. In their case, other channels are available, including email and one-to-one meetings with their superiors and other social media-type channels.

Moreover, concerning the employees' findings on the organisation's communication mechanisms and channels, they also mentioned email, one-to-one

meetings, regular meetings with all staff, open-door policies, staff meetings, staff attitude surveys, the IBTIKAR portal, the workplace channel, the CEO town hall, TAWASUL, and informal discussions. However, some employees remain unaware of the full range of mechanisms available in the organisation. It could be argued that the organisation should put in more effort to encourage employees of all levels to find and use these channels.

Voice mechanisms in organisations provide an opportunity for employees to have a say concerning their work. In particular, new digital mechanisms, such as social media, are being increasingly adopted by organisations for knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and general communication. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of all types of social media, including internal and formal enterprise social media, such as Workplace and Microsoft Teams, and/or external and informal applications or platforms, such as WhatsApp and Facebook (Kelly, 2020).

One interesting finding arose when the HR managers were asked how often and effectively employees utilise the mechanisms and channels of employee voice. They affirmed that employees do not fully engage with those mechanisms and channels available in the bank. This implies various factors hinder employees from utilising the available communication channels. On the contrary, the findings from the employees' responses revealed that their engagement with the organisation's communication mechanisms and channels was positive, as the they confirmed that it is very important to raise work-related issues and suggest improvements in the organisation (see Sections 7.4.1 and 7.4.2 for more details).

In addition, from the responses of the HR interviewees, it appears that the bank does value employee voice and is keen that employees should have access to suitable infrastructure to enable them to voice their concerns and suggest ideas. In this context, the HR managers' data revealed that various channels and mechanisms are provided, and employees are encouraged to use them. It can be concluded that the organisation recognises the benefits it gains from providing mechanisms to enable employees to raise their concerns about work-related issues and to suggest improvements to working practices and the working environment. On the other hand, HR managers revealed that FLMs do not want to be trained in HR to encourage their employees to express their views, and that not all employees make use of this facility, and so questions remain. Why does HR believe that? Is there a breakdown in communication between parties? If so, why and how can it be remedied?

7.3.1 Encouraging employees to utilise mechanisms and channels

The findings from HR managers show that employees are encouraged to contribute to how the workplace is managed through local teams, at divisional level, or at overall organisational level (see Section 6.2.4.1 for more details). All the participants from FLM level held the view that employees are strongly encouraged to utilise the mechanisms and channels available in the organisation.

It is evident that there is an open-door policy, meaning employees can approach their managers. It can be argued that employees feel more comfortable with such an open-door policy, because they can speak freely with their managers. Furthermore, employees communicate with their FLMs because there are no boundaries between them due to an open-office policy. In their study of three categories of employee voice – direct communication, upward problem-solving, and

representative participation Marchington & Wilkinson (2000) argued that the first two dimensions are more likely to function directly and individually and are often the basis for face-to-face communication between supervisors or FLMs and their employees.

Also, the importance of open-door policies and the relationship between FLMs and their employees, including listening to their voice, was revealed by Wilkinson et al. (2013b), who found that employees only feel obliged to participate if they have a good relationship with their managers. Evidence from the literature also confirms that managers are the main drivers in convincing employees or enabling them to participate and approach their FLMs (Townsend & Loudoun, 2015). In general, most FLM role theories tend to describe that managers are requested to create suitable environments for employee participation, because employee voice is recognised in helping to find new products and services, enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of task processes, and observe problems in work systems (Detert et al., 2013).

Furthermore, the findings of FLMs indicate that the organisation has created a very dynamic culture in which communication is encouraged; such communication is an everyday thing, and people communicate often and freely. This environment provides employees with several opportunities to express themselves through multiple channels. FLMs assist these channels, contributing to an open discussion culture.

Remarkably, some employees are more comfortable speaking up in group situations than in one-to-one meetings. This emphasises the importance of motivation in the AMO framework. While employees look forward to the quarterly CEO town hall meetings, their preference for group discussions could stem from feeling more

supported in a larger setting. This motivation is impacted by positive reinforcement from FLMs for participating in these public forums. Contrarily, the CIPD (2021) survey found that employee voice is most facilitated through one-to-one meetings with FLMs, with 62 per cent using this channel to communicate their suggestions and ideas, and 49 per cent expressing their voice within team meetings.

Furthermore, employee interviews show that employees use a variety of formal and informal approaches to express their opinions, with a strong preference for engaging their FLMs directly. This demonstrates their ability to communicate successfully since they have established strong relationships with their FLMs. Frequent one-to-one meetings provide valuable opportunities for employees to share concerns and suggest improvements. In summary, the findings reveal that FLMs have distinct opinions on employee voice. Employees typically approach their FLMs directly to address concerns, exhibiting their ability to communicate openly. Simultaneously, some employees feel more comfortable speaking in groups, emphasising their motivation as a result of group dynamics. Overall, despite having various options to express their ideas, employees prefer direct communication with their FLMs, demonstrating the importance of opportunity in creating a conducive employee voice climate.

7.4 FLMs' role in implementing HRM

The literature emphasises the important role of FLMs in the implementation of HRM. Furthermore, the role of FLMs has gained greater recognition in business organisations and academic research, where it has been increasingly noticed that FLMs are adopting core HRM functions and responsibilities (Azmi & Mushtaq, 2015).

It is argued in the literature that the devolvement of HR practices to FLMs has become organisations' intention, and thus significant organisational benefits and costs exist from involving FLMs in HR practices (Renwick, 2003). From this perspective, Brewster & Larsen (2000) introduced five elements of the rationale for devolving HR practices to FLMs: "to reduce costs; to provide a more comprehensive approach to HRM; to place responsibility for HRM with managers most responsible for it; to speed up decision making and as an alternative to outsourcing the HR function" (pp.196–198).

This thesis aims to explore how FLMs implement and encourage direct voice mechanisms and execute HR roles to hear and act upon their employees' voice, and the factors that encourage organisations and HR departments to support FLMs to take up HR functions. In this context, this study found a significant difference between the HR managers' and FLMs' responses. Hence, comparing the findings of both levels, the data of HR managers revealed that they believe that the majority of FLMs do effectively implement HR policy and act as facilitators for employee voice, whereas the majority of FLMs agreed that they have not been encouraged to implement HRM specifically (employee voice) in their organisation. Furthermore, it is found that the importance of managing the team and building up the trust of employees should be conveyed to FLMs. Hence, FLMs should be empowered by the management to make their role more effective and efficient.

Moreover, the finding indicates that the HR department has developed a system of monitoring and evaluating FLMs in implementing HRM in the organisation, as one of the participants commented. However, if the performance management process is effective, and the HR department boosts employee participation rates through

different platforms available in the bank, why then are a majority of FLMs still unaware of how to implement HR policies regarding employee voice? It appears that the HR evaluation process through appraisal management is either inefficient or insufficient in its application. Why, for instance, is it not done more often than once per year? A possible explanation for this might be that there is a gap somewhere in the provision of training and supervision.

Another finding, revealed by the HR managers, is that there is a divergence of views regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of FLMs in implementing employee voice, with Interviewee HR1 saying there is no specific mechanism for measuring FLMs' performance, whereas Interviewee HR2 commented that they have multiple ways of measuring this. After obtaining a follow-up answer from one of the HR managers regarding this issue, it was discovered that the organisation measures the effectiveness in multiple ways, as per the details provided in Section 6.4.1. Since there is an available measurement in the organisation for evaluating the effectiveness of FLMs in implementing HRM, this implies that the organisation is encouraging their employees to be able to have a say.

Contrary to expectations, the data of the current study reveals that, on the one hand, the majority of FLMs agreed that they have not been encouraged to implement HRM specifically (employee voice) in the bank. On the other hand, some FLMs stated that they do implement HRM by describing that the organisation has created an open-space policy, which facilitates employees expressing their voice, and different channels to enable employees to speak out. Another finding is that FLMs conduct morning huddles during which they meet with their employees. Such daily meetings are generally only to discuss business and performance. It is only

occasionally that FLMs discuss matters such as employee attitudes and their concerns.

From this perspective, Townsend (2014) argued that FLMs are responsible for implementing the voice mechanisms that have been embedded by management, in which they escalate voice up and down the hierarchy. However, the findings indicate that some FLMs have not initiated the implementation of employee voice. This emphasises the obvious inconsistency of approach found among the FLMs. This is contradictory to Nehles et al.'s (2006) study, which highlighted five devolution factors that enable line managers to execute HR functions under the AMO rubric – desire, capacity, competencies, support, and clear policy and procedures.

Concisely, the above finding contradicts the theory that the devolution of HRM to line managers is the norm, and which assumes line managers are familiar with the company's policy regarding employee voice with the attendant support offered by HR. Perhaps they lack the motivation and encouragement to implement employee voice in the organisation. The most important finding is that one of the FLMs, Interviewee FLM-M4, seemed unaware of the implementation of employee voice: (see Section 6.4). This suggests that the line manager has not been encouraged to inform his employees about the various channels available for the implementation of employee voice.

These findings diverge from the study findings of Mowbray et al. (2022), which suggest that, if FLMs have not been provided with voice mechanisms and training on HR practices, they will still be keen to encourage employee voice, enabling employees to contribute to better performance outcomes. By doing this, they might create their own voice flow mechanisms for the overall productivity of their unit and

team. In these circumstances, Mowbray et al. (2022) also argued that not all FLMs will have the drive to work in partnership with HR teams and thus will need to develop their own voice mechanisms and HR practices.

Furthermore, it was found that when one of the FLMs meets with staff once per month, it seems, primarily, to be a problem-solving session. This demonstrates a difference between FLMs regarding the frequency of meetings with staff. It would be interesting to note the effect of daily huddles, weekly meetings, and less frequent meetings. There seems to be no coherent strategy or guidance/recommendation given to FLMs as to when and how they should meet their staff, and what the nature of meeting with employees should be. If staff are constrained from expressing their voice at this monthly meeting, this could cause employees to feel their voice is being stifled, especially when they discover that other team leaders are meeting daily.

Is the HR department being lax in its application of company policy concerning employee voice or is it simply allowing FLMs to have too much flexibility in deciding for themselves what is best for their individual department, and maybe what would indirectly benefit themselves at the expense of their employees' happiness and well-being? In this regard, there has to be monthly visits from HR and top management to ensure that all FLMs are aware of the policy and processes concerning employee voice and available channels to enable employees to express their views and raise concerns. It should be noted that this might impact on available resources. For this to be a viable course of action, it would be necessary for positive outcomes to outweigh resource implications. There would have to be some method, formula, or algorithm devised for evaluating this.

7.4.1 FLMs dealing with employee grievances and other issues

Despite the findings of both FLMs and HR managers concerning FLMs' role in HRM implementation, employees have an opportunity to talk to their FLMs and have a say regarding the issues mentioned in Section 7.3.2.1. What was noted is that, while some parameters could be changed to suit the needs of the business, other concerns could not be addressed due to Ministry of Labour regulation in the country, such as working hours, which remain fixed in law.

Overall, the data indicates that FLMs are open to discussing the various points previously mentioned with their employees, and can make changes within the business needs of the company when they have a harmonious working environment in which FLMs listen to their employees and try to help. This could be assuring employees that they can talk about their issues, or it could be welcoming suggestions for improvements, or advising employees as to what course of action to take to resolve their problem. When FLMs are open to the voices of their employees, problems can be more readily resolved, to the satisfaction of the employee and for the benefit of the organisation.

This study's findings support the findings of several other studies, for example, concerning the major responsibilities in terms of FLMs' involvement in HR practices. Marchington et al. (2016) found in their study that those responsibilities are managing team briefings and problem-solving groups, informal communications with employees, reviewing performance, developing team/staff skills, and monitoring employee absence (which is discussed more in Section 3.1.1). Similarly, Teague & Roche (2012) found in their study that FLMs are recognised as playing a

significant role in employee voice in most companies and are principally engaged in resolving workplace conflict.

The findings at the employee level revealed that employees first approach their FLMs to raise issues and concerns, and favour one-to-one meetings with their FLMs to raise issues when they wish to make temporary or permanent changes to the issues previously mentioned. In their report, *Talking About Voice: Employees' Experience*, CIPD's (2019, p.7) key finding on voice channels is that one-to-one meetings with a line manager are the most common voice channel used by employees. They also note that HR department should provide sufficient training to all FLMs on how to enable open conversations during one-to-one meetings with their employees, since this is the key channel through which employees express their ideas and concerns.

The study results in this context indicate that the organisation has a harmonious working environment in which employees feel comfortable in approaching their FLMs, in the knowledge that their FLMs are supportive and approachable. This result ties well with previous studies in which a supportive work environment is a factor that keeps employees more committed to their organisations. Additionally, the findings of employees revealed that most employees prefer to speak directly with their FLMs if they encounter work-related issues. This is also supported by Olson-Buchanan & Boswell (2002), who stated that most employees prefer to have direct communication with their FLMs and pursue their assistance.

However, employees will prefer not to speak to their FLMs if they have a problem or issue with them directly. In such cases, employees would rather speak to their FLMs' superiors to resolve the issues. Furthermore, the data indicates that when

issues occur between employees, the employees prefer to resolve these among themselves, because they feel that they work in an organisation that encourages them to take the initiative to do this.

Regarding grievances at work, the HR department has a form that employees fill in. The HR department will then investigate the case. Employees appreciate FLMs' support in this because they are the first people with whom employees should speak to ensure a more harmonious working environment is created, for this will ultimately lead to the organisation increasing its business. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that employees follow the proper channels and routes for seeking solutions for their issues. First, they speak to their line managers; if nothing then happens, the issue is referred to the department head, and, finally, if there still is no resolution, it should be referred to the HR department.

This suggests that most of the employees can discuss work-related issues with their FLMs as well as the head of the department and the HR department, implying that the organisation is a place where employees are comfortable in approaching various levels of management, in a recognised sequence, to raise concerns. Thus, the employee voice process is functioning in a satisfactory manner.

Thus, from the above, it can be argued that the successful implementation of employee voice has positive benefits both to the employees themselves and to the organisation as a whole, as it engenders employees' loyalty, trust, and job satisfaction, which leads to increased productivity to the benefit of the organisation and the clients that it serves.

7.4.2 FLMs dealing with employees suggesting improvements

According to Papalexandris & Panayotopoulou (2003), FLMs are essential participants in managing HR functions and HR activities have always been a part of their function; the role of FLMs has developed and continues to expand over time. Moreover, Landau (2009) indicates that organisations do not need to pursue different voice mechanisms, but do need capable and approachable managers to act upon their employees' concerns, suggestions, and ideas, to make them feel that their voice has not been neglected or disregarded. The aim is to enable FLMs to effectively escalate employees' suggestions for improvements.

Within this frame of reference, the findings of FLMs show that managers emphasise the importance of enabling employees to put forward suggestions. For example, they indicate that FLMs actively encourage their employees to bring forward such suggestions. This is a significant finding in the understanding of the importance of suggestions for improvements, which the organisation generally welcomes if they are meritorious and attainable, and implements them as per its business model and requirements. The findings also indicate that the bank does implement suggestions when employees bring forward a feasible proposal for improved working practices that benefit the whole organisation.

7.4.3 FLMs as informal voice champions for employees to raise issues and suggest improvements

From the FLMs' data, it was found that the FLM is the first point of contact for employees to advance their ideas, rather than approaching other levels such as the HR department or senior management. This should be the first step because HR will

not know the specific issues or details or nuances of the department. The reason employees approach their managers first is due to their comfort in doing so. Also, the FLMs' findings revealed that they generally have a good relationship with their employees, and therefore employees feel confident in approaching them. However, it was found that employees do not always follow the proper procedures; some go directly to HR or even the CEO with their ideas if they think they are good.

Furthermore, the FLMs operate an open-door policy which enables employees to feel comfortable approaching them. Another important finding is that the small team sizes minimise barriers to speaking out. This suggests that team size is critical: a small team encourages employees to have their say. Hence, the findings show that there are minimal barriers to employees approaching their managers. Perhaps open-space offices encourage employees to speak up and speak out because they provide a friendly workspace.

The findings of HR managers also reveal that there is no barrier preventing employees from approaching their FLMs and senior managers. Also, employee data revealed that the preferred channel for enabling employees to speak up is their line manager. Therefore, all employees responded that they are confident to bring forward their suggestions via their FLM (this was elaborated in Sections 6.5 and 6.6).

Hence, the data supports the finding of Strauss (1998) that informal employee voice is the "day-to-day relations between supervisor and subordinates in which the latter are allowed substantial input into decisions … a process which allows workers to exert some influence over their work and the condition under which they work" (p.15). Thus, it appears that direct voice could be beneficial in solving minor issues or day-to-day perceived inequalities in conditions. It has been noticed that the direct

voice mechanism has more of a direct impact on employees than the indirect voice mechanism and is considered more important to the needs of employees (Freeman & Rogers, 2006). It may be more valued by the employees as they experience immediate results by having direct communication with managers.

7.5 Opportunities for employees to raise issues at work and make suggestions for improvements

This theme emerged as a measure of the organisational approach to developing opportunities to raise work-related issues and suggest improvements. Wilkinson & Fay (2011) found that employers gain substantial advantages by providing voice mechanisms to their employees. In organisations where employees enjoy the opportunities associated with having a voice, they might not be interested in supporting union organising drives (Lewin & Mitchell, 1992). As long as managers or management hear employees' concerns, employees would rather not participate in trade union activities because they have approachable managers and already enjoy good relationships between employees and managers.

The FLMs' findings revealed that the organisation has created different mechanisms and channels for employees to raise any kind of issue and provide opinions and ideas. Additionally, the FLM findings revealed that various available channels enable employees to speak out. Such channels include simply encouraging employees to speak to their FLMs or, beyond that, using various other channels such as whistleblowing and incident reporting. The incident reporting mechanism is different to whistleblowing in that it enables employees to report any kind of incident related to employees, services, or systems within their working environment and make immediate recommendations. Finally, there is the CEO town

hall mechanism. However, this only occurs quarterly, so what might employees do in the interim? They might use whistleblowing or incident reporting if they are unable to resolve issues directly with their FLM. Whereas whistleblowing is confidential, the CEO town hall is not, and thus shyer employees may not be confident enough to speak up at the town hall.

This study found that nobody will consider you a troublemaker for making suggestions for improvements, unlike when raising issues and concerns. Thus, there are fewer tools available for putting forward suggestions than there are for raising concerns. However, employees are still confident to use available channels for putting forward suggestions.

The interesting point in these responses is that some of the participants affirmed that the CEO town hall provides a good channel and opportunity to enable employees to speak out because employees believe they obtain instant answers from senior management that way. Moreover, the town hall meeting is available for either bringing forward concerns or offering suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, there is a committee within the CEO's office that is responsible for looking at employees' issues, in addition to HR. Although this sounds positive, what is their main responsibility, and how does this committee work? Would they pick up issues from employees in the town hall sessions, or maybe HR passes incidents and cases to them? One of the participants affirmed that opportunities are available through various channels; however, she is not quite sure if the issues that are reported will be addressed. The findings indicate that interior branches require additional visits from senior management to guarantee that staff feel heard. There may be a perception that employees in interior branches are less supported than

those in the HQ or capital city, with less opportunity to express their views. Although one participant noted this, it emphasises the need for senior management to connect with interior branches more frequently to guarantee that all employees have equitable access to feedback methods.

7.6 The impact of employees raising issues and concerns on their attitudes and behaviours and on the organisation

The FLMs' data showed that when employees approached their FLMs with issues at work, and FLMs were able to solve the issues to employees' satisfaction, then typically employees felt more positive towards their work, their job satisfaction was enhanced, and they were thus likely to be more productive. This is to the benefit of the organisation. After issues have been resolved, the employees develop more positive attitudes. This enables employees to be more productive and to produce good, intelligent work. These findings are in line with Bryson et al.'s (2006) empirical investigation, which found that in two-thirds of their case studies, managers stated that there were some improvements in employee attitudes and behaviours as an outcome of employee voice.

It was also found that employees respond well to their FLMs when the latter act promptly to resolve employee issues. Employees thus will tend to engage more productively with their work. This has the potential to result in enhanced business opportunities for the organisation. Moreover, by resolving employee workplace issues, FLM are understood as having the well-being of their employees at heart, which is liable to boost the employees' morale, thus potentially resulting in enhanced employee job satisfaction, overall competence, and, ultimately, productivity. When FLMs listen to the voice of their employees and subsequently

resolve their issues, employees feel more at ease. It can be thus argued that the voice of employees is essential in the harmonious functioning of the workplace as it boosts both their morale and productivity. In addition, employees generally displayed a positive attitude towards the deployment of employee voice, as the more employees raise issues, the more they may come up with better solutions, which is very good for the morale of employees and the development of the organisation.

In contrast, FLMs' lack of capability to resolve work-related issues to employees' satisfaction was also explored. In that circumstance, the impact on employees' attitudes and behaviours was largely negative, which is detrimental the organisation as well. Whenever employees are satisfied, they work hard, which is good for the organisation itself. It is clear from this research that the opposite is also true. According to Korsgaard & Roberson (1995), FLMs who allow employees to participate in decision-making may perceive a positive employee attitude toward the company since the employees feel recognised, heard, and subsequently more satisfied with their line manager.

In summary, if FLMs are not able to resolve work-related issues, employees are unlikely to give their best in terms of their work. FLMs should have a more robust way of addressing employees' needs and concerns. Hearing employee voice is essential in acting upon and resolving employee concerns. If this does not transpire, then employees are less likely to give the organisation 100 per cent of their abilities and commitment. To fully address employees' work issues, it is essential to listen to what employees have to say. FLMs should also ensure there is no bias towards any

given employee: all should be treated equally and professionally when it comes to listening to the voice of employees.

7.6.1 Common issues raised by employees

The main aim of this study is to investigate how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say by raising work-related issues; therefore, for the researcher, it was crucial to explore the most common issues raised by employees and to understand in depth the employees' demands in the organisation.

The HR managers' data revealed that the most common area of concern for employees is salary and working conditions. It is evident from their responses that staff ask for an increase in salary as there is no clear career pathway leading to promotion. In all organisations, most people expect to progress in their careers and to be suitably rewarded for this. It can be argued that staff would prefer for their talents and abilities to be recognised through promotion. Moreover, the organisation has adopted a market survey approach to comparing pay scales in the market, in order to address concerns over pay and promotion. What does this say about employee voice? It implies that the organisation values its employees' views and concerns regarding pay and working conditions. The more employees are valued in the organisation, the more their views will be listened to and acted upon.

Furthermore, the data shows that the HR department visits employees in different departments and branches, conducts an annual survey, and adopts a one-to-one approach through which they speak directly to employees and receive first hand their ideas and concerns. It can be argued that a responsible organisation, one that is interested in its employees' welfare, will be keen to listen to its employees' views.

In addition, the data revealed that the majority of FLMs in this study concentrated on two main issues that employees commonly raise: high workloads and pay and working conditions. Workload is a classic work-related issue raised by employees. One particular result concerning workload is that insufficient staff members in the organisation will lead to staff having unacceptably high workloads. It can be inferred that this could result in staff dissatisfaction, which in turn could lower work efficiency and potentially loyalty to the company. Improving the system, whereby employees could finish their tasks automatically, rather than manually, may decrease pressure on them. Hence, this would increase operational efficiency. An alternative to this is to employ more people, but that would not address concerns regarding workplace efficiency. Workload issues generate the bulk of complaints. FLMs seem upset by the continuous stream of requests from employees regarding this.

One of the interesting findings from the FLM level was that, when new tasks or systems are deployed, it seems insufficient thought is given to fully explaining how the new setup will function. Employees feel disorientated and confused and restrained even to ask questions to address this. This indicates a lack of use of the full range of communication tools between FLMs and their employees. This potentially leads to a tense situation and an atmosphere of mistrust between FLMs and employees. Employee voice thus breaks down and work productivity suffers. Moreover, the question arises as to how to best establish new working practices while avoiding role ambiguity and confusion. For example, employees may feel uncertain about which behaviours are appropriate in a new situation or working environment, and thus may feel reluctant to exercise their employee voice appropriately.

As has been revealed by HR data, communication is one of the key issues that employees complain about, whereby they feel a lack of communication from the top level to the bottom. There seems to be an issue with management communicating with employees. For this reason, it can be recommended that the organisation shift focus more to conducting management visits to the departments and branches. Employees might feel remote from their superiors and need more communication from them to encourage them to raise concerns and suggest improvements. Communication happens most effectively when managers visit departments and branches. This indicates there is a gap in management provision because communication is lacking. Clearly, employees are concerned that they are receiving neither effective communication from their managers nor effective directions.

One of the issues that emerged from these findings is the contradiction between HR responses, which affirm that the organisation adopts a market survey approach to comparing pay scales in the market to address employee concerns over pay and promotion, and employees still consistently complaining about their pay. The themes of promotion and salary strike a negative note, given that employees put in such requests frequently, indicating they might not have been promoted for a long time. There might be two explanations regarding this. Firstly, the organisation just surveys without applying its outcomes to the pay scales of employees and, secondly, employees demand more than what is available in the internal marketplace of the organisation regarding pay.

7.7 The impact of employees' suggestions for improvements on their attitudes and behaviours and on the organisation

Employees expressing their suggestions for improvements is essential in any organisation and therefore it is important to explore from FLMs' perspectives the impact of employees making suggestions. After reviewing and analysing all the participants' responses from the FLM level, it was found that when employees approach their FLM with ideas for improvements related to their tasks, work team, or working environment, which their FLM is able to implement to their satisfaction, this has a corresponding positive impact on their attitudes and behaviours. This is because one of the functions of the FLM is to listen to their employees' suggestions carefully and act upon them, if they are deemed appropriate.

It was also found that this action enhances employee performance, boosts their morale, and heightens their loyalty toward the bank. It is important for the good of both the employee and the organisation that employees' voices are heard. Such a working environment stimulates latent talent in employees and encourages them to bring forth their inspiring and enlightened ideas. The AMO model specifically mentions improvements in ability, motivation, and opportunity to participate, which enhances productivity and improves overall organisational performance (Appelbaum et al., 2000).

In addition, the findings of employees show that, through this process, employees are led to feel positive and important. This suggests that by embracing employees' useful, innovative ideas, an approach to work can be developed that leads to reducing the workload and increasing perceived advantages for developing

productivity and creativity (see Section 6.5.2 for more details). On the other hand, there were examples of FLMs not being able to implement employees' ideas about improvements to their satisfaction. The impact on their behaviour was negative, which was detrimental to the team and the organisation as a whole.

The data revealed that the honesty and transparency of team leaders towards employees is very important for building up trust and promoting good teamwork. This also helps motivate team members to continue to suggest improvements, despite any recent setbacks. It was also found that the management is open and transparent towards the team leaders regarding budget constraints and the lack of resources. This then is conveyed to their staff. This is not about trying to stifle ideas but is primarily the result of a lack of resources at present. Employee voice is concerned not only with listening but with acting and responding, either positively or negatively, to enhance employees' loyalty to their organisation (Marchington, 2008).

7.8 The importance of employees making suggestions for improvement

The findings of FLMs indicated that all managers encourage and motivate their staff to make suggestions for improvement. This is because they perceive the importance of direct employee voice in enhancing employees' productivity, team morale, and motivation. Thus, it is good for business, as it will advance banking practices leading ultimately to enhanced customer experience and satisfaction. These findings also suggest that if employees are encouraged to offer suggestions for improvement, this will create a stronger and more dynamic team, because they are working together, proposing initiatives, and sharing ideas. As implied by Wilkinson & Dundon (2010),

new business arises from employees advancing ideas for improvement and efficiency. Taken together, the findings show that it is good practice to provide constructive suggestions and ideas about the operation of tasks, to reduce the workload on staff and to enhance employee creativity.

Furthermore, the advantages of providing voice mechanisms and channels for the employees to make suggestions for improvements were also discussed by HR managers. The findings of HR managers show that employees feel they are valued and important in the organisation. Moreover, providing a mechanism for the employees, through FLMs, the HR department, or the senior management, to raise their concerns about work-related issues and to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team, helps employees feel they are doing an important job and contributing positively to the organisation's productivity, functionality, and efficiency. Additionally, it was found from HR data that this increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the employees, ultimately to the benefit of the customer and the organisation itself. For example, an HR manager described employees suggesting a change from manual to automated processes, thus potentially reducing costs and increasing efficiency, and ultimately delivering the best service to the customer.

Moreover, the results of this study show that the advantages of employees being able to raise their concerns about work-related issues and to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team outweigh the disadvantages. This finding supports the results of Farndale et al. (2011) that the benefits of having an employee voice in an organisation may arise from its positive impacts on

organisational commitment, interpersonal relations (especially between FLMs and their employees), and trust relations in the workplace.

The findings reported in this study suggest that the organisation is keen to implement and adopt a system for the employee voice process, because both HR managers agreed that the voice of employees is essential for the harmonious functioning of the workplace, as it boosts the morale, efficiency, and productivity of employees. Moreover, it is found that the disadvantages are dangerous for the organisation, first, and for employees themselves. The HR data revealed that if the organisation does not implement potentially effective suggestions from employees, this may hamper the trust the employee has in the organisation, which is not beneficial for either the organisation or the employees concerned. In this context, Marchington (2008) affirmed that the advantage of voice is to improve productivity and creativity via the provision of a fairer workplace. Consequently, it can be explained that an influential voice, either direct or indirect, is beneficial to employees and employers.

7.8.1 Confidence of employees in making suggestions

The findings of employees demonstrate that they feel confident to suggest improvements, showing that the organisation welcomes suggestions from employees and that the confidence of employees is boosted by advancing such suggestions. Furthermore, as it is generally through FLMs that such suggestions are forwarded initially, this indicates that FLMs provide an effective channel for the implementation of employee voice. The findings of FLMs revealed that there is open communication between all team members. One of the participants revealed that

her employees feel confident in coming to her, just as she feels equally confident in going to her line manager.

This study's findings are in line with the work of Detert & Burris (2007) and Morrison & Milliken (2000), who suggested that the expression of ideas and suggestions by employees is significant for improving current systems and achieving organisational goals. In contrast, the findings do not align with the results of Morrison's (2014) study, which identified several factors that hold employees back and make them reluctant or unwilling to voice their ideas, opinions, and suggestions, including leaders' discouragement, fear of being dismissed or viewed negatively, and having nothing meaningful to convey.

Finally, the findings of employees also suggest that the organisation appreciates certain suggestions, and that these are better received than others, especially those that enhance the business of the bank. It also found that the organisation is less keen to embrace suggestions that will benefit the employees to the cost of the company, such as working fewer hours or changing shift patterns, those suggestions that do not add any direct value to the company, and suggestions for increasing salaries, which is beyond FLMs' scope due to the HR department's control.

7.9 Factors hindering FLMs in implementing HRM

As per the findings from the HR managers, it is revealed that a combination of a lack of resources, role ambiguity and conflict, and heavy workloads are the factors that prevent FLMs from becoming effective employee voice facilitators and result in FLMs' incompetence in implementing HRM practices. It is evident from the HR managers' responses that FLMs lack the necessary skills and knowledge in HR

practices, particularly in managing employee voice. In addition, the FLMs' inability to lead and manage people, and their reluctance and apprehension in embracing new and complex tasks, derives from the notion that the facilitation of employee voice is a particularly complex and sensitive task. Furthermore, their incompetence and inability to adapt to new working practices contributes to this. According to Teague & Roche (2012), senior managers consider FLMs as having little confidence in handling workplace conflict.

According to one HR manager, if the FLMs have been provided with the right resources and skills and the correct approach, and have been given sufficient time to devote to managing people and practising their management in the right ways, there should not be any barriers that discourage them from allowing and encouraging their employees to express their views. This finding is contrary to those of previous studies which have suggested that FLMs' ability is associated with obtaining the necessary skills, knowledge, and training to motivate them to implement HR practices. There is a need to provide FLMs with appropriate opportunities to strengthen their ability, particularly time to perform an HR role. Also, FLMs need support from HR professionals, adequate capacity in terms of time to implement HR activities, education and training, a clearly defined and allocated role, and transparent policies and procedures to support them in performing HR roles.

This makes it clear that these requirements need to be available for FLMs to manage voice and decide what mechanisms and channels they utilise to encourage their employees to be active in employee voice (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Therefore, FLMs' ability to manage employee voice effectively in the chosen bank was

compromised. This was revealed through the FLMs' lack of necessary skills and knowledge in HR practices and exacerbated by the fact that no specific training in the field of employee voice implementation had been provided to them.

Hoogendoorn & Brewster's (1992) research revealed that not all FLMs may take the initiative to embrace training and education in the facilitation of employee voice. Some may be concerned it eats into their own working time or increases their workload. According to HR managers, the data revealed that some FLMs believe they require formal training in employee voice deployment and facilitation, in order to properly enable employees to speak up. However, others believe that they know how to deal with their staff instinctively, and thus require no formal training regarding the implementation of employee voice policies. This reveals a lack of responsiveness to the specific training and support needs of FLMs within the organisation.

This finding is consistent with those from previous studies on the subject. The findings of this study support the studies of Marchington & Suter (2013), Teague & Roche (2012), and Bozionelos & Baruch (2015), which found that the barriers FLMs face hinder them from effectively implementing and managing employee voice, followed by a lack of sufficient formal training to become competent implementers of HRM practices in the workplace, to encourage employees to speak out, and to know how to respond appropriately.

In this context, Marchington & Suter (2013) suggested that skilled and qualified FLMs are more amenable to empowering employee views and using those views for joint benefit. It is beneficial for management and HR departments to provide extensive support to FLMs for shaping voice mechanisms and channels through

which employees will be able to express their voice and influence organisational outcomes (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Also, Bozionelos & Baruch (2015) described some elements that enable FLMs to supervise their teams, including technical knowledge, motivational skills, coordination, and capacity to negotiate within their influence circle.

What has emerged from the FLM data is that not all managers that were interviewed had received formal training concerning employees having a say, and this is a barrier preventing FLMs from facilitating effective employee voice. However, some FLMs revealed that they had received informal support from their line managers on how to manage employees. Although the organisation provides different types of courses, such as on leadership and time management, it has never provided a course directly related to employee voice.

This was consistent with a study conducted by Brewster & Larsen (1992), who found that most organisations do not provide any formal training to enable their FLMs to handle HR issues in a way that organisations desire. Furthermore, they identified several organisations that trained at least a third of their managers in HR techniques, including performance appraisal, communications, delegation, motivation, and team building. Also acknowledged is that FLMs need to be trained and qualified in those areas of HRM most practised to achieve operational goals (Brewster & Larsen, 1992).

Additionally, the majority of the FLM participants mentioned the importance of providing courses about employee voice as being essential. Therefore, the organisation ought to make provisions to provide this. When comparing the findings of both parties (HR managers and FLMs), it is found that there is a gap in the

provision of training in that no courses are provided regarding employee voice to FLMs. In this respect, the organisation must put more effort into providing courses that train FLMs both to encourage employees to speak out and to know how to respond appropriately to employees. After reviewing employee voice directly through line manager literature, it was noted that allowing employees to speak up makes them feel valued and motivated to contribute to the decision-making process in the organisation.

It is important to maximise the potential of employees. Moreover, by encouraging and enabling employees to have a say in the workplace, the potential for problems arising in the first place is reduced. This fosters a more harmonious working environment, leading to enhanced employee productivity and loyalty to the organisation. The positive impact of allowing employees to raise issues thus mitigating or preventing potential problems was supported by Gill & Loftus (1984), who noted "a complaint procedure makes an important contribution to harmonious employee relations and can boost the morale and efficiency of the entire organisation" (pp.2–3).

It can be recommended that all managers should be trained in the implementation of HR policies because they will have staff coming to them, reporting to them and expressing their opinions. Whether FLMs recognise it or not, they effectively become HR managers and thus they should be properly trained for that role. Providing access to specific HR policies and practices, combined with supervision from the HR department and support from management, will enable FLMs to interpret and implement HR activities as required (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003).

According to Bos-Nehles et al. (2014), only ability has an independent and direct positive effect on the effectiveness of HRM implementation by FLMs; and this effect can be positively or negatively influenced by motivation and opportunity. This study revealed that line managers' ability to manage employee voice at the bank was jeopardised by the insufficient training provided by the HR department. Although FLMs had informal support from their superiors, this was not sufficient to meet the expectations placed upon them.

7.10 Relationship between employee voice and other workplace/HR issues

7.10.1 Relationship between employee voice and staff engagement with their work

Wilkinson et al. (2014) articulated that organisations can invest in programmes to enhance and motivate employees to be involved and engaged. This echoes generally that direct employee voice is a vital driver of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). In this context, the data revealed that both participants from HR agreed that there is a relationship between employees having a say and their engagement with their work. This implies that employees and their concerns are valued in the organisation, leading to enhanced staff engagement in the working environment. This result is in line with CIPD's (2006) report, which shows that communication is the essential factor to lead employees to work engagement. The report also reveals that facilitating the opportunity to feed their views and opinions upwards is the most significant driver of employees' engagement. According to Robinson et al. (2004), the main element for employee engagement is a recognition of being valued and involved in the organisation.

What emerges from the HR manager data is that there is an association between job satisfaction and employee loyalty to the company: if employees feel that they can have a say in the organisation, they will be more engaged and feel greater loyalty because of this. Employees always value having platforms or channels to raise their concerns and suggest improvements with middle or senior management, and specifically to have their concerns and suggestions addressed and acted upon. Similarly, the results from the employee level (Section 6.9.1) indicate that all interviewees without exception suggested that allowing them to have a say encourages them to be more engaged with their work.

From the above results, it is evident that allowing and enabling employees to have a say, and listening to them, encourages them to be more engaged with their work and also increases their confidence and self-esteem. Overall, this enables them to become more effective and productive employees, to the benefit of the organisation. Therefore, employee voice facilitation is effective for enhancing employee engagement. The relationship between employees' performance and organisational performance was also supported by several academics and researchers who found that the more employees are motivated and encouraged by their FLMs, the more likely it is that they will engage in working more productively (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Kellner et al., 2019; Appelbaum et al., 2000; Jiang et al., 2012; Boselie, 2010). Engaged employees perceive their efforts as more meaningful and fulfilling, which increases job satisfaction (Truss et al., 2006).

Whenever employees' voices are heard and acted upon, they are likely to respond with greater engagement. Therefore, employee voice is the sort of internal communication that may positively enhance employee engagement with the

organisation (Ruck et al., 2017). The claim has also been made that employees who believe that they have an opportunity to effectively express their management concerns are likely to produce more positive attitudes and demonstrate higher levels of performance (Purcell et al., 2003).

7.10.2 Relationship between employee voice and job satisfaction

The data of both participants from the HR level confirmed that there is a direct association between employee job satisfaction and employees being able to express their concerns. Similarly, the majority of FLMs in this study agreed that there is a correlation between employee voice and employee job satisfaction. The findings imply that allowing employees to express their views and raise concerns increases their satisfaction, even if immediate results are not achieved. Being heard provides a sense of encouragement, this emphasises the relevance of voice mechanisms in boosting employee well-being.

A possible explanation for this might be that, if employees feel that their voice has been listened to and that what they have put forward has been considered, they will engage positively with their work. This results in a high degree of loyalty to the organisation. From the data collected from FLMs, it was found that there is a positive association between employees' voices being heard, engagement with work, loyalty to the organisation, and personal job satisfaction. The findings of this study support Holland et al.'s (2012) survey results, which found that direct voice is associated with job satisfaction and is more important than the existence of trade union indirect or collective voice.

Also, Kok et al. (2014, p.428) emphasised that "the communication lines are open between the employees and management so as to lead to increased job satisfaction and a positive attitude, not only towards the position of the former but also to the institution itself". Therefore, employee voice is essential in the workplace because it enables employees to bring a valuable contribution to that workplace.

Another important finding from FLMs is that if employees' thoughts and suggestions, and issues raised, are properly addressed, and problems are solved to a reasonable degree, then there might be a relationship between employees speaking out and their level of job satisfaction. It is found that employees would not use the available communication channels provided by the organisation if these ultimately yielded no results. However, if their voice has been heard in the past, and has been taken seriously, and this has yielded results and effected change, then they will use such channels again. If this has not been the case, however, then such channels are pointless. In this context, it can be argued that hearing and acting upon employees' suggestions is crucial, especially when employees come up with feasible and valuable suggestions.

It is evident from the FLMs' data that there is a direct association between employees' voices being heard *and* their concerns being acted upon and employee job satisfaction, loyalty to the organisation, and increased motivation and energy.

7.10.3 Relationship between employee voice and staff turnover

The literature stresses the correlation between employee voice and staff turnover. In their book *What Do Unions Do?* Freeman & Medoff (1984) developed Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty model. Concerning work relations, dissatisfied

employees can choose to exit the relationship with an official resignation and search for another suitable job. According to Hatipoglu & Inelmen (2018), if employees are loyal to their organisation, they will stay and raise their dissatisfaction with management to improve the situation. Hirschman (1970) identified voice as a communication between two parties, expressing the voice (e.g. source) to a target (e.g. recipient), to improve a situation through proactive behaviour rather than deciding to exit from the organisation. In this regard, the data of HR managers revealed that to keep employees satisfied, productive, and engaged with their work, it is essential that employee voices are both heard and acted upon, and that suitable mechanisms and channels are provided by the organisation expressly for this purpose. This ultimately should lead to reduced turnover rates.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study, concerning the relationship between employees having a say and employee turnover, was that not being able to express their voice is not the only reason why employees may leave their employment, thus providing a contradictory view among interviewees. Even if employees are satisfied and happy in their work, they may still leave their present employer for a higher salary and more rewarding job. Employees do not leave just because they have not been able to raise their concerns about work-related issues and suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team. Additionally, employees may leave their job for other reasons, such as personal financial concerns or dissatisfaction with the work environment.

It was found that if employee voice suddenly becomes silenced or ignored, employees' satisfaction level will decline, and they will be likely to seek alternative employment, thus increasing the turnover rate. Turnover rate is an indicator of

employee satisfaction which in turn directly relates to employees being able to express their views. Other results were broadly in line with this finding, confirming that voice, if acted upon, will improve the situation, and employees will subsequently become more satisfied with working conditions and less likely to leave the organisation (Bashshur & Oc, 2015).

From the FLM level, the study results highlight that when employees are able to have a say with their ideas and concerns and are happy in their working environment, then they are more likely to be loyal to the organisation. The FLMs argued that if line managers are not interested in listening to their employees, then they will not be happy. The first action they might contemplate is to consider moving to another department to work under another FLM. If that does not work, they will potentially look for another job in a different organisation.

Thus, there is a definite (inverse) relationship between staff turnover and employees being listened to. If their voice is heard and acted upon, they tend to be more likely to remain loyal to the organisation. This study also found that there is an association between employees having a say and the attitude of line managers towards employees, and their job satisfaction. It all comes down to employees feeling happy and valued in their work. Employees do not appreciate their words constantly falling on deaf ears.

This finding is consistent with other research that confirmed that organisations could reduce employee turnover by fostering the use of effective employee voice mechanisms. If there is no voice mechanism in the organisation, employees will look for alternative employment and give no indication that anything is wrong until they leave the organisation; therefore, organisations can reduce employee turnover by

adopting effective voice mechanisms (Spencer, 1986). In the Pakistani banking sector, employees recognise employee voice mechanisms as playing a vital role in controlling employee turnover (Hunjra et al., 2010).

7.11 Employee voice in the appraisal process

Organisations need to train and encourage FLMs to embrace further initiatives to manage employee voice in a way that considers voice management as a component in their performance appraisal evaluations (Landau, 2009). This gives FLMs a better understanding of how to manage performance appraisal reviews with their employees. Furthermore, conducting valuable performance appraisals with employees and offering feedback allows employees to feel supported by their FLMs, and this will potentially motivate them to engage more effectively in their work. Moreover, performance appraisal review is one of the FLMs' responsibilities in formal HR practices (Gilbert et al., 2011).

The majority of participants from the FLM level agreed that the appraisal process provides the right context to allow employees to discuss their opinions on any of the points mentioned (see Section 6.10). One participant disagreed. In general, this implies that employees are free to discuss the mentioned points in Section 7.2.3.1 throughout the year, but not during the appraisal process, as the appraisal is intended to focus solely on employee performance. Moreover, for raising issues and suggesting improvements, specific mechanisms and channels are provided. Further, FLMs added that employees are given meaningful feedback by them or HR regarding the issues that they raise, and the suggestions they forward, during the appraisal process. However, two participants mentioned that, although they passed up to HR

the views of employees arising from the appraisal process, they received no response or feedback on these from HR.

Similarly, employee-level data revealed that employees can discuss the various issues mentioned with their FLMs during the appraisal review. Furthermore, one participant stated that raising issues and suggesting improvements is a continuous process in the organisation, and therefore employees do not have to wait for the appraisal to do so. This implies that the organisation has adopted a transparent and open approach towards its employees. However, some participants mentioned that appraisal is not the right place to raise issues but is the right place to discuss performance issues. In this context, one participant highlighted that if the KPIs meet with the expectations of the business then employees can discuss the issues with their FLMs.

To sum up, there is a divergence of opinion as to whether the appraisal review provides the right context for the offering up of suggestions and concerns and for receiving positive responses. Some believe it is the right context while others think the appraisal process should be concerned only with the assessment of performance. The recommendation would be that a place for employee voice should be built into the appraisal review process, thus removing any frustration or ambiguity. Korsgaard et al. (1998) classified appraisal review as a formal voice mechanism and stated that self-appraisal allows employees to provide input into their supervisor's evaluation. This is expected to positively affect employees' attitudes towards the appraisal process and to receiving feedback.

7.12 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presented the discussion of the key results as found in Chapter 6. The chapter began by presenting the impact and effectiveness of the employee voice process in the organisation, by identifying whether the organisation has a clear organisational policy concerning employee voice which enables and allows employees to raise work-related issues and suggestions for improvement via different communication mechanisms and channels adopted by the organisation. It also explored the role of FLMs in facilitating the employee voice process and the factors that hinder them in being effective employee voice implementors, including their lack of necessary skills and knowledge in HR practices, in which FLMs have not been provided formal training by the organisation. The chapter also highlighted the importance of employees raising issues and making suggestions for improvements in the organisation. It highlighted the relationship between employee voice and other workplace/HR issues in relation to employees' engagement with work, employee job satisfaction, and employee turnover rate.

Overall, it is not just about hearing the voice of employees – it is acting upon employee voice and implementing positive suggestions for improvement that will result in enhanced employee morale, to the benefit of both employee and employer. The findings show that effective employee voice mechanisms are strongly reliant on employees' ability, motivation, and opportunities. Employees exhibit their ability to communicate effectively by approaching FLMs directly, while their motivation is formed by their confidence in group settings and the support they receive from their managers. Furthermore, the opportunity for open communication is critical, as employees feel more empowered when they have

different channels and mechanisms to express their work-related issues and suggest improvements. Thus, building an environment that increases these three AMO framework elements is critical for organisations seeking to boost employee voice and overall organisational success. Having discussed the study's findings, the next chapter provides the contributions of the research, suggested actions for the organisation, limitations, and suggestions for future research areas.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the thesis and a summary of the challenges encountered in conducting this investigation. It is followed by the contributions of the research, suggested actions for the organisation, limitations, and suggestions for future research areas. However, before presenting the above aspects, it is vital to present an overview of the present study.

8.2 Overview of the present study

The thesis began with Chapter 1, which identified the research background, problem statement, and rationale for the sector selected for this thesis. It underlined the key aims of the study, which were to explore in depth how FLMs formally and informally implement the direct employee voice process in the private sector. It explored how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say by expressing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions, regarding the effectiveness of both employees and FLMs.

The literature review was divided into three chapters. Chapter 2 shed light on conceptualisations of employee voice, including direct employee voice and its formal and informal mechanisms, and channels that enable employees to express their views. Marchington (2008) argued that different formal and informal voice mechanisms and channels are utilised in most organisations to enable employees to express their views. Employers gain substantial advantages by providing voice mechanisms to their employees (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). However, to attain this, it is crucial to enhance managers' attitudes, behaviours, and ability to utilise formal

and informal voice mechanisms in their organisation. Therefore, the literature of this study shed light firstly on employee voice directly and indirectly, and the focus was on direct employee voice through FLMs in this context. Since employee voice is one of the FLMs' HRM functions, it is essential to study the devolution of HR practices to FLMs. At present FLMs have a critical role in HRM.

For this reason, Chapter 3 on the devolution of HRM to FLMs investigated whether FLMs face any challenges in implementing HR practices and whether they are provided with sufficient support by their management or the HR department. Therefore, FLMs' importance in HRM has become crucial as they are responsible for managing people at the operational level (Marchington, 2001). In this role, they are unavoidably accountable for the implementation of HR practices (Gratton & Truss, 2003). However, different academics claim that line managers have been ineffective in their HR role because they are influenced by numerous factors that lead them to perform HR practices unsuccessfully (Hope Hailey et al., 2005; Torrington & Hall, 1996). Hutchinson & Purcell (2008) noted that effective FLMs are a method by which HR strategies can come to life in organisations. Furthermore, FLMs must communicate back to employees to ensure that their voice has been heard and acted upon, and not simply disregarded (Townsend & Mowbray, 2020).

Chapter 4 discussed AMO theory as a conceptual framework to explore the influence of ability, motivation, and opportunity on the ability of FLMs to implement employee voice in their organisation. FLMs are broadly perceived as efficient in implementing HR practices. Based on AMO theory, according to Bos-Nehles et al. (2013), it is expected that the performance of FLMs in devolving HR practices is subject to their ability to apply HR practices as well as their motivation and the opportunities

provided to apply the practices. This chapter also discussed the training and support made available to FLMs to enable and motivate them to execute HR roles and functions.

Chapter 5 discussed the methodological approach of this study. It answers the study's questions as follows:

1. What is the impact and effectiveness of the direct employee voice process in organisations?

2. To what extent does the role of FLMs facilitate the direct employee voice process?

3. From the employees' perspectives, what might enable them to express their voice and have a greater say in their workplace?

As noted, research on employee involvement and voice has gained significant attention in the field of HRM. This thesis investigated the impact and effectiveness of the employee voice process in a given bank, and the role of FLMs in implementing the direct employee voice process through both formal and informal mechanisms, to become voice facilitators in their organisation or to manage the voice of their employees.

This was studied through a qualitative method approach. The important reason for choosing face-to-face semi-structured interviews is to achieve an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the employees' voices, including HR managers, FLMs, and employees. According to Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner (2014), face-to-face interviews are acceptable in the culture of Middle Eastern countries, particularly GCC countries. In such nations, top-level employees prefer face-to-face interviews.

Chapter 6 presented the case study findings based on interviews conducted with HR managers, FLMs, and employees from the selected organisation included in this thesis. After a detailed evaluation of the gathered data, as identified by the researcher, and its relation to the interview questions, the data was presented as per the key themes that emerged. This chapter highlighted the key findings from the case study, as to how the organisation increases its employees' awareness of employee involvement and engagement, through the effectiveness of adopting an employee voice policy. Creating such a policy enables employees to have a say in the organisation to the benefit of the organisation itself and its employees. Furthermore, it identifies the role of FLMs in implementing and encouraging direct voice mechanisms, and in executing HR roles.

The chapter provided a deeper understanding of the perception of the HR department of the role of FLMs in managing employee voice within their departments, and how FLMs implement and encourage direct voice mechanisms and channels and execute HR practices (such as implementing employee voice). The chapter also emphasised how employees perceive their managers as the first point of contact to raise work-related issues and suggest improvements in the organisation.

Chapter 7 provided a combined discussion of the empirical findings of all parties – HR managers, FLMs, and employees – from different occupational groups in the bank to get an overview of the emerging themes from the interview questions and to facilitate comprehension of their respective responses. The discussion sought to compare the parties' answers concerning the same question asked of all parties.

Most of the interview questions were paralleled for all levels to elicit a response to the overarching research questions presented in Chapter 1.

Finally, Chapter 8 is the conclusion of this study. In addition, the contribution to academic knowledge derived from the research in this study will help identify knowledge gaps and will lead to suggesting further research to provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

8.3 Key contributions

This study contributes to the literature on employee voice in significant ways. First, it expands on the work of Mowbray et al. (2022) by emphasising the importance of FLMs in shaping and managing voice mechanisms within the organisation. Mowbray et al. (2022) emphasise that FLMs play an important role in creating and developing voice mechanisms and accompanying HR practices, positioning them as proactive contributors rather than mere implementers of established policies. This study validates and expands on Mowbray et al.'s (2022) findings by indicating that, despite a lack of formal HR support or training, FLMs rely on their own initiative and support from their superiors to promote EIP.

Notably, many FLMs avoid formal training, feeling that their natural management skills are sufficient for good leadership. This insight contributes to a theoretical understanding of how FLMs can increase the effectiveness of employee voice systems, even when structured HR support and guidance are lacking. Moreover, it highlights a significant gap in existing literature, suggesting that stronger collaboration between HR support and FLM practices is required to achieve better

performance outcomes, allowing organisations to prosper without relying primarily on direct HR involvement.

Second, the study explores conventional ideas on the effectiveness of formal communication mechanisms, as noted by academics including Dundon et al. (2004), Landau (2009), Boxall & Purcell (2011), and Marchington & Suter (2013). While these studies highlight the importance of formal channels for employee voice, this research reveals that employees frequently choose to directly approach their FLMs, rather than using formal channels. Both employees and HR managers perceive FLMs as the first point of contact for raising work-related issues and suggestions for improvements.

This highlights a significant limitation of formal communication mechanisms and demonstrates that strong interpersonal relationships frequently play a more important role in implementing employee voice. The study suggests that relying only on formal mechanisms can overlook the value of informal ways of communicating, which are often more effective. These include informal discussions, one-to-one meetings, and an open-door policy, and help FLMs maintain a more natural and approachable relationship with their teams. The informal mechanism can foster a sense of openness and make employees feel more comfortable having a say. Overall, the study emphasises the significance of employing both formal and informal channels to foster a more open and successful communication system within organisations.

Third, this study contributes to the employee voice literature by expanding on the work of Kim et al. (2023), who view constructive voice as a continuous interaction between employees and managers, and emphasise the importance of positive

feedback in creating trust. However, this study identifies a significant gap in understanding the impact of insufficient or inadequate managerial feedback. It highlights that FLMs play an important role in appraisal performance reviews and that having voice channels alone is insufficient to keep employees engaged. When employees' concerns or suggestions are neglected, their trust and motivation to have a say will be decreased. This demonstrates the significance of positive feedback in making employees feel valued and keeping them involved in decision-making. Furthermore, the study found that just supporting profit-driven suggestions might undermine trust and disrupt feedback loops, resulting in disengagement. By addressing these concerns, this study provides a better understanding of how managerial responsiveness influences employee motivation, which has crucial consequences for developing trust, commitment, and involvement in organisational decision-making.

Fourth, this study relies on Wilkinson et al.'s (2024) discovery that, while numerous formal voice structures exist in businesses, they are often not visible or easily accessible to employees. As a result, employees frequently do not know who to contact for certain issues. This study also reveals that, despite the availability of formal mechanisms, employees prefer to use informal channels, such as directly approaching their line managers through one-to-one meetings, open-door policies, and informal discussions. This emphasises the disadvantages of relying on formal voice channels alone and highlights the need for informal communication. It implies that organisations should prioritise informal interactions and ensure that they complement formal frameworks. By doing so, they may create a more effective and inviting communication climate in which employees feel comfortable expressing their issues and suggestions.

Fifth, this study emphasises the importance of structured training programmes for FLMs on employee voice mechanisms. While Wang et al. (2024) emphasise the importance of instilling resilience and adaptation in leaders, this study provides a more specific perspective. Some FLMs have received training and are keen to implement employee voice, but the majority lack consistent formal training. Furthermore, the dependence of some FLMs on informal knowledge and interim solutions, rather than organised formal training, may undermine the effectiveness of voice mechanisms among their teams. While adaptation is vital for accepting change, the data shows that effective voice climates require more than simply adaptability; they also demand systematic and planned training programmes. Such training is critical for providing FLMs with the skills required for fully inclusive communicative settings.

Sixth, this thesis advances our understanding of the relationship between FLMs and HRM practices in organisations. It identifies a gap in the research about the support that FLMs receive from HR managers. While Bos-Nehles et al. (2020) emphasise the necessity of systematic training and clear communication for effective HRM implementation, the findings of this study demonstrate that many FLMs feel unsupported in their roles. This lack of support can impede their ability to implement HRM practices, negatively impacting overall organisational performance. Using the measurement techniques proposed by Bos-Nehles et al. (2020), HR professionals may effectively assess and address the specific needs of FLMs, ensuring they are prepared to manage their HRM obligations. This thesis emphasises the value of collaboration between HR managers and FLMs, arguing for systematic support mechanisms to improve HRM effectiveness. Finally, the findings of this study provide a better understanding of the HRM landscape in Oman's banking sector and

practical suggestions for improving employee voice mechanisms through improved support for FLMs.

Seventh, this study builds on and broadens the strategy taken by Nehles et al. (2006) to identify and address the issues that FLMs experience when implementing HR policies. While it validates some of the five key barriers described by Nehles et al. (2006) – lack of desire, capacity, skills, support, and clear policies and procedures – it also provides new insights. Unlike Nehles et al.'s (2006) work, which affirms that FLMs lack the desire to engage in HR activities, this study demonstrates that FLMs are willing to implement HR practices, maintain an open-door policy, and support open communication with employees. Employees reported having a strong relationship with their FLMs, which allowed them to express their views, even during CEO town halls.

In terms of capacity, this study demonstrates that, while multitasking, FLMs set aside adequate time to efficiently implement HR activities and prioritise addressing employee issues and concerns. Regarding skills, whereas Nehles et al. (2006) claimed that FLMs may lack the requisite abilities for implementing HR rules, this study shows that many FLMs have good interpersonal skills that allow them to engage with employees. However, the data also shows that FLMs do not receive enough training on employee voice, which is critical for dealing with difficult issues and cultivating mechanisms for employee voice.

Furthermore, while Nehles et al. (2006) described a lack of support from HR managers, this study found that certain FLMs obtain informal support from their managers, allowing them to manage HR functions more efficiently. Concerning the lack of clear policies and procedures, this study emphasises the necessity for clear

HR policies, since HR managers, some FLMs, and employees are aware of these policy documents, which are available throughout the organisation. Thus, our study adds to the current literature by providing a thorough insight into how FLMs manage these barriers, emphasising the importance of structured training, continuous support, and clear communication of HR policies.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the discussion on the direct employee voice process being formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say by expressing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions in the banking sector in Oman where previously no published literature was available.

In conclusion, this study contributes significantly to the literature on employee voice and the critical role of FLMs in changing organisational practices. It emphasises that, while FLMs frequently face challenges in terms of support, training, and the effectiveness of formal communication mechanisms, they have a great desire to implement HR practices and promote employee involvement. Key findings indicate that informal communication and interpersonal interactions are critical in supporting employee voice, frequently exceeding the effectiveness of formal channels.

This study demonstrates that organisations must value both structured training programmes and informal contacts to foster an inclusive and responsive work environment. Effective voice mechanisms require more than just adaptation; they also necessitate systematic support, regular training, and clear HR policies and procedures. This approach guarantees that FLMs are adequately prepared to encourage employee participation and voice.

8.4 Theoretical contribution: Exploring the AMO model for employee voice and HRM devolution to FLMs

This study focuses on how AMO theory is applied to employee voice and the critical role of FLMs in this framework. While HR administrators affect organisational policies regarding direct employee voice, this study focuses especially on the AMO of FLMs and employees. It explores how FLMs provide opportunities for employees to communicate their work-related issues and suggest improvements, and how this affects employee motivation and engagement. By highlighting the critical role of FLMs in implementing effective voice mechanisms and channels, this study provides useful insights into how the AMO model can be adapted to highlight the roles of both FLMs and employees in establishing a responsive and diverse workplace culture, hence improving organisational performance.

8.5 Methodological contributions

This study represents a methodological contribution. It is set apart from other studies in the field of employee voice by the fact that senior HR managers, FLMs, and employees from different occupational groups were included, thus enabling the acquisition of broad observations and triangulated data gathered from the three different parties. This ensures authenticity and validity concerning employees raising workplace issues and suggestions for improvements in the banking sector. This thesis makes significant methodological advances in the study of employee voice by utilising the AMO framework. A qualitative research design provides an in-depth look at how FLMs and employees discuss work-related issues and suggestions for improvements. The detailed interviews provide important insights into both

dimensions of employee voice, which many studies overlook. The AMO framework assists in determining how the ability to communicate, motivation from group dynamics, and opportunity for direct engagement influence these interactions. Furthermore, involving HR managers for validation improves the findings. By focusing on the private sector, this study provides unique insights that improve our understanding of employee voice in various organisational settings. Overall, these methodological approaches make substantial contributions to the current literature on employee voice.

8.6 Limitations and Reflections

Although the findings of this study suggest a deeper understanding of how the direct employee voice process is formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, there are various factors which affected and limited the scope of the study.

1. The findings are not generalisable because only one organisation was involved in the study. This was to attempt to fully explore how the direct employee voice process is formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, namely the banking sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say by expressing their concerns, ideas, and suggestions regarding the effectiveness of both employees and FLMs in Oman. However, it reflects the views of only one organisation, excluding the views of employees from other banks.

2. There is a lack of previous studies on direct employee voice systems in Oman, specifically in the banking sector. This was a challenge for the researcher as it

was not possible to obtain secondary data that could have been the basis for discourse on the research topic to support or challenge the findings.

3. This study represents a single case study approach by applying a qualitative instrument, semi-structured interviews, to attain thorough responses from HR managers, FLMs, and employees in the bank, regarding employee voice and the effectiveness of FLMs in implementing it. In his analysis, Ridder (2017) explained that a single case study is seen as advantageous, particularly when the need to have a greater understanding of 'how' and 'why' questions arises. Furthermore, several academics have identified positive outcomes in this type of qualitative approach, based on interpretive research, which has gradually increased in management and organisational sciences (Prasad & Prasad, 2002), and generally within social sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1996, 2011; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003; Schwandt, 1994). There are many instruments which could have been used in this study; however, semi-structured interviews were used as these were considered the most appropriate instrument to fulfil the purpose of providing fruitful data to answer the research questions and to attain the study's aims.

4. The Covid-19 pandemic posed challenges in approaching and obtaining approval from other banks, as their employees worked remotely, which required them to focus on their core job functions, although the researcher's intention and plan was to investigate two banks.

5. Interviews being conducted electronically and the lack of rapport and concentration due to staff choosing not to use video and often multitasking and not giving the interview their full attention possibly affected the quality of responses.

6.   Some participants complained about the length of the interview questions and the researcher observed that interviewees were strained at the end of the meeting.

7.   It was difficult for the researcher to obtain policies and other documentation related to the employee voice process from the bank, due to the confidentiality and sensitivity of the data. Furthermore, the restrictive method of sharing and accessing the policies of the bank was the reason for abstention. The researcher could not find any available data related to employee voice systems from the bank website to obtain secondary data.

8.   Participation in this study was voluntary and the number of participants from the bank was relatively small. However, the data collected was rich and answered the interview questions proficiently, hence mitigating the risks of low participation. The questions asked were thorough and robust and were able to generate rich data. With this approach, the researcher adopted purposive sampling (see Section 5.11.3), which is choosing the respondents who possess the required data (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

9.   In terms of reflecting on challenges encountered by the researcher during the journey of the PhD study, it is indeed poignant to note that the researcher has gained advanced research skills and acquired knowledge about direct employee voice. Although the journey was full of challenges, through these, the researcher has not only gained such skills and knowledge but also learned how to overcome obstacles and learn from mistakes. At this stage, the researcher feels confident in embracing various areas of study, specifically concerning data collection techniques and the effective analysis of qualitative data. This has given the researcher the impetus to be confident to conduct further research

in the future, specifically to investigate the impact of EIP on employee commitment and productivity within the same organisation and another similar organisation, investigating them together.

10. Throughout this journey, the researcher has learned how to effectively manage time and give equal priority to study and his family. Furthermore, during this study the researcher developed knowledge about different cultures, especially about Scottish culture and how to engage with this suitably, firstly through daily communication and contact with the local environment and community, and secondly via dealings with British and different international research students, and by developing enduring local friendships.

11. In addition, through being a student at one of the best-equipped universities in the UK (University of Strathclyde), the researcher has acquired many variable opportunities and positive challenges that have made him more confident and have afforded him a better understanding of the world from different perspectives. I would say also that Working with his supervisors and building trust has been vital in supporting the researcher in completing this study. Moreover, this has provided the researcher with a great opportunity to enjoy academic life at the university along with experiencing student life in the UK, which has left an extremely positive impression that will never be forgotten.

8.7 Suggestions for future research

The findings remain open to various explanations, and thus the necessity for further research in direct employee voice becomes more obvious. It would be via continuous research that employee voice systems are better understood. Based on the findings, areas for consideration for further research are as follows:

- As the sample of this study only contains FLMs, HR managers, and employees, further studies could be carried out on a bigger sample including heads of departments, general managers, and the CEO of the bank. This would provide an improved understanding of the focus on employee voice at each level.

- As the study focused on staff working predominantly in the bank's HQ, it might also be worthy of replication including more employees and managers working in the branches, to test the findings regarding HQ colleagues having more awareness of the policies and procedures.

- While this study was carried out in one sector in Oman, banking, it would be useful to compare it with another sector, for example, the insurance sector.

- More research is needed to further explore what could motivate FLMs to implement direct employee voice in their organisation.

- Further research is required on the effect of training and support on FLMs' effectiveness and efficiency in their HRM responsibilities.

- More research could be conducted on management interventions as a support system to help FLMs to become successful employee voice implementors in their organisations.

- Further research is required to explore the relationship between allowing employees to express their views, enhancing employees' commitment, and fostering a more harmonious working environment, leading to enhanced employee productivity.

- Further research is needed to explore how constructive suggestions and ideas for improvements in the workplace are taken forward and the subsequent desired effect on the workforce, that is, reducing the workload on employees and enhancing their creativity.

- More research is needed to further explore FLMs' inability to implement employees' ideas about employee satisfaction. Would this impact be negative or positive and what would be the consequences if negative?

8.8 Suggested actions for the organisation

There are several recommendations to be suggested for the organisation that was the focus of this study:

- The findings revealed that interviewees from the employee level are less aware, compared with FLMs and HR managers, of available employee voice mechanisms and channels. Therefore, the decision-makers and the HR department should endeavour to promote the effectiveness of FLMs as employee voice enablers, and to train and support employees to be more aware of available employee voice channels and mechanisms.
- Since sufficient opportunities have been provided by different mechanisms and channels being made available, it is essential to enhance FLMs' ability by offering appropriate training and coaching and by deploying a suitable approach to the selection and hiring of FLMs. Furthermore, it would be prudent to encourage FLMs, through motivation, to become effective employee voice facilitators.
- The HR managers' findings revealed that, to some extent, employees utilise the mechanisms and channels that are available. In this regard, the organisation, as well as the HR department, must ensure that all employees are given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with available channels and mechanisms pertaining to employee voice and ensure that they are encouraged to utilise them fully.

- Those employees who disagreed about the availability of the policy on employee voice need to be refreshed concerning the organisation's policies and the mechanisms available for accessing them. Although there is a policy document available, it seems that employees are not always aware of its existence. Therefore, more effort should be put in by the organisation in promoting this document and encouraging employees to read it.

- The employee relations section of the HR department might investigate further how to educate FLMs in encouraging employee voice. One line manager suggested creating an employee relations department.

- There is a divergence of opinion as to whether the appraisal review provides the right context for the offering up of suggestions and concerns and for receiving positive responses regarding these. The recommendation would be that a place for employee voice should be built into the appraisal review process, thus removing any frustration or ambiguity.

- Future FLMs should be selected only when they have received professional training in the implementation of employee voice – specifically in relation to encouraging employees to express their views and listening and acting upon their work-related concerns and suggestions for improvements.

- Training courses should be available both to FLMs, to ensure their role in implementing HRM is successfully achieved, and to employees, to ensure that they are aware of the organisation's policy in terms of employee voice and its mechanisms and channels.

- It was noticed that branch staff have limited knowledge about employee voice compared with their counterparts at HQ. Therefore, it is vital that guidance and

introductory seminars on employee voice should be offered to them by the employee relations section.

- Interior branches should receive intensive visits from the management and HR department to hear from employees about their concerns and opinions, and to make them aware of how to utilise the mechanisms and channels that are available in the bank.

- The employee voice system should be kept on the agenda of the bank's academy for future courses and training for the employees.

- Since there are digital screens around HQ, there should be message pop-ups on those screens about the employee voice process. There should also be emails, containing the same information, sent to interior branches.

8.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delves deeply into how FLMs formally and informally implement direct employee voice in the private sector, with a focus on how FLMs encourage employees to raise work-related issues and recommend improvements. The findings indicate that FLMs encourage employees to express their opinions on both the banking process and the overall working environment, and provide suggestions for improvements, even if these two areas frequently overlap and use the same communication channels. While FLMs often encourage employees to communicate both problems and suggestions, there are instances when the channels diverge, such as when whistleblowing or internal reporting mechanisms are utilised to voice issues rather than to suggest improvements for change.

Referring back to the literature, the study's findings are consistent with previous studies on the characteristics of direct and indirect voice. Direct voice, defined by

Marchington & Wilkinson (2013, 2014, 2020), is unmediated communication between employees and management. In contrast, indirect voice frequently relies on third-party participation, such as trade unions or collective institutions such as works councils (Wilkinson et al., 2020; Della et al., 2021). Klaas et al. (2012) pointed out that direct voice might develop without formal protocols, implying a more informal and dynamic approach to communication, which is consistent with the findings of this study. However, Baku et al. (2017) highlighted that the efficiency of informal voice channels is dependent on the construction of formal mechanisms, underlining the importance of merging informal and formal systems. This synthesis suggests that, while direct voice can thrive in a less organised setting, its full potential is reached when combined with formal participation frameworks.

Furthermore, current research, such as that of Shipton et al. (2024), emphasises the need to provide FLMs with proper training and support for managing both organisational and employee-focused voice. FLMs, when appropriately educated, are more effective in encouraging employees to express their opinions while also mitigating the negative outcomes of voice procedures, such as employee burnout. Training enables FLMs to manage voice more efficiently and reduce the risk of employee stress, while also ensuring that they do not violate HR regulations owing to misinterpretation or a lack of clarity.

Furthermore, as noted by Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) and Nehles et al. (2006), various variables, such as a lack of competence, desire, and support, impede FLMs' ability to effectively apply HRM practices. These problems underline the necessity for HR departments to ensure that FLMs are well equipped to manage operational responsibilities while also facilitating employee voice. Without enough training,

FLMs may lack the confidence to resolve disagreements or make independent decisions, limiting their effectiveness.

This study, via the perspective of AMO theory, provides a more in-depth understanding of how FLMs might be better voice facilitators.

- Ability: FLMs demand training and abilities to manage formal and informal voice processes. With better ability, FLMs can navigate HR policies and effectively handle employee work-related issues, which aligns with the competence-related challenges described by Bos-Nehles et al. (2013).
- Motivation: As Shipton et al. (2024) pointed out, FLMs benefit from both internal and external incentives to stay motivated in their role. A motivated FLM is more likely to create an environment that encourages employee voice, decreasing burnout and ensuring issues are handled.
- Opportunity: Creating established opportunities for FLMs to foster voice guarantees that employees have formal channels to share their ideas and offer improvements. This is consistent with the literature on the need to balance informal and formal voice systems, as stated by Baku et al. (2017).

Organisations can better prepare FLMs to manage voice processes by improving their skills via training, encouraging them through recognition and support, and providing organised opportunities for voice.

To sum up, this study has highlighted the critical role that FLMs play in supporting employee voice in the private sector. It demonstrates how FLMs encourage employees to express their ideas and comments about banking processes and the overall work environment. This is consistent with previous studies on how direct and

indirect communication channels might work together to foster a more open workplace.

The findings revealed a crucial insight: organisations must invest in FLM training and assistance. Organisations can help FLMs become more effective in their roles by providing them with the necessary skills and motivation, as well as opportunities to build employee voice. This improves not only FLMs' but also employees' well-being and engagement. The study also emphasises the importance of the AMO framework. Organisations that focus on these factors can foster a more communicative and productive atmosphere.

Overall, it is evident that FLMs are more than just managers; they are a vital link between employees and the management. This raises interesting concerns regarding how different workplace cultures may influence the effectiveness of voice mechanisms, as well as what creative training approaches could further empower FLMs. Exploring these topics will be critical in developing workplaces where every employee's voice is heard and valued, eventually leading to greater success for all parties involved.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Form

Consent Form
Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

Title of the study: 'Direct employee voice: implications for organisations and first line managers'.

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I confirm that I have read and understood the Privacy Notice for Participants in Research Projects and understand how my personal information will be used and what will happen to it (i.e. how it will be stored and for how long).
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, up to the point of completion, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can request the withdrawal from the study of personal information that identifies me and that whenever possible researchers will comply with my request.
- I understand that anonymised data (i.e. data that do not identify me personally) cannot be withdrawn once they have been included in the study.
- I understand that any information recorded in the research will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project.
- I consent to being audio and/or video recorded as part of the project   Yes / No

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Appendix B Participant Information Sheet

Appendix B1 Participant Information Sheet for HRD Managers

Participant Information Sheet

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

<u>(HR Managers)</u>

Title of the study

Direct employee voice: implications for organisations and first line managers' (FLMs).

.

Introduction

My name is Naif Habib Juma Al Zadjali. I am a PhD student in the Department of Work, Employment and Organisation at the University of Strathclyde Business

School in the United Kingdom. I am carrying out research on Direct Employee Voice in the banking sector in Oman for my dissertation.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The main purpose of the research is to investigate in-depth how direct employee voice process formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say through expressing their concerns, ideas and suggestions in the banking sector in Oman.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary on your part. You are under no obligation to participate. Should you choose to participate you are under no obligation to answer any questions you would rather not respond to. Your participation in the interview will be accepted as an expression of consent to participate in this research study. You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time.

What will you do in the project?

Your participation will involve taking part in an interview with me. The interview will be for approximately 45 to 60 minutes through Zoom. If you agree to take part, you will be contacted within the next week for the interview arrangements. For the purpose of accuracy, and with your agreement, an audio recording of the interview will take place.

Why have you been invited to take part?

I will be interviewing several employees from different occupational levels in the organisation who will be in a position to help me understand and to discuss your experiences with how direct employee voice has been implemented and how employees express their views. Accordingly, I will be interviewing HR managers and first-line managers (FLMs). You have been invited to take part to discuss your perceptions of how employees, or yourself, are using direct employee voice channels to speak up within your organisation because to provide a valuable perspective.

What information is being collected?

I have a series of questions that I want to ask you about your experience in how direct employee voice has been set up within your organisation that enable employees to have a say.

Who will have access to the information?

In line with the University of Strathclyde's Privacy Policy, the information you provide will be treated as confidential and anonymous. No one other than myself and my supervisor will have access to this data.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

All information collected through this research will be treated in strict confidence. The research data (taped interviews) will be archived at secure central University servers for a five (5) year period, after which they will be destroyed. The data will be secured and stored on my password-protected personal laptop. No individuals or organisations will be identified in my dissertation. Any illustrative quotes that I may use will be anonymised. However, the data collected may be used later on a scientific publication.

Thank you for reading this information; please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

I will analyse the data from the interview along with other similar data I am collecting from other participants and then present the results in my dissertation. If you are happy and willing to participate in this research, then you will be required to sign a consent form to confirm that. However, if you do not like to take part in this research, your attention is highly appreciated.

Researcher Contact Details:

Naif Habib Juma Al Zadjali

Doctoral Researcher

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

University of Strathclyde Business School

199 Cathedral Street, Glasgow, UK

Contact No: +96895680100

E-mail address: naif.al-zadjali@strath.ac.uk

Chief Investigator details:

Patricia Findlay, LLB, BA (Hons), DPhil (Oxon), FRSA

Professor of Work and Employment Relations

Director, Scottish Centre for Employment Research

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

University of Strathclyde Business School

Contact No: +44 (0)141 548 4858

E-mail address: patricia.findlay@strath.ac.uk

This investigation has been granted ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Work, Employment and Organisation.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed, or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Tony McCarthy

Chair, Department Ethics Committee

Department of Work, Employment, and Organisation

University of Strathclyde

Sir William Duncan Building

130 Rottenrow

Glasgow

G4 0QU

Scotland

Appendix B2 Participant Information Sheet for FLMs

Participant Information Sheet

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

(First-line Managers (FLMs)

Title of the study

Direct employee voice: implications for organisations and first line managers'
(FLMs).

Introduction

My name is Naif Habib Juma Al Zadjali. I am a PhD student in the Department of
Work, Employment and Organisation at the University of Strathclyde Business
School in the United Kingdom. I am carrying out research on Direct Employee Voice
in the banking sector in Oman for my dissertation.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The main purpose of the research is to investigate in-depth how direct employee voice process s formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say through expressing their concerns, ideas and suggestions in the banking sector in Oman.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary on your part. You are under no obligation to participate. Should you choose to participate you are under no obligation to answer any questions you would rather not respond to. Your participation in the interview will be accepted as an expression of consent to participate in this research study. You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time.

What will you do in the project?

Your participation will involve taking part in an interview with me. The interview will be for approximately 45 to 60 minutes through Zoom. If you agree to take part, you will be contacted within the next week for the interview arrangements. For the purpose of accuracy, and with your agreement, an audio recording of the interview will take place.

Why have you been invited to take part?

I will be interviewing several employees from different occupational levels in the organisation who will be in a position to help me understand and to discuss your experiences with how direct employee voice has been implemented and how employees express their views. Accordingly, I will be interviewing HR managers and first-line managers (FLMs). You have been invited to take part to discuss your perceptions of how employees, or yourself, are using direct employee voice channels to speak up within your organisation because to provide a valuable perspective.

What information is being collected?

I have a series of questions that I want to ask you about your experience in how direct employee voice has been set up within your organisation that enable employees to have a say.

Who will have access to the information?

In line with the University of Strathclyde's Privacy Policy, the information you provide will be treated as confidential and anonymous. No one other than myself and my supervisor will have access to this data.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

All information collected through this research will be treated in strict confidence. The research data (taped interviews) will be archived at secure central University servers for a five (5) year period, after which they will be destroyed. The data will be secured and stored on my password-protected personal laptop. No individuals or organisations will be identified in my dissertation. Any illustrative quotes that I may use will be anonymised. However, the data collected may be used later on a scientific publication.

Thank you for reading this information; please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

I will analyse the data from the interview along with other similar data I am collecting from other participants and then present the results in my dissertation. If you are happy and willing to participate in this research, then you will be required to sign a consent form to confirm that. However, if you do not like to take part in this research, your attention is highly appreciated.

Researcher Contact Details:

Naif Habib Juma Al Zadjali

Doctoral Researcher

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

University of Strathclyde Business School

199 Cathedral Street, Glasgow, UK

Contact No: +96895680100

E-mail address: naif.al-zadjali@strath.ac.uk

Chief Investigator details:

Patricia Findlay, LLB, BA (Hons), DPhil (Oxon), FRSA

Professor of Work and Employment Relations

Director, Scottish Centre for Employment Research

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

University of Strathclyde Business School

Contact No: +44 (0)141 548 4858

E-mail address: patricia.findlay@strath.ac.uk

This investigation has been granted ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Work, Employment and Organisation.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed, or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Tony McCarthy

Chair, Department Ethics Committee

Department of Work, Employment, and Organisation

University of Strathclyde

Sir William Duncan Building

130 Rottenrow

Glasgow

G4 0QU

Scotland, UK

Appendix B3 Participant Information Sheet for Employees

Participant Information Sheet

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

(Employees from different occupational levels)

Title of the study

Direct employee voice: implications for organisations and first line managers' (FLMs).

Introduction

My name is Naif Habib Juma Al Zadjali. I am a PhD student in the Department of Work, Employment and Organisation at the University of Strathclyde Business School in the United Kingdom. I am carrying out research on Direct Employee Voice in the banking sector in Oman for my dissertation.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The main purpose of the research is to investigate in-depth how direct employee voice process formally and informally implemented by FLMs in the private sector, and how employees are encouraged by their FLMs to have a say through expressing their concerns, ideas and suggestions in the banking sector in Oman.

Do you have to take part?

Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary on your part. You are under no obligation to participate. Should you choose to participate you are under no obligation to answer any questions you would rather not respond to. Your participation in the interview will be accepted as an expression of consent to participate in this research study. You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time.

Questions/

What will you do in the project?

Your participation will involve taking part in an interview with me. The interview will be for approximately 45 to 60 minutes through Zoom. If you agree to take part, you will be contacted within the next week for the interview arrangements. For the purpose of accuracy, and with your agreement, an audio recording of the interview will take place.

Why have you been invited to take part?

I will be interviewing several employees from different occupational levels in the organisation who will be in a position to help me understand and to discuss your experiences with how direct employee voice has been implemented and how employees express their views. Accordingly, I will be interviewing HR managers and first-line managers (FLMs). You have been invited to take part to discuss your perceptions of how employees, or yourself, are using direct employee voice channels to speak up within your organisation because to provide a valuable perspective.

What information is being collected?

I have a series of questions that I want to ask you about your experience in how direct employee voice has been set up within your organisation that enable employees to have a say.

Who will have access to the information?

In line with the University of Strathclyde's Privacy Policy, the information you provide will be treated as confidential and anonymous. No one other than myself and my supervisor will have access to this data.

Where will the information be stored and how long will it be kept for?

All information collected through this research will be treated in strict confidence. The research data (taped interviews) will be archived at secure central University servers for a five (5) year period, after which they will be destroyed. The data will be secured and stored on my password-protected personal laptop. No individuals or organisations will be identified in my dissertation. Any illustrative quotes that I may use will be anonymised. However, the data collected may be used later on a scientific publication.

Thank you for reading this information; please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

I will analyse the data from the interview along with other similar data I am collecting from other participants and then present the results in my dissertation. If you are happy and willing to participate in this research, then you will be required to sign a

consent form to confirm that. However, if you do not like to take part in this research, your attention is highly appreciated.

Researcher Contact Details:

Naif Habib Juma Al Zadjali

Doctoral Researcher

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

University of Strathclyde Business School

199 Cathedral Street, Glasgow, UK

Contact No: +96895680100

E-mail address: naif.al-zadjali@strath.ac.uk

Chief Investigator details:

Patricia Findlay, LLB, BA (Hons), DPhil (Oxon), FRSA

Professor of Work and Employment Relations

Director, Scottish Centre for Employment Research

Department of Work, Employment and Organisation

University of Strathclyde Business School

Contact No: +44 (0)141 548 4858

E-mail address: patricia.findlay@strath.ac.uk

This investigation has been granted ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Work, Employment and Organisation.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed, or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Tony McCarthy

Chair, Department Ethics Committee

Department of Work, Employment, and Organisation

University of Strathclyde

Sir William Duncan Building

130 Rottenrow

Glasgow

G4 0QU

Scotland, UK

Appendix C1: Letter of Request

26 August 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Naif Habib Juma Al Zadjali, PhD student

This is to confirm that Mr Naif Al Zadjali is a PhD student at the University of Strathclyde Business School, studying under my supervision and that of Professor Ian Cunningham. He has been approved to undertake research fieldwork on his thesis, provisionally titled 'Direct employee voice: implications for organisations and first line managers'. His research is based on data to be derived in a case study from the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman. He is planning to collect his data by conducting interviews via Zoom with employees and managers from different occupational and organisational levels, including line and human resource managers. This is an important topic and I would be extremely grateful if you could provide this student with full support and cooperation for his data collection.

Yours faithfully,

Patricia Findlay

Patricia Findlay, LLB, BA (Hons), DPhil (Oxon), FRSA

Distinguished Professor of Work and Employment Relations;

Director, Scottish Centre for Employment Research;

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Innovating works … improving work & workplaces

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Strathclyde Business School is triple accredited

Appendix C2: Letter of Request

To whom it may concern	لمن يهمه الامر
This is to inform you that the employee, Naif Bin Habib Bin Juma Al Zadjali- ID no 3833296 has been seconded to the University of Strathclyde in the United Kingdom to undertake a PhD Degree in the field of Human Resource Management. The title of hisdoctoral research is Employment Relationship in the Banking Sectors. Due to the importance of this area of research in enriching the field of business and entrepreneurship locally, the researcher requests that the person in charge facilitates his task as a researcher in allowing him/enabling him to collect the data needed for his research. Thank you for your thorough cooperation and ongoing support. Yours sincerely,	يرجى التكرم بالعلم بأن الفاضل/ نايف بن حبيب بن جمعة الزدجالي حامل بطاقة شخصية رقم 3833296 والمبتعث الى جامعة سترايثكلايد بالمملكة المتحدة . وذلك لنيل درجة الدكتوراه في مجال ادارة الموارد البشرية علما بأن عنوان بحثه هو " العلاقات المهنية في القطاع المصرفي". وكما لا يخفى عليكم دور وأهميه البحوث العلمية في إثراء المعرفة كما لها الدور الفعال في الأخذ بتوصياتها. وعليه يرجى من له علاقة بتسهيل مهام الباحث والمتعلقة بتوفير البيانات المطلوبة. شاكرين تعاونكم الدائم لما فيه المصلحة العامة وتفضلوا بقول فائق الاحترام. عيسى بن حمدان العامري مدير دائرة الموارد البشرية وزارة العمل

Issa Hamdan Al-Amri Director Of Human Resources Department Ministry of labour	

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Appendix D.1: Interview Questions for HRD Managers

SECTION: General

1. What you do in your organisation; please tell me very briefly?

2. Is the HR function in your organisation managed centrally within an HR department or is it devolved to local HRMs and/or FLMs?

3. Is there a Director of HR in your organisation and does he/she participate with other senior managers in the organisation when making decisions on the company's future?

SECTION: Policy.

4. Is there a policy, vision, value statement or written documents that describe the organisation's attitude to employees speaking up?

5. What was the impetus/rationale for above policy, vision or statement?

6. Do you know if it has been published and/or is available to all employees?

SECTION: Mechanisms and channels.

7. What mechanisms or channels of communication exist in your organisation to facilitate employees having a say?

8. To what degree do employees in your organisation use these mechanisms or channels to speak out?

9. If they do not, what are the reasons for this?

SECTION: The FLM role.

10. In your experience as an HR manager, what is the role of FLM in terms of allowing and/or encouraging their employees to express their views?

11. In what ways does this matter to you?

12. What behaviours do you engage in to make this happen?

13. How do you monitor and evaluate FLMs engagement in this task?

14. To what extent are there barriers that discourage FLMs from allowing and/or encouraging their employees to express their views for example:

   ➢ lack of resources.

   ➢ role ambiguity and conflict.

   ➢ and heavy workloads in their workplace.

15. Do all FLMs want their employees to express their views?

16. Have FLMs received any formal training and support to manage the process of enabling employees to have a say?

> ➤ If yes, what form did that take, particularly with reference to content and duration?

> ➤ Do you think it was sufficient?

> ➤ Is there a need for refresher courses?

17. Do you think all FLMs agree they need to be trained in HR to encourage their employees to express their views?

SECTION:

18. What are the key issues raised by employees within your organisation?

19. In what ways does your organisation evaluate the effectiveness of managers in encouraging employees to have a say?

20. In what ways does your organisation evaluate staff in their effectiveness in encouraging employees to have a say?

21. Can you provide an example that describes the outcome for the organisation when an employee having had a say in the workplace? Would this be considered an effective outcome?

22. Can you provide an example that describes the outcome for the employee when they have a say in the workplace? Would the employee consider this a positive outcome?

23. At what levels in your organisation are staff encouraged to contribute in how the workplace is managed, for example, within local teams, division level, overall organisational level, or a combination of the above?

24. Do your organisation value employees have a say?

25. Does it matter to the employees that they have a say?

26. In your experience as a HR manager, which area do employees most commonly express their views? **For example:** immediate work tasks and team organisation, pay and working conditions, individual personal issues and grievances?

27. What happens when these views are expressed: are they considered and acted upon?

28. How do you as an HR manager get to know what employees think about the following:

- Immediate work tasks and team organisation?

- Pay and working conditions?

- Individual personal issues and grievances?

SECTION:

29. What advantages does the organisation gain from:

a. providing a mechanism for their employees through FLMs to raise their concerns about work-related issues?

b. providing a mechanism for their employees through FLMs to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team?

30. What advantages does the organisation gain from:

    a. providing a mechanism for their employees through HR department or other senior managers to raise their concerns about work-related issues?

    b. providing a mechanism for their employees through HR department or other senior managers to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team?

31. To what extent does employees' ability to raise their concerns about work-related issues and suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team influence how they engage with their work?

32. To what degree do employees being able to raise their concerns about work-related issues and suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team, affect job satisfaction?

33. How is employees' turnover affected and/or improved by employees raising their concerns about work-related issues and suggesting improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team?

34. To what extent does employees' ability to raise their concerns about work-related issues and to suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team reduced grievance figures?

35. How do you gain employee feedback regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of the mechanisms concerning:

    a. Raising concerns about their work-related issues

    b. Suggesting improvements to the operation of tasks or in the work team.

36. In your experience what are the disadvantages of employees being able to raise their concerns about work-related issues and suggest improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team?

37. To what degree do the advantages outweigh the disadvantages?

SECTION: Demographic Information

The following Information about you will help the researcher to understand how different people view direct employee voice mechanisms and channels.

(Indicate the appropriate box below)

Age range:

    a. 18-29

    b. 30-39

    c. 40-49

    d. 50-59

    e. 60-65

Gender

    a. Male

b. Female

c. Other

d. Prefer not to say.

Please indicate one of the following that best describes your educational background:

A. Higher National Diploma

B. Bachelor's degree

C. Master's degree and above

Work experience:

How long have you been working in this organisation?

A. Less than 3 years

B. 3-10 years

C. Greater than 10 but less than 20 years

D. More than 20 years

How many years have you worked in this organisation as a manager?

E. Less than 3 years

F. 3-10 years

G. Greater than 10 but less than 20 years

H. More than 20 years

Appendix D.2: Interview Questions for FLMs

1. Tell me very briefly what you do in your organisation and who you report to?

2. What is the size and nature of your work team?

SECTION: POLICY

3. Is there any sort of policy, vision, values, or written documents that describe the organisation's attitude to employees' views and employees having a say in what goes on here?

4. Is it issued to employees, or are they made aware of it and where they can access it?

5. If no such policy is in existence/available, is there a general company or management approach to seeking employee views?

6. What is your view on this policy or approach to seeking employees' views?

7. Are you always able to implement this in practice?

8. To what degree do employees in your team engage with the organisation's policy on employee involvement?

SECTION: GENERAL

9. What mechanisms or channels of communication exist in your organisation to facilitate employees having a say?

10. To what degree do employees in your unit use these specific mechanisms or channels to speak out?

11. If they do not use them, what are the reasons for this?

12. What happens when employees wish to change or make temporary or permanent changes with respect to any of the following:

a. Working hours?

b. Shift patterns?

c. Start and finish times?

d. Changes to holidays?

e. Work/family conflicts?

f. Queries and issues with their performance?

g. Issues concerning pay and conditions?

SECTIONSS: GRIEVANCES AND OTHER ISSUES

13. Can you tell me what happens when employees approach you if they have a problem at work? **For example:**

➢ Employees have a problem with their role, and their capacity to undertake it effectively.

➢ Employees have a personal/conflictual issue with a colleague(s) that they cannot resolve?

➢ Employees have an issue with you as their line manager that they cannot resolve.

➢ They wish to suggest an improvement in the way their job or the way their team's role is undertaken.

➢ A grievance at work.?

14. To what extent does it matter to you that your employees have a say in these issues? Why is this the case?

15. Can you provide me with an example of when an employee came to you with one of the above issues/problems at work, and you were able to resolve or deal with the issue to the employee's satisfaction? What was the impact on the employee's attitudes and behaviours? Was this good for the organisation?

16. Can you provide me with an example when you were not able to resolve an issue of this nature? How did you deal with feedback to the employee? What was the employee's reaction? What was the impact on the employee's attitudes and behaviours? Was this good for the organisation?

17. What are the most common work-related concerns that have been raised by employees to you as first-line manager?

18. What is the most difficult aspect of dealing with listening and acting on employee problems at work?

19. To your knowledge there is any connection between employees being able to express their views and staff turnover.

20. From your experience is there any connection between employees speaking out and their satisfaction with work?

21. To what extent do you believe the organisation provides enough opportunities for employees to raise problems/issues at work?

22. If it is not believed to be enough, what would you suggest should be done?

SECTION: SUGGESTIONS

23. To what extent do you encourage employees to put forward suggestions for improvements in the workplace?

24. Can you tell me what happens when employees come forward to you with suggestions for improvements related to their tasks, work team or working environment?

25. Can you provide me with an example of when an employee came to you with an idea about improvements related to their tasks, work team or working environment, and you were able to implement that idea to the employee's satisfaction? What was the impact on the employees' attitudes and behaviour? Were these behaviours good for the team/organisation **(explain)?**

26. Can you provide me with an example of when you were not able to do the above? How did you deal with the feedback to the employee? What was the employee's reaction? What was the impact on employee behaviours? Were these employee behaviours good for the team/ organisation **(explain)?**

27. Do you think that some employees would be uncomfortable in approaching you to express their desire to make suggestions for improvement? If so, why?

28. In practice, do you help progress the suggestions that employees bring forward, or does someone else take these suggestions forward?

29. Do employees approach other intermediaries such as the HR department or senior management when seeking to put forward their suggestions? If so, why?

30. To what extent do you believe the organisation provides enough opportunities for employees to make suggestions to improve their work, the work of their team or the work environment?

31. If not, what would you suggest providing more opportunities?

32. Are there tensions between what HR wants to happen and what first-line managers do regarding employees having a say? **If so,** why does this happen?

33. What informal support and/ or formal training have you received as a first-line manager to encourage employees to speak out and to know how to respond appropriately?

   ➢ If you have received such training, what form did that take, particularly with reference to content and duration?

   ➢ Do you think it was sufficient? if it was not sufficient what would you recommend?

   ➢ Is there a need for refresher courses?

Section - Appraisal

34. What is your role in employee appraisal?

35. Does the appraisal process provide employees with opportunities to discuss their opinions on any of the following **(explain)**

a. Raising issues/problems/Grievances at work?

b. Changes in working conditions?

c. Suggestions to improve their work, the work of their team or working environment?

36. What happens to these views/opinions after the appraisal, how are they considered and acted upon?

Demographic Information

The following Information about you will help the researcher to understand how different people view direct employee voice mechanisms and channels.

(Indicate the appropriate box below)

Which category below includes your age?

a. 18-29
b. 30-39
c. 40-49
d. 50-59
e. 60-65

Gender:

a. Male
b. Female
c. Other
d. Prefer not to say.

Please indicate one of the following that best describes your educational background:

D. Higher National Diploma
E. Bachelor's Degree
F. Master's degree and above

Work experience:

How long have you been working in this organisation?

I. Less than 3 years

J. 3-10 years

K. Greater than 10 but less than 20 years

L. More than 20 years

How many years have you worked in this organisation as a manager?

M. Less than 3 years

N. 3-10 years

O. Greater than 10 but less than 20 years

P. More than 20 years

Appendix D.3: Interview Questions for Employees

1. Tell me very briefly what you do in your organisation and who do you report to?

2. What is the size and nature of your work team?

SECTION: POLICY

3. Is there any sort of policy, vision, values, or written documents that discuss the organisation's attitude to employees' views and employees having a say?

4. Do you know if it has been published and/or is available to all employees? Have you read it?

SECTION: GENERAL

5. What mechanisms or channels of communication exist in your organisation to facilitate employees having a say?

6. To what degree do you use these mechanisms or channels to speak out?

7. If you do not, what are the reasons for this?

8. Who do you speak to or how do you raise the issue when you wish to make temporary or permanent changes to any of the following:

a. Working hours?

b. Shift patterns?

c. Start and finish times?

d. Changes to holidays?

e. Work/family conflicts?

f. Discuss queries and issues with your performance?

g. Issues concerning pay and conditions?

SECTION: GRIEVANCES AND OTHER ISSUES

9. To what extent is it important for you to raise your concerns about work-related issues?

10. Can you tell me what happens when you have a problem at work? **For example?**
   ➤ you have a problem with your role, and your capacity to undertake it effectively?
   ➤ You have a personal/conflictual issue with a colleague(s) that You cannot resolve?

> You have an issue with your line manager that you cannot resolve?

> A grievance at work?

11. Who do you go to about such problems?

12. Can you provide me with an example of when you approached your first line manager with one of the above problems at work, and he/she was able to resolve or deal with the issue to your satisfaction? How did this make you feel about:

- Your manager.
- Your opinion regarding how much your views were heard and considered.
- The organisation.

13. Can you provide me with an example when your first line manager was not able to resolve an issue of this nature? What sort of feedback did you get? How did this make you feel about?

- Your manager.
- Your opinion regarding how much your views were heard and considered.
- The organisation.

14. Are you ever concerned about the possible consequences of expressing your grievances and concerns to your FLM? Why/why not?

15. To what extent does raising your concerns about work-related issues and suggesting improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team benefit you personally?

SECTION: SUGGESTIONS

16. To what extent is it important for you suggesting improvements to the operation of tasks and the work team?

17. Can you provide me with an example of when you approached your line manager with an idea about how to improve how you undertake your tasks, the work of your team or working environment, to implement that idea to your satisfaction? How did this make you feel towards:
    - Your manager?
    - The organisation?

18. Can you provide me with an example of when you approached your line manager with an idea about how to improve how you undertake your tasks, the work of your team or working environment and you **were not** able to do the above? What sort of feedback did you receive? How did this feedback make you feel about:
    - Your manager?
    - The organisation? **(explain)?**

19. Are there other available processes or mechanisms for making suggestions?

20. Are some of your suggestions better received than others?

21. What suggestions are most likely to be taken up?

22. What suggestions are least likely to be taken up? **Why?**

23. Are you confident in making suggestions at your work?

24. Does any previous experience of making suggestions make you more or less confident?

25. To what extent does having a say encourage you to be more engaged with your work?

26. .From your experience is there any connection between employees speaking out and their satisfaction with work?

27. To your knowledge is there any connection between employees being able to express their views and staff turnover?

Appraisal

28. Can you use your appraisal to discuss the following:

- You have a problem with your role, and capacity to undertake it effectively?

- You have a personal/conflictual issue with a colleague(s) that you cannot resolve?

- You have an issue with your line manager that you cannot resolve?

- You wish to suggest an improvement in the way your job or your team's role is undertaken?

29. Temporary or permanent changes to any of the following:

a. Working hours

b. Shift patterns?

c. Start and finish times?

d. Changes to holidays?

e. Work/family conflicts?

f. Discuss queries and issues with your performance?

g. Issues concerning pay and conditions?

30. To what degree is appraisal the right place to raise these concerns and receive a positive response?

Demographic Information

The following Information about you will help the researcher to understand how different people view direct employee voice mechanisms and channels.

(Indicate the appropriate box below)

Which category below includes your age?

a. 18-29

b. 30-39

   c. 40-49

   d. 50-59

   e. 60-65

Gender:

a. Male

b. Female

c. Other

d. Prefer not to say.

Please indicate one of the following that best describes your educational background:

a. Higher National Diploma

b. Bachelor's Degree

c. Master's degree and above

Work experience:

How long have you been working in this organisation?

a. Less than 3 years

b. 3-10 years

c. Greater than 10 but less than 20 years

d. More than 20 years