

# **Constructive and destructive voice behaviours in cooperatives: the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drives.**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to understand how job satisfaction relates to constructive and destructive voice in cooperatives by developing an integrated theoretical model that combines Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Motivational Synergy Theory (MST). We investigate the underlying motivational explanation by adopting a follower-centric perspective and focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic factors related to leadership styles and performance-based rewards. The empirical mediation analyses of 300 workers of Italian cooperatives show specific associations of job satisfaction with constructive and destructive voice via transformational and transactional leadership and performance-based rewards. Unlike most existing literature, this study considers employee voice as an extra-role behaviour that can be positive (constructive) or negative (destructive) for the organisation. Moreover, it brings new theoretical perspectives to the voice debate by combining SET and MST, thus developing fertile grounds for further studies. Finally, it extends existing knowledge about employee voice to the under-investigated but highly relevant context of cooperatives.

**Keywords.** Employee voice, transformational leadership, rewards, cooperatives

## **Data availability**

The data are not publicly available due to containing information that could compromise research participant privacy but are available from the corresponding author on a reasonable request.

## **Introduction**

Employee voice is increasingly recognised as a factor that may crucially influence organisational performance through better decision-making and increased commitment. This strategic relevance has led to a proliferation of the voice literature in recent years (for reviews, see Della Torre et al., 2022; Mori et al., 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Although scholars have adopted different and separated perspectives in studying employee voice that have generated disciplinary “silos” in research (Mori et al., 2022; Wilkinson et al., 2020), the concept of employee voice is commonly defined as “all of the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say about, and influence, their work and the functioning of their organisation” (Wilkinson et al., 2020, p. 30).

Voice research across various streams typically centres around private, profit-driven organisational contexts, particularly within traditional companies operating in the manufacturing or services industry. However, other important contexts deserve greater attention for their specific characteristics that may help in better understanding how individual voice takes shape within organisations. This is the case for worker cooperatives, which are traditionally known for basing their existence on people. The democratic structure of worker cooperatives involves the active participation of its members in setting policies and making decisions through their elected representatives, who are answerable to the membership (Cheney et al., 2014; Vieta et al., 2016). In this context, employee voice is, therefore, central in the everyday life of cooperatives. Nevertheless, the literature has yet to extensively investigate how voice behaviour takes shape within such organisational contexts. The limited existing knowledge derives from Mondragon’s atypical cooperatives case, regarding, for example, worker-owners governance and the related level of voice impact on the cooperative effectiveness (Arando et al., 2015) or the transfer process of involvement and other human resource management (HRM) practices in subsidiaries (Basterretxea et al., 2019;

Bretos et al., 2018). More evidence about voice behaviours exists for the adjacent context of non-profit organisations, investigating, for example, the role of psychological contract fulfilment (Ali Arain et al., 2018), leadership styles (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020; Pei et al., 2018), and volunteers' motivation (Garner & Garner, 2010).

Reflecting a common trend in organisational behaviour (OB) literature, scholars consider only the prosocial nature of voice, which includes promoting change or defending the status quo for the benefit of the organisation (constructive voice; Barry & Wilkinson, 2016). However, it has been argued that a more comprehensive framework for understanding employee voice should also include critical or hurting voice behaviours (destructive voice), which also characterise the organisation's daily life (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014). Given the democratic and participatory principles inherent in worker cooperatives, the examination of constructive and destructive voice behaviours becomes particularly relevant for enabling the active involvement of members in decision-making processes. The exploration of these voice behaviours not only aligns with participation principle but also is critical to understand the dynamics of member's participation within the cooperative governance framework.

In this paper, we adopt the lens of social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964) to investigate the relationship between members' job satisfaction with constructive and destructive voice in worker cooperatives. Aligned with the existing OB literature, we conceptualise voice as an extra-role behaviour contingent upon employees' perceptions of the organisational treatment they receive, as manifested through their satisfaction levels (Côté et al., 2021; Shang et al., 2019), which affect their decision to reciprocate with a constructive or destructive voice. Although the literature has generally recognised that job satisfaction is positively related to prosocial voice behaviours (Chamberlin et al., 2017), much less is known about the mechanisms and motivational factors through which this relationship operates. In light of this, we integrate SET with Motivational

Synergy Theory (MST, Amabile, 1993) to explore the potential synergy between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influencing employees' decisions to reciprocate with different voice behaviours.

Drawing on the significance of leader-member relationships in shaping prohibitive voice within non-profit organisations (Pei et al., 2018), and recognising the different role of transformational leaders compared to transactional leaders in influencing extra-role behaviours in people-oriented contexts (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020), this study focuses on two motivational drives that the voice literature has essentially shown to have a central role: leadership and economic rewards (Della Torre et al., 2020; McClean et al., 2012; Mori et al., 2022). Adopting a follower-centric perspective (Howell & Shamir, 2005), it aims to answer the following questions: What is the relationship between job satisfaction and voice behaviours among members in worker cooperatives? To what extent is this relationship guided by motivational drives in the workplace, particularly in the context of leadership and reward approaches?

To answer these research questions, we proposed extrinsic and intrinsic drives as channels for influencing members' voice behaviours, framing transformational leadership as an intrinsic motivational drives and transactional leadership and economic incentives as extrinsic ones.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the literature on employee voice within the specific context of cooperatives. Firstly, it explores voice in terms of its positive and negative outcomes, tied to employee satisfaction with both job and organisation. By adopting a broad perspective, this study addresses gaps from inaccurate or incomplete understanding (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Song et al., 2019). By doing so, this study extends the existing knowledge on employee voice behaviours to the underexplored context of cooperatives, providing a micro-level perspective on participation (Camargo Benavides & Ehrenhard, 2021). Given the inherently people-oriented and democratic nature of cooperatives, they serve as an ideal context for both

constructive and destructive voice behaviours, with employees (as members) viewing voice as a means to exercise ownership and actively engage in everyday activities. Secondly, the research examines the intrinsic (IMD) and extrinsic motivational drives (EMD) shaping members' voice behaviours, highlighting their different effects in driving member participation within cooperatives (Valentinov, 2004). Finally, the integrations between SET and MST offers new avenues for theoretical refinement in the voice literature that may allow a better understanding of how voice takes shape in such contexts, thus suggesting fruitful insights for new research directions that advance the broader debate on employee voice.

The article is structured as follows: following the introduction, it outlines the key characteristics of cooperatives as social capital-based organisations and discusses the relevance of voice behaviours within these contexts. Subsequently, the theoretical framework is presented, which delves into the examination of the concept of 'voice' with its constructive and destructive orientations, as explored in this study. The article then presents the study hypotheses. The research methodology section provides detailed insights into the approach employed, focusing on a sample of nineteen worker and social cooperatives in Italy. The empirical findings are subsequently elucidated, followed by an extensive discussion in the concluding section. This final section contributes theoretical insights to cooperative literature and offers practical management recommendations.

### *Cooperatives as social capital-based organisations*

Cooperatives, driven primarily not by profit but by social values (Valentinov, 2004), aim to provide members with goods and services under more favourable conditions and higher quality compared to the market. The distinctive essence of cooperatives lies in their foundation of social values, relationships, and mutual dynamics, differentiating them from conventional business entities

(Sacchetti & Tortia, 2016). For scholars and practitioners, the key to their success resides in the emphasis on supporting daily activities while prioritising social factors over structural ones (Borgström, 2013). Social relations form the cornerstone of members' work, who operate within the workplaces based on an informal hierarchy with formal and informal rules grounded in reciprocal behaviours (Borzaga & Tortia, 2017; Jensen et al., 2015; Jussila et al., 2012). In this context, scholars have adopted the term 'social capital' to characterise the quality of these relationships, emphasising the importance of trust, shared norms, and interconnected networks (Spear, 2000; Valentinov, 2004). Cooperatives, therefore, function as unique, social capital-based organisations operating under mutual and reciprocal dynamics (Valentinov, 2004). In greater detail, worker cooperatives have a unique structure in which members serve as workers and actively participate in company governance and decision-making (Vieta et al., 2016). Their dual nature requires Worker cooperatives to find a balance between profitability and fundamental values and missions, positioning themselves at a crossroads between traditional businesses and nonprofit organisations (Cheney et al., 2014), involving the highest level of participation, regularly and extensively facilitated through the resources contributed by members in both labour and capital (Borzaga et al., 2021; Cheney et al., 2014; Guzmán et al., 2020). As a consequence, worker cooperatives face the challenge of managing member heterogeneity, which manifests in diverse preferences and interests regarding organisational structures, objectives, resource distribution, and control rights (Höhler & Köhl, 2018), contributing to complexity in the management process. Further, the intensification of competitive pressures could restrict the decision-making influence of certain members, jeopardizing both ownership and governance (Österberg & Nilsson, 2009). Therefore, a critical need exists to explore workplace dynamics and factors affecting members' participation. In this context, members' voluntary and open manifestation of ideas, suggestions and concerns about work –

namely employee voice – might play a crucial role in fostering cooperatives’ participative decision-making and revitalising democratic processes within worker cooperatives.

### **Theoretical framework and research hypotheses**

In cooperatives, the dynamics of participation, interactions, and relationships are rooted in the fundamental principle of strong reciprocity (Poledrini, 2015), diverging from a strict equivalence between individual contributions and economic outcomes (Borzaga & Tortia, 2017). The principle of reciprocity, aligned with Social Exchange Theory (SET, Blau, 1964) in organisational theory, asserts that parties engaged in exchange relationships reciprocate the treatment they receive from others. More specifically, adopting an OB perspective, the reciprocity norm of SET indicates that employees respond positively or negatively towards their organisation based on how supportive they perceive it to be (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2016).

Applying the lens of SET to members’ participation dynamics, we can assume that the treatment they receive within cooperative workplace influences their participative responses. This is consistent with Knapp et al.’s (2017) study, which, while concentrating on nonprofit organisations, unveiled a strong concern among individuals regarding how they are treated. This resonance extends to cooperative contexts, highlighting a shared emphasis on the significance of interpersonal treatment over job characteristics.

Consequently, we can assume that satisfied members infer that their organisations provide them with benefits and support (Côté et al., 2021; Shang et al., 2019), and tend to reciprocate by sharing their knowledge and opinions, thus expressing their constructive voice (Kim et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2020). Conversely, dissatisfied members, feeling unsupported, may express criticism and harmful opinions intending to damage the organisation, that is, a destructive voice. Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) consistently define constructive voice as “the voluntary expression of ideas,

information, or opinions focused on effecting organizationally functional change to the work context”, whereas destructive voice is “the voluntary expression of hurtful, critical, or debasing opinions regarding work policies, practices, procedures, etc.” (p.91). In other words, while constructive voice challenges the organisation with positive, promotive intentions, for example, proposing a new work procedure to increase efficiency, destructive voice challenges the organisation with, for example, bad-mouthing or overly critical comments regarding work policies (Mackey et al., 2020). Despite its significance, destructive voice has been relatively overlooked compared to studies focusing on constructive voice and its positive organisational impacts (for a review, see Kim et al., 2022). Notably, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, there has been minimal exploration of these voices collectively within the context of cooperative memberships.

Members’ decision to adopt challenging voice behaviours may also be related to factors concerning the micro-dynamics of the employment relationship that extend beyond the specific organisational context. In this regard, the voice literature strongly emphasises the role of leadership in supporting and motivating employees to express their voice at work (McClean et al., 2012). Another important factor relates to economic incentives tied to performance, which may enhance or diminish the positive effects of intrinsic motivation for speaking up, contingent upon employees’ perceptions of the incentive’s controlling or supporting nature (Della Torre et al., 2020).

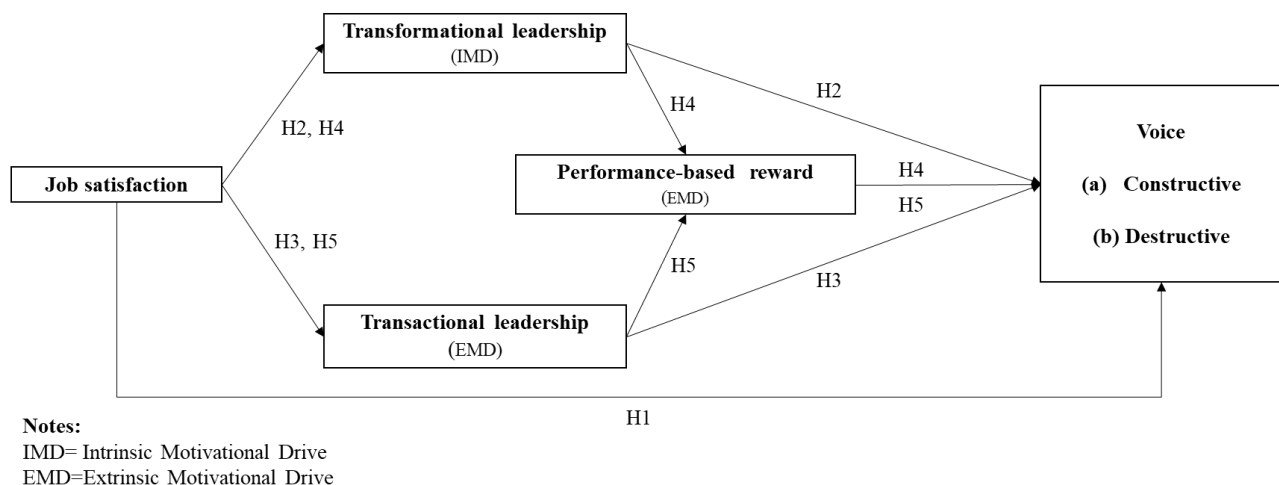
In line with SET predictions that posit leaders establish diverse exchange relationships with followers grounded in social and economic exchanges (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2016), we adopt a follower-centred perspective, acknowledging the active role that even followers play in shaping leadership approaches (Flickinger et al., 2016; Howell & Shamir, 2005). We, therefore, consider two leadership styles based on social-relational and economic-hierarchical exchange approaches (namely transformational and transactional leadership) and economic incentives based on performance (performance-based rewards). This allows us to develop our theoretical framework by



integrating SET with the MST developed by Amabile (1993), which argues that extrinsic motivational drives can synergistically combine with intrinsic motivational drives under certain circumstances.

Building upon these frameworks and inspired by Oostlander et al. (2014) study on the influence of leadership on volunteer motivation, our proposition posits that IMD (i.e., transformational leadership) and EMD (i.e., transactional leadership and economic incentives) stimulate individual motivation in distinct ways and differentially influence members' to voice their opinions. Based on MST (Amabile, 1993), we also propose that rewards, when fair and focused on the merit of the employee's work, can complement leadership styles in affecting voice behaviour. The conceptual framework adopted by this study is presented in Figure 1, which shows how the intermediate mechanisms of transformational and transactional leadership with performance-based rewards explain the relationship between job satisfaction and constructive and destructive voice behaviours.

Figure 1 – Research Framework



*Job satisfaction and voice behaviours*

The relationship between job satisfaction and employee voice has been explored in prior works, typically adopting a unidimensional approach to voice (e.g., Alfayad & Arif, 2017; Holland et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016; Liang & Yeh, 2020; Lin et al., 2020). LePine and Van Dyne (1998) found empirical support for their view that employees who are satisfied with their group will be more likely to develop new ideas and spend time communicating their ideas to the group. Similarly, in exploring differences in attitudes and behaviours across diverse generations of employees, recent studies have demonstrated that job satisfaction is related to constructive employee voice (Kim et al., 2016). Interestingly, Lin et al. (2020) identified a U-shaped curvilinear relationship between job satisfaction and voice behaviours: high job satisfaction prompts employees to provide constructive suggestions for organisational improvement, while low satisfaction leads to an instrumental approach, with employees expressing ideas to change the unsatisfactory status quo and regain satisfaction. They also showed that these results hold only when employees have high prosocial and low self-protective voice beliefs, that is, when employees believe that their voice behaviour should primarily serve to help their organisations and present low risks in terms of potential punishment for challenging the status quo and creating problems for others (Lin et al., 2020).

This latter finding is strictly related to the psychological safety associated with voice behaviour (Liang et al., 2012; Morrison, 2011). For instance, scholars argue that destructive voice behaviours are riskier for employees as they can lead to negative consequences (Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Wei et al., 2015). However, in worker cooperatives contexts, members exercise participation and ownership in everyday activities, reflecting their role as employees and owners (Borzaga et al., 2021; Cheney et al., 2014). Given members' intrinsic motivation to uphold the cooperative's mission, reflecting their social values and beliefs (Valentinov, 2007), we may assume they perceive low risks in challenging the status quo, whether through constructive suggestions or critical comments. Thus, consistent with SET predictions and prior research emphasising the

connection between members' job satisfaction and their subsequent behaviours (Garner & Garner, 2010; Shang et al., 2019), we anticipate that members will employ their voice, both positively and negatively, to reciprocate organisational treatment. Positive evaluations, leading to higher job satisfaction, are likely to manifest in increased constructive voice behaviours, supporting the cooperative. Conversely, negative job evaluations resulting in low satisfaction levels may give rise to destructive voice behaviours. In formal terms, we predict:

H1a. Job satisfaction is positively related to constructive voice.

H1b. Job satisfaction is negatively related to destructive voice.

#### *The mediating role of leadership*

The voice literature has largely demonstrated the relevance of leaders in determining employees' voice behaviours (Detert & Burris, 2007; Jada & Mukhopadhyay, 2019). This is mainly because leaders are the main target of voice behaviours and have authority in managing and allocating organisational resources and rewards (Detert et al., 2013). Leaders' behaviours thus determine the voice climate that affects members' decisions about using their voice or remaining silent (Garner & Garner, 2010). For example, Brykman and Maerz (2022) noted that leaders' prior positive reactions to voices create positive voice climates that increase employees' subsequent voice intentions. In our framework (Figure 1), leadership is considered a motivational drive explaining how job satisfaction translates into members' behaviours, acting as a mediating factor (Flickinger et al., 2016; Shabane et al., 2017). This follower-centric perspective of leadership (Howell & Shamir, 2005) aligns with the social capital foundation of cooperatives, characterised by mutual and reciprocal relationships (Valentinov, 2004), which extends to interactions between leaders and members as well.

Our attention is drawn to the transformational and transactional leadership styles, which the literature indicated as the most crucial leadership constructs in non-profit settings (Rowold et al., 2014). Transformational leadership operates under a social-relational approach by inspiring and promoting employees' interests and stimulating them beyond work expectations (Bass, 1990). This leadership style acts as a drive for employees' intrinsic motivation by providing responsibility and activating higher-order values. It also creates a sense of the group by generating awareness and identification regarding the organisational purposes and mission (Avolio et al., 2008; Bass, 1990). By caring for cooperative's members feelings and needs and expressing confidence in them, transformational leaders also create a positive climate that allows members to feel safe using their voice, as demonstrated mainly by the voice literature (Detert & Burris, 2007; Duan et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2010). This is especially pertinent for cooperatives, where the relational approach of transformational leadership aligns with their foundational essence. Existing literature consistently demonstrates a strong association between transformational leadership and discretionary behaviours in cooperatives (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020; Zhang et al., 2020).

Therefore, based on SET predictions and considering satisfaction at work as a breeding ground for members participation in worker cooperatives, the relational approach enacted by transformational leadership represents an additional intrinsic motivational drive that determines the choice of members to reciprocate with constructive or destructive voice behaviours. On one hand, transformational leaders play a crucial role in translating job satisfaction into constructive voice by disseminating organisational purposes, mission, and offering social support. On the other hand, they are equally vital in compensating for job dissatisfaction and preventing its translation into destructive voice. Hence, our hypothesis suggests a mediation effect of transformational leadership as follows:

H2. Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and (a) constructive/(b) destructive voice.

Additionally, existing literature generally considers transformational leadership as opposed to the transactional type and argues that the former is more influential than the latter in terms of effects on employees' performance, organisational citizenship behaviour, and engagement (Bass et al., 2003; Breevaart et al., 2014). The same holds even for the cooperative context, for which the small amount of existing evidence supports the above leaders' approach predominance in explaining affective commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020). However, when considering voice behaviour as the outcome, both leadership styles appear highly influential across diverse organisational contexts in fostering employees' commitment to idea generation and propositions (Deichmann & Stam, 2015).

More in detail, transactional leaders stimulate employees' efforts and behaviours for performance by promising positive and tangible rewards (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). As such, this mainly follows an economic-hierarchical approach based on exchanging tangible resources (Blau, 1964). According to the MST view, transactional leadership style, by focusing on extrinsic drives for motivation, leads employees to translate (or not) their intrinsic motivation related to job satisfaction into extra-role behaviours, such as voice. Indeed, knowing what the manager expects from them in terms of tasks and rewards (Bass, 1985; Podsakoff et al., 1990) can stimulate employees to contribute with constructive ideas and suggestions (for satisfied employees) and abstain from destructive criticisms towards the organisation (for unsatisfied employees). This is mainly the case in the context of the cooperatives, where HRM systems risk clashing or being misaligned with the governance structure of worker cooperatives (Basterretxea et al., 2019), and members have, therefore, less awareness of the expected performance standards and related rewards

without guidance from leaders. As a result, we posit that transactional leadership could serve as an alternative mechanism guiding satisfied members' participation in their cooperative, as follows:

H3. Transactional leadership mediates the relationship between job satisfaction and (a) constructive/(b) destructive voice.

*The instrumental tool for leaders: the role of performance-based rewards in motivating employee voice*

To motivate their employees, leaders can employ organisational performance-reward systems, the most common incentives in HRM practices focused on particular work behavioural standards (Pinder, 2014). Performance-based reward systems include promotions and rewards proportional to the performance and competence of the employee rather than seniority, thus placing more emphasis on the value of the individual's contribution.

This reward system aligns with the core tenet of cooperatives, emphasising the value placed on people; indeed, it has been shown that performance-based HRM practices, including rewards systems (e. g., Arando et al., 2015; Bretos et al., 2018), induce members to behave consistently with the organisation's goals (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). However, previous research on voice and rewards (e.g., Burris et al., 2013; Howell et al., 2015) has focused mainly on managers' reactions and performance evaluations, neglecting other perspectives on reward practices. Although voice behaviour generally cannot be prescribed in advance because of its extra-role nature (Werner, 2000), HR practices associated with motivation might be vital in encouraging it (Gerhart & Fang, 2015; Mowbray et al., 2020).

According to MST, specific extrinsic drives tied to individuals' competence and performance can synergise with intrinsic motivation, particularly when the latter is high (Amabile, 1993, p. 196). This argument holds true for members of worker cooperatives, who are intrinsically

motivated to uphold the cooperative's mission (Valentinov, 2007). Accordingly, as rewards constitute a direct effort to boost motivation (Boxall & Macky, 2009), we posit that a reward system founded on individual effort, skills, and fairness in reward distribution propels members' motivation to engage in voice behaviours. This theoretical argument combines with the SET perspective, showing that a reward system traces the exchange foundation of the relationship between employees and the organisation (through its leaders). Furthermore, since it is essential for individuals to understand the instrumental link between their actions and the resulting outcomes (Gagné & Deci, 2005), leaders can support them in inferring the link between the rewards system and voice behaviours. Consequently, the synergic effect of different leadership approaches with the adoption of performance-based rewards represents the process through which the intrinsic motivation related to the satisfaction levels determines different voice behaviours. As a result, with the perception that they are rewarded by leaders based on their value and performance (Kim & Lee, 2006), members reciprocate by sharing their knowledge and ideas. Therefore, we propose that:

H4. Transformational leadership and performance-based rewards mediate the relationship between job satisfaction and (a) constructive/(b) destructive voice.

H5: Transactional leadership and performance-based rewards mediate the relationship between job satisfaction and (a) constructive/(b) destructive voice.

## **Research methodology**

### *Data collection and sample*

This study focused on 19 Italian worker cooperatives situated in Tuscany, operating across diverse sectors within the production and services industries including agri-food, production and

services, culture, tourism, communication, and social industries. Worker cooperatives and social ones are recognised as major cooperatives contributing to Italian value-added (Istat, 2019).

Data were collected through a web-based survey using a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions from November 2020 to April 2021. First, participants received an email introducing our research and a web link to the anonymous survey. After 15 days, the invited participants were reminded to complete the survey.

We sent 808 invitations and received 333 responses (total response rate: 41%). Production and service worker cooperatives comprised 67% of the total responses (223), whereas social worker cooperatives Type A (dedicated to health, social care, education, and social services) constituted 33% (110 responses). This distribution mirrors the overall pattern observed in Italian cooperatives (MIMIT, 2022). Most respondents were from medium-sized cooperatives (59%), followed by large cooperatives (30%) and micro and small cooperatives (11%). However, we found that 33 were only partially completed and we treated them as non-responses. Following Cavaliere et al. (2021), we considered the need to test non-response bias by running t-tests between fully and partially filled questionnaires. The analysis showed no statistically significant differences between the two subgroups, suggesting that non-response bias did not affect the findings. After eliminating the partially completed questionnaires with missing data, we obtained a total of 300 usable responses in all subsequent analyses.

### *Measures*

Self-perception measures allow for gathering data on variables based on a seven-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree) (Spector, 2019). The survey was in Italian, based on the English version of the original scales adopted. A back-translation was therefore conducted (Brislin, 1980).



*Job satisfaction (JobSat)* was assessed using three items taken from Fast et al. (2014). This measure indicates the global satisfaction level commonly used to assess overall employee attitude (Holland et al., 2011). An example of this item is “Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job” ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

*Employee voice* was adopted from Maynes and Podsakoff (2014). Both constructive (*ConstrV*) and destructive (*DestrV*) voice measures were based on a five-item scale. An example of an item referring to constructive voice is: “I frequently make suggestions about how to do things in new or more effective ways at work” ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ). An example of item associated with destructive voice is: “I frequently make overly critical comments regarding how things are done in the organisation” ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

*Transformational leadership (TransfL)* was composed of 11 items taken from Podsakoff et al. (1990). An example is “My manager has stimulated me to think about old problems in new ways” ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ).

*Transactional leadership (TransacL)* comprised five items adapted from Podsakoff et al. (1990). An example is “My manager gives me special recognition when my work is very good” ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

*The performance-based reward systems (Rewards)* four-item scale was adapted from Kim and Lee (2006). It measures employees’ perceptions of the extent to which employee performance represents the base of the incentives, including promotions and rewards. An example is: “I feel that employees are promoted to higher positions not for years of work but for competencies and performance” ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ).

*Control variables.* We included four control variables to reduce the power of alternative explanations. Specifically, previous studies illustrated that voice behaviours may be related to

employee gender, seniority and role in the organisation (Cooper et al., 2021; Detert & Burris, 2007).

As a further control, we also included the organisation to which the employee belonged and its size.

Table I reports the descriptive statistics and correlations for the above study variables.

**Table I.** Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables

	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>JobSat</i>	<i>ConstrV</i>	<i>DestrV</i>	<i>TransfL</i>	<i>TransacL</i>	<i>Rewards</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Size</i>	<i>Board/ member</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Seniority</i>
<i>JobSat</i>	1	7	5.49	1.29	1										
<i>ConstrV</i>	1	7	4.84	1.38	.156**	1									
<i>DestrV</i>	1	7	2.45	1.28	-.325**	-0.035	1								
<i>TransfL</i>	1	7	4.90	1.32	.578**	.277**	-.384**	1							
<i>TransacL</i>	1	7	4.41	1.55	.410**	.261**	-.256**	.741**	1						
<i>Rewards</i>	2	7	5.03	0.99	.617**	.177**	-.392**	.697**	.587**	1					
<i>Organisation</i>	1	19	9.02	6.05	-.121*	-0.052	0.059	-0.105	-0.105	-.117*	1				
<i>Size</i>	1	4	3.10	0.76	-0.021	0.008	-0.099	-0.086	-0.077	-0.074	-.190**	1			
<i>Board/member</i>	1	2	1.73	0.44	-0.085	-.134*	0.029	-.132*	-0.057	-.149**	-0.019	0.097	1		
<i>Gender</i>	1	2	1.50	0.50	-0.044	0.066	0.094	-0.091	-0.079	-0.004	-0.027	-.171**	-.180**	1	
<i>Seniority</i>	0	47	15.15	9.38	0.024	0.031	0.106	-0.047	-.130*	-0.077	-.113*	.162**	-.176**	0.009	1

*Notes:*

JobSat=Job satisfaction; ConstrV=Constructive voice; DestrV=Destructive voice; TransfL=Transformational leadership; TransacL=Transactional leadership; Rewards=Performance-based reward

\*p < .05. \*\* p < .01

### *Analytical procedure*

*Validity and reliability.* To check the validity of each construct, we followed previous studies and calculated convergent and discriminant validity (Hair, 2009) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Knapp et al., 2017). All the constructs investigated for convergent validity had an AVE higher than 0.50 and CR higher than 0.70. For discriminant validity, we compared the square root of the AVE of each construct with the inter-construct correlation coefficients. We found that the former was more significant than the latter for all constructs; in addition, the AVE of each construct was more significant than the maximum shared variance (MSV). Overall, these checks confirmed the validity of the measures used.

We conducted CFA using AMOS 24. The six-factor model in Table II confirmed an overall satisfactory fit (Hair, 2009; Kline, 2015). Moreover, we examined alternative models by loading different observed variables into the same latent variable. All the alternative models showed a poor fit (Table II), confirming that the research variables' factor structures were consistent with the conceptual model and the variables load onto the latent variables as was intended in the six-factor model.

*Common method variance (CMV).* To address the limitation of self-report data and mitigate the risk of CMV, first, based on Podsakoff et al. (2003), we included two participant groups within cooperatives (board of directors' workers and other employees) to provide diverse perspectives. Second, to enhance procedural remedies, the examined items were part of a comprehensive questionnaire covering various constructs related to employee voice, translated into Italian with clear, concise statements for better participant understanding. We ensured randomness in item presentation, separated dependent and independent variables, and emphasized no right or wrong answers for participant anonymity, mitigating potential social desirability effects. Additionally,

Harman's one-factor test post hoc analysis revealed six factors in both unrotated and rotated factor analyses, with the unrotated factor solution explaining 38.5% of the covariance, below the 50% threshold (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Finally, the single-factor model demonstrated poor fit (Table II), indicating its inadequacy in accounting for the data's variance (Malhotra et al., 2006).

**Table II** CFA of model's measurement

<i>Models</i>	$\chi^2/df$	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>SRMR</i>
6-factor model	1.337***	0.982	0.034	0.045
5-factor model 1: TransacL and TransfL combined	2.698***	0.908	0.058	0.075
5-factor model 2: ConstrV and DestrV combined	2.41***	0.923	0.122	0.069
3-factor model: dependent variables combined, and mediators combined	4.203***	0.823	0.131	0.103
Single-factor model	7.781***	0.624	0.138	0.15

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

*Data analysis.* In line with recent studies (Chen et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020), the hypotheses were examined using the PROCESS macro for SPSS. This analytical approach, developed by Hayes (2017), relies on linear regression analyses to estimate the coefficients of regression equations, allowing for an understanding of both direct and indirect effects within the mediation model. It incorporates bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs), known for effectively accommodating the irregularities in the sampling distribution observed in many empirical studies, producing thus a more accurate inference and a test with a higher power. To assess the presence of mediation, we estimated the indirect relationship between job satisfaction (JobSat) with employee constructive (ConstrV) and destructive voice (DestrV), through transformational leadership (TranfL), transactional leadership (TransacL) and the two leadership styles with performance-based rewards (rewards), and its associated CI.

## Results

The baseline hypothesis of the mediation model requires a significant direct relationship between job satisfaction and employee voice (H1a-b). The results indicated a significant and positive direct effect of job satisfaction on constructive voice ( $\beta=0.14$ ;  $t(293)=2.50$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) and a significant direct and negative effect on destructive voice ( $\beta=-0.32$ ;  $t(293)=-6.82$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). Therefore, the results support hypotheses H1a and H1b.

Regarding the indirect effect of the intrinsic motivational drive transformational leadership, Model 1 (Table III) showed that job satisfaction is related to this mediator ( $\beta =0.51$ ;  $t(293)=11.76$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). The results reported in Table III for Model 4a revealed that transformational leadership is associated with constructive voice ( $\beta= 0.23$ ;  $t(290)=2.09$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), and the CI entirely above zero (Table IV) supports the mediation effect proposed in H2a. In the same way, Model 4b (Table III) indicated that transformational leadership is related to destructive voice ( $\beta=-0.29$ ;  $t(290)=-2.89$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), and Table IV demonstrates the CI is entirely below zero, supporting the mediation effect of H2b.

Regarding the indirect effect of the extrinsic motivational drive transactional leadership, although Model 2 (Table III) revealed an association with job satisfaction ( $\beta=0.44$ ;  $t(293)=7.41$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), Model 4(a-b) showed that this variable was not significant for constructive voice and destructive voice ( $p>0.05$ ). The bootstrap CI demonstrated the absence of association between the variables investigated, straddling zero (Table IV). Therefore, H3a and H3b have not been confirmed.

The significance test of the serial mediation model involving transformational leadership (IMD) and performance-based reward (EMD) required testing the following relationships: job satisfaction  $\rightarrow$  transformational leadership  $\rightarrow$  performance-based reward  $\rightarrow$  constructive voice (destructive voice). The results in Table IV indicate that the indirect impact of job satisfaction on constructive voice through both mediators is not significant since the CI straddles zero. H4a is thus

not supported. The results also indicate that the indirect effect of job satisfaction on destructive voice via transformational leadership and performance-based reward is significant and negative ( $\beta = -0.04$ ), confirmed by the CI that is entirely below zero. H4b is supported.

Following the same procedure above, the significance test of the serial mediation model involving the two EMDs, transactional leadership and performance-based reward, required testing the relationships for job satisfaction  $\rightarrow$  transactional leadership  $\rightarrow$  performance-based reward  $\rightarrow$  constructive voice (destructive voice). The indirect effect of job satisfaction on constructive voice through both mediators is not significant (Table IV) as the CI includes zero. H5a is thus not supported. The results also indicate that the indirect effect of job satisfaction on destructive voice via transactional leadership and performance-based reward is significant ( $\beta = -0.014$ ). H5b is thus supported. Tables III and IV present the results of the hypotheses testing.

**Table III** Mediation results (PROCESS macro for regression analyses)

Antecedent	Model 1 M2 (TransfL)			Model 2 M1 (TransacL)			Model 3 M3 (Rewards)			Model 4a Y (ConstrV)			Model 4b Y (DestrV)		
	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i>
JobSat	0.51	0.04	0.001	0.44	0.06	0.001	0.28	0.04	0.001	0.02	0.08	0.842	-0.08	0.07	0.219
TransfL (IMD)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.35	0.06	0.001	0.23	0.11	0.037	-0.29	0.10	0.004
TransacL (EMD)	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.12	0.04	0.005	0.14	0.08	0.069	0.10	0.07	0.149
Rewards (EMD)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.09	0.10	0.375	-0.26	0.09	0.005
Organisation	-0.01	0.01	0.169	-0.02	0.01	0.089	-0.01	0.01	0.485	0.00	0.01	0.902	0.00	0.01	0.911
Size	-0.13	0.08	0.098	-0.14	0.11	0.197	0.00	0.06	0.938	0.09	0.10	0.394	-0.24	0.09	0.009
Board/member	-0.29	0.13	0.026	-0.20	0.18	0.269	-0.16	0.10	0.108	-0.27	0.18	0.121	0.01	0.16	0.958
Gender	-0.24	0.12	0.037	-0.25	0.16	0.114	0.10	0.09	0.259	0.24	0.15	0.124	0.13	0.14	0.368
Seniority	-0.01	0.01	0.129	-0.02	0.01	0.006	-0.01	0.00	0.133	0.00	0.01	0.619	0.02	0.01	0.035
	$R^2 = 0.36$			$R^2 = 0.20$			$R^2 = 0.58$			$R^2 = 0.10$			$R^2 = 0.22$		
	F(6.293)=27.8 <i>p</i> =0.001			F(6.293)=12.6 <i>p</i> =0.001			F(8.291)=49.5 <i>p</i> =0.001			F(9.290)=3.8 <i>p</i> =0.001			F(9.290)=9.01 <i>p</i> =0.001		

Notes: N=300

JobSat=Job satisfaction; ConstrV=Constructive voice; DestrV=Destructive voice; TransfL=Transformational leadership; TransacL=Transactional leadership; Rewards=Performance-based reward; IMD= intrinsic motivational drive; EMD=extrinsic motivational drive.



**Table IV** Indirect effect sizes and CI

		Indirect effect	95% confidence interval*				Decision on Hypotheses
			Effect	Boot. SE	Boot. LLCI	Boot. ULCI	
H2a	JobSat→TransfL (IMD)→ConstrV	0.12	0.06	0.00	0.23	Accepted	
H2b	JobSat→TransfL (IMD)→DestrV	-0.15	0.05	-0.26	-0.05	Accepted	
H3a	JobSat→TransacL (EMD)→ConstrV	0.06	0.04	-0.01	0.14	Rejected	
H3b	JobSat→TransacL (EMD)→DestrV	0.04	0.04	-0.02	0.12	Rejected	
H4a	JobSat→TransfL (IMD)→Rewards (EMD)→ConstrV	-0.02	0.02	-0.06	0.02	Rejected	
H4b	JobSat→TransfL (IMD)→Rewards (EMD)→DestrV	-0.05	0.02	-0.09	-0.01	Accepted	
H5a	JobSat→TransacL (EMD)→Rewards (EMD)→ConstrV	0.00	0.01	-0.02	0.01	Rejected	
H5b	JobSat→TransacL (EMD)→Rewards (EMD)→DestrV	-0.01	0.01	-0.03	-0.002	Accepted	

\*5,000 bootstrap samples for bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals

JobSat=Job satisfaction; ConstrV=Constructive voice; DestrV=Destructive voice; TransfL=Transformational leadership; TransacL=Transactional leadership; Rewards= Performance-based reward; IMD= intrinsic motivational drive; EMD=extrinsic motivational drive

Boot. SE = bootstrap standard errors; Boot. LLCI= bootstrap lower bounds of the 95% confidence interval

Boot. ULCI= bootstrap upper bounds of the 95% confidence interval

## **Discussion**

### *Theoretical contribution*

Our study is one of the first to explore the link between job satisfaction and employee voice using the framework proposed by Maynes and Podsakoff (2014). Specifically, our study demonstrates that members within cooperatives offer either constructive ideas and suggestions (constructive voice) or negative opinions and criticisms about their work and workplace processes (destructive voice) depending on their level of job satisfaction. In line with SET, these results confirm that members tend to reciprocate the treatment received from the organisation through voice behaviours (Carnevale et al., 2017; Rees et al., 2013). When members are satisfied with their worker cooperative, they contribute to the cooperative's development with innovative ideas; when unsatisfied, they tend to contest and criticise the cooperative's status quo. It is possible that this finding may be explained by the people-centric approach of cooperatives as social capital-based organisations, where the democratic structure and the fact that members serve as both owners and members (Borzaga et al., 2021; Cheney et al., 2014) may lead them to feel a higher sense of safety in expressing their negative opinions compared to other organisational contexts. While this finding holds particular significance within the cooperative literature, it also implies the need for voice research (within and beyond the worker cooperatives context) to further investigate whether and how destructive voice may act as an alternative to exit for dissatisfied employees (Garner & Garner, 2010).

Furthermore, this study identified transformational leadership as a mediator of job satisfaction relationships with constructive and destructive voices, while transactional leadership does not play a significant role. This adds to existing research on people-oriented settings (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020) by demonstrating that transformational leadership is an intrinsic

motivational drive that triggers the effects of employees' positive evaluations and perceptions of the work (job satisfaction), leading them to discretionary behaviours, such as voice. In line with this, when leaders embrace a social-relational approach, nurturing an environment that encourages individual contributions and extends beyond mere work tasks, it activates higher-order intrinsic needs. This stimulation, in turn, drives positive extra-role behaviours, such as constructive voice, while concurrently mitigating negative extra-role behaviours, such as destructive voice. This aligns with Tortia et al.'s (2020) perspective, asserting that the dynamics between a relational and transparent context and cooperative's processes serve as a substantial means of involving members and directing their motivational drives. In contrast, because of the specific characteristics of the cooperative context, the extrinsic nature of the exchange between the transactional leader and employee fits less effectively with the organisational value systems. It means that in contexts where social values permeate the organisation, members reciprocate the treatment received by their leaders only when leaders build on their (dis)satisfaction through intrinsic motivational drives (IMD) rather than on the material, extrinsic dimensions of the employment relationship (EMD). Consistently, the literature suggests that motivation derived from workplace relationships involving connections, feedback and well-being, exchanges positively mediates processes in social capital-based organisations (Tortia et al., 2022).

Based on the above, one may conclude that in the context of cooperatives, contrary to MST predictions, extrinsic motivational factors do not always combine synergically with intrinsic motivation related to members' job satisfaction. Our findings also reveal a mediation of both leadership styles with performance-based rewards on the job satisfaction-destructive voice relationship, offering insights into the social capital organisations. In such contexts, when leaders exert influence through the administration of rewards and penalties (Bass, 1990), accentuating the significance of an individual's contribution and aligning promotions and rewards with demonstrated

performance and competence, facilitate the synergy between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drives. Indeed, the study shows that relational (leadership) and structural-level motivational drives (performance-based rewards) can prevent employees' misbehaviours deriving from low levels of members' job satisfaction. This represents also an essential line of development for MST, suggesting that IMD and EMD may combine synergically (or not) depending on the organisational nature of the factors, such as relational or structural, and the context considered.

However, leadership approaches and adopting a reward system based on performance did not mediate between job satisfaction and constructive voice. On the one hand, the absence of a significant effect contributes to the debate on the risk of crowding out intrinsic motivation in volunteering and member activities with increased monetary incentives (Valentinov, 2007). On the other hand, aligning with Ugur and Heermans (2024), our findings indicate that when employees are satisfied with their work conditions, they exhibit prosocial voice behaviours irrespective of extrinsic incentives. Cooperatives thus thrive on members' intrinsic motivation (Valentinov, 2007) obviating the need for management practices to externally foster such motivation (Rincon-Roldan & Lopez-Cabrales, 2022).

Taken as a whole, the aforementioned findings underscore the necessity for additional research to deepen our understanding of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drives shaping members' decisions in channelling their satisfaction towards voice behaviours, which offer members a means of participating in cooperative decision-making. Emphasising the importance of relations that uphold cooperative values, our findings underscore the significance of workplace social capital for these organisations (Bretos et al., 2020; Storey et al., 2014; Valentinov, 2004).

#### *Limitations and future research directions*

Although this study has promising findings and implications, it also has limitations that pave the way for further research. First, from the theoretical perspective, since SET posits that employees react according to their treatment in the workplace, the relationship investigated in this work may be a reiterative process. In other words, different levels of job satisfaction might emerge due to the organisation's reactions to constructive and destructive voice behaviours, according to which members perceive their participation in organisational decisions. As a response to the organisation's reaction to their voice, members might judge their situation at work positively or negatively, thus increasing or reducing their job satisfaction. Therefore, although our mediation model attempts to explain this relationship (Hayes, 2017), longitudinal studies that include the organisational responses to employee challenging voices might help test these iterative processes and extend the promising findings of this investigation.

Second, as for methodology, to test the specific mediations we chose SPSS PROCESS with linear regression over SEM due to concerns about sample size (Westland, 2010) as raised by Knapp et al. (2017). Specifically, over 1700 respondents are needed for a 0.1 effect size with SEM (Soper, 2024). Nevertheless, as a robustness test, we decided to conduct an exploratory SEM analysis, which revealed satisfactory fit indices (CMIN/DF=1.377; CFI=0.980; SRMR=0.048; RMSEA=0.036). While the results were largely consistent, differences in CI and *p-values* for H2a and H4b were observed, changing from  $p < 0.01$  in hierarchical regression to  $p < 0.1$  in SEM, indicating weaker evidence. This aligns with Knapp et al. (2017) findings and sample size concerns, supporting our regression approach to ensure a more robust analysis. Increasing the sample size in future research could fortify the robustness of our findings and provide additional validation for the observed trends. Simultaneously, although similar studies have reported comparable response rates (Garner & Garner, 2010; Knapp et al., 2017; Oostlander et al., 2014), potential concerns about representativity and non-response bias might arise. To address this, we analysed incomplete questionnaires to assess any

significant differences and found no substantial discrepancies. However, some segments may still be underrepresented, which could affect the generalizability of our findings. Future research should aim to increase participation rates to capture a broader range of perspectives. Finally, given that our paper concentrates on the unique research context of worker cooperatives, a strength that addresses a gap in research on employee voice in non-traditional settings, it is essential to acknowledge the limitation regarding the generalisability of our findings to other organisational contexts. Consequently, a promising avenue for future studies would involve investigating our theoretical model in diverse research contexts to broaden the applicability of our findings.

### *Practical implications*

This study also has significant implications for the management of cooperatives. First, cooperative managers should prioritise their followers' job satisfaction, as it reflects the alignment of their fundamental intrinsic motivation to support the cooperative's mission with their evaluations of their job situation. These evaluations, in turn, translate into the effects of constructive or destructive voice behaviours. While high job satisfaction leads to constructive voice, which is highly beneficial for the organisation and promotes innovation and change, low job satisfaction leads to destructive voice behaviours, which may have pervasive and expensive effects (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Second, the literature on cooperatives suggests that leaders may be a potent source degeneration of cooperative essence as they might find it challenging to adapt their approach to the culture and values of the cooperative, limiting the cooperative's success (Storey et al., 2014). Thus, cooperatives need to properly select people for leadership roles: within these organisations, leaders should show openness to challenging ideas and inspire employees beyond the required work tasks. Indeed, this study indicates that transformational behaviours represent the adequate approaches that make the set of values of the cooperative understandable for its members and, at the

same time, inspire and motivate members' positive involvement and prevent their negative participation. Thus, cooperatives may also want to implement specific training programmes focused on transformational leadership styles to make leaders aware of the influence of their attitudes and behaviours on employees. Finally, cooperatives should also implement specific organisational policies that promote a meritocratic and fair reward system, as this may be a determinant factor for compensating potential employees' dissatisfaction and avoid that it translates into detrimental voice behaviours. Accordingly, it should be adopted a set reward system consistent with the essential worker cooperatives' principle concerning the centrality of people (Signoretti & Sacchetti, 2020), such as individual competencies and performance goals, which represent a way to manage the delicate balance between providing direction to the intrinsically motivated members, on the one hand, and preserving and further developing the motivational basis of their work through extrinsic instruments, on the other (Valentinov, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

This study explored how job satisfaction influences different types of challenging voice behaviours in worker cooperatives by integrating Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Motivational Synergy Theory (MST). We investigated the underlying motivational drives of this relationship by focusing on transformational and transactional leadership styles and performance-based rewards. Our findings highlight that members reciprocate the treatment they receive from their organisation through voice behaviours, confirming the relevance of SET in cooperative settings. Specifically, transformational leadership emerged as a key mediator in the relationship between job satisfaction and both constructive and destructive voice, while transactional leadership showed no significant effect. This suggests that in value-driven contexts, members are more likely to respond to job satisfaction with discretionary behaviours when leadership appeals to intrinsic motivational drives

rather than material incentives. Furthermore, the significant mediation effects of both leadership styles and performance-based rewards on the job satisfaction–destructive voice relationship provide valuable insights into managing cooperative environments, suggesting that combining relational and structural motivational strategies can mitigate negative behaviours arising from low job satisfaction. Overall, this study's results open the way for further research to better understand how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations shape voice behaviours, particularly in contexts where cooperative decision-making and social values are central.



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