Employee Wellbeing in an Era of Declining Worker Power: An Evaluation of Employee Voice Interventions

Cherise Regier

DPhil in Social Intervention and Policy Evaluation

Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford

Kellogg College

ABSTRACT

Over the past four decades, profound economic, political, and institutional changes have eroded worker power and reshaped the nature of employment across affluent democracies. This doctoral thesis explores the implications of these transformations for employee wellbeing, focusing on employee voice—a key but often overlooked dimension of worker power. Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach, this research conceptualizes employee voice as a human capability central to achieving wellbeing at work and in broader life. Through a combination of theoretical development and empirical investigation, structured around four standalone papers, this thesis aims to address the overarching research question: To what extent do employee voice interventions enhance employee wellbeing in practice?

The first paper develops a conceptual framework grounded in Amartya Sen's capability approach to guide the empirical evaluation of employee voice interventions as potential determinants of wellbeing. It reconceptualizes employee voice as a foundational freedom that expands individuals' capabilities to shape their working conditions and broader lives, rather than treating voice as a mere procedural input or an instrumental means to efficiency. By framing voice as a human capability, the framework highlights the importance of both institutional support and individual agency in transforming voice opportunities into real freedoms. This conceptual model offers a multidimensional foundation for assessing the design, implementation, and outcomes of voice interventions, advancing a more normative and holistic approach to evaluating their effectiveness in promoting employee wellbeing.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the second paper turns to rights-based labour law as an institutional channel for voice, focusing on Europe's right-to-disconnect (R2D) legislation. Applying a dynamic difference-in-differences design to five waves of European Social Survey data (2010–2020), the study exploits the staggered introduction of R2D laws across France, Belgium, and Spain. The results show statistically significant and substantively meaningful improvements in life satisfaction and happiness among employees in teleworkable occupations following the introduction of R2D protections. Moderation analysis highlights that wellbeing improvements are amplified in countries with robust industrial relations institutions capable of supporting worker voice. The findings suggest that formal rights alone are insufficient to safeguard wellbeing without institutional frameworks that enable workers to actively shape their implementation.

The third paper empirically examines the effects of voice exercised through labour unions, leveraging a natural experiment created by the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 in Great Britain. Using firm establishment date as an exogenous instrument for union recognition, this study addresses longstanding concerns about endogeneity

bias in the trade union–wellbeing relationship. The analysis reveals a strong negative causal effect of union recognition on employee job satisfaction within private-sector firms, aligning with prior empirical findings but challenging the normative expectation that labour unions enhance wellbeing. Several theoretical explanations are discussed, including the constraints imposed by adversarial labour–management relations, the erosion of union effectiveness under hostile regulatory environments, and the possibility of unmet employee expectations within unionized settings.

The fourth paper synthesizes the evidence base for workplace-level voice interventions through a systematic review of 92 studies. Interventions are categorized into three domains: freedom of speech and self-expression, self-determination, and consultation and codetermination. Across high- and moderate-quality studies, 41% of outcomes demonstrate positive effects on subjective wellbeing, 55% show null effects, and 4% reveal negative effects. Participatory interventions that provide employees with opportunities to influence workplace organization emerge as the most consistently effective. The findings highlight the importance of implementation quality, managerial responsiveness, and meaningful employee influence. The review also identifies key evidence gaps, including limited attention to eudaimonic wellbeing and to interventions that promote freedom of speech and self-expression, as well as inconsistencies in how employee voice is conceptualized and operationalized.

In summary, employee voice interventions appear to be most effective when they are substantive, structured, and consequential—offering employees not merely the opportunity to be heard, but meaningful influence over decisions. Yet their effectiveness is often constrained by regulatory support, sectoral dynamics, managerial culture, and historical legacies. Methodologically, this thesis contributes to the field by applying advanced causal inference methods. Theoretically, it bridges literature from human development, industrial relations, and wellbeing to offer a multidimensional, context-sensitive account of employee voice interventions. Ultimately, this research contributes to the urgent call to renew worker power through inclusive, evidence-based approaches to labour policy and organizational practice grounded in human-centered principles.

CONTENTS

Introduction 4

Paper 1 – Labour Law, Employees' Capability for Voice, and Wellbeing: A Framework for Evaluation 23

Paper 2 – Digital Overconnectivity and Employee Wellbeing: An Evaluation of the Right-to-Disconnect Law in Europe 42

Paper 3 – The Impact of Trade Unions on Job Satisfaction: A Natural Experiment from 1980s Great Britain 72

Paper 4 – Employee Voice Interventions and Workplace Wellbeing: A Systematic Review of the Evidence 96

Conclusion 135

Introduction

Cherie Regier

ABSTRACT

Over the past four decades, profound economic, political, and institutional changes have eroded worker power and reshaped the nature of employment across affluent democracies. This doctoral thesis explores the implications of these transformations for employee wellbeing, focusing on employee voice—a key but often overlooked dimension of worker power. Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach, this research conceptualizes employee voice as a human capability central to achieving wellbeing at work and in broader life. Through a combination of theoretical development and empirical investigation structured around four standalone papers, this thesis aims to address the overarching research question: to what extent do employee voice interventions enhance employee wellbeing in practice?

The first paper develops a conceptual framework grounded in the capability approach to guide empirical evaluation of employee voice interventions as a potential determinant of wellbeing. The subsequent three papers empirically examine the effects of voice through three primary institutional channels: (1) trade unions, using a natural experiment in 1980s Great Britain; (2) labour law, via a quasi-experimental analysis of Europe's right-to-disconnect legislation; and (3) workplace interventions, through a systematic review of 92 studies across diverse contexts. These analyses uncover wide variation in the effectiveness of voice interventions depending on their form, institutional support, and the degree of employee influence they afford.

MOTIVATION

The struggle to reconcile competing pressures between free markets and regulation consumes the politics of modern capitalism (Crouch, 2011; Kalleberg, 2018; Streeck, 2014). The past three decades represent a period of intense labour market transformation shaped by volatile health, social, economic, and geopolitical forces (Autor et al., 2016; Kalleberg, 2009; ILO, 2021; OECD, 2019; Standing, 2011). Globalization, international competition, and technological advancement have driven governments to favour economic efficiency through market deregulation, often at the expense of workers' wellbeing (Baccaro & Howell, 2017; ILO, 2019; Kalleberg, 2011; Peck, 2001). Financialization and shareholder primacy have redefined corporate objectives in a way that has marginalized workers' interests and diluted their power within contemporary employment relationships (Appelbaum & Batt, 2014; Davis, 2008; Krippner, 2005; Lazonick, 2014; Stoclhammer, 2010). Layoffs, stagnant wages, and work intensification are no longer business survival mechanisms but profit maximization strategies to transfer income away from earners towards owners, further weakening employers' ties to their workforces (Weil, 2014; Piketty, 2014; Mishel et al., 2015 Stansbury & Summer, 2020).

This phenomenon has led to the erosion of good quality jobs across affluent democracies (Green, 2005). Today, a growing number of workers spanning different industries, occupations, and demographic groups, struggle to

access decent employment that supports their wellbeing at work and in broader life (Case & Deaton, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; ILO, 2019; Kalleberg 2011, 2018; Marmot et al., 2010). Despite governments' efforts to mitigate these challenges through active labour market and social protection policies, worker power has significantly declined (Baccaro & Howell, 2017; Bonoli, 2010; Streeck, 2012; Thelen, 2014). This trend is most clearly illustrated by the decline in trade union membership since 1979—the peak year of union density in most liberal market economies. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, trade unions, long regarded as the primary institutional mechanism for employee voice, have experienced a sustained and pervasive descent (Bryson et al., 2010; Farber et al., 2021; Howell, 2005; Jackson & Schetagne, 2004; Western & Rosenfeld, 2011). Unlike other labour market indicators that fluctuate with economic cycles, union membership has shown no signs of meaningful recovery, underscoring a structural weakening of collective worker representation over the past four decades.

A key component of worker power is employees' capability for voice: the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say, formally or informally, collectively or individually, to influence organizational decision-making over issues that affect their work and personal life (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Employers and employees must negotiate the terms of their work through legally binding contracts, workplace policies, and informal expectations and understandings. Employees with limited voice lack sufficient bargaining power to influence negotiations, which threatens their wellbeing by increasing their risk of exposure to work-related stressors and restricting their opportunities to improve their welfare. A balanced employment relationship should allow employers to economically prosper while adequately supporting employee wellbeing (Budd, 2004). Workers ought to have access to employment that delivers a fair standard of instrumental treatment (i.e., equity) and intrinsic participation (i.e., voice) (Befort & Budd, 2009; Budd 2004), but how this balance is effectively achieved in today's rapidly evolving labour market remains a significant challenge.

RESEARCH DEBATE

Multiple theoretical traditions across disciplines converge on the notion that employees ought to possess some degree of voice at work, not only as economic actors but as human beings and democratic citizens. As Hodson (2001) argues, "working with dignity ultimately requires the right to participate actively in all aspects of work life, through both formal and informal means. Dignity rests on the opportunity to exercise agency – to operate purposefully and effectively in one's environment." Similarly, the International Labour Organization identifies "freedom for people to express their concerns, organize, and participate in decisions that affect their lives" as a core tenet of its 'decent work' agenda, aligned with Goal 8 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, despite the normative weight these frameworks place on voice as integral to human dignity and in turn, wellbeing, empirical evidence on how employee voice shapes subjective wellbeing remains strikingly limited. As a result, we face a crucial unanswered question: which forms of voice—whether enabled through policy, unions, or workplace interventions—are most effective in enhancing workers' wellbeing, if any at all?

A foundational premise of pluralist industrial relations scholarship is an inherent imbalance of bargaining power in favour of capital, thereby challenging the notion that free markets alone can sustain a fair and equitable employment relationship (Budd, 2004; Fox, 1974; Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Kaufman, 2004; Kochan, 1988). From this perspective, government intervention is necessary to support labour in their efforts to cultivate dignified working lives and mitigate economic coercion (Baccaro & Howell; Befort & Budd, 2009; Gahan &

Pekarek, 2014; ILO, 2008; Polanyi, 2001; Standing, 2011). Public policy, accordingly, is tasked with countering employer power by promoting employee voice as a means to foster more balanced and productive employment relationships that yield equitable returns for workers. Historically, trade unions have been viewed as a principal vehicle for institutionalizing voice and safeguarding worker interests. However, there has been a discernible shift away from collective labour law in recent decades toward individual labour law, with governments increasingly relying on statutory regulation to delineate employer obligations and employee rights (Arthurs, 2006; Deakin & Morris, 2012; Davies, 2009; Heery & Frege, 2006).

In contrast, neoliberal economic thought—defined here in line with Harvey (2005) as a political project that seeks to "restore class power" by promoting market discipline, privatization, and reduced state intervention—generally resists government involvement in labour markets, viewing inequalities not as failures but as natural outcomes of competition. Similarly, Peck (2010) emphasizes neoliberalism as a process marked by regulatory rollback and market-oriented governance. From this vantage point, conflict between capital and labour is reframed as a misalignment of interests, resolvable through strategic human resource management (Budd, 2004). Employee voice is often positioned not as a democratic right or means of redressing power imbalances, but as a tool for enhancing organizational performance. Consequently, participatory practices such as team briefings, suggestion schemes, or high-involvement work systems are promoted less for their intrinsic value to workers and more for their instrumental benefits to firms (Marchington & Wilkinson, 2005; Dundon et al., 2004). While these practices may foster a sense of agency, purpose, and inclusion, their underlying profit orientation raises critical concerns—particularly when employee interests diverge from short-term business imperatives.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My doctoral thesis investigates this important yet underexplored research puzzle by seeking to answer the following overarching research question: **to what extent do employee voice interventions, a key component of worker power, actually enhance employee wellbeing in practice?** While the normative case for employee voice is compelling, rooted in principles of human dignity, democratic participation, and fair treatment, its theoretical basis as a determinant of employee wellbeing remains relatively underdeveloped. In particular, there is limited conceptual clarity around which employee voice interventions might influence employee wellbeing, and under what conditions such effects are likely to materialize.

Compounding this research gap are a host of empirical complexities. The design, implementation, and impact of employee voice interventions vary significantly across regions, organizational settings, demographic groups, and historical periods. These variations are shaped by broader social, economic, political, and technological forces that are continuously reshaping the nature, structure, and meaning of work. Consequently, the relationship between employee voice interventions and wellbeing, though intuitively presumed to be positive, is far from straightforward. As such, understanding whether, how, and under what conditions such interventions might contribute to wellbeing requires careful attention to institutional and contextual factors guided by theoretical insights.

My doctoral thesis engages directly with this tension. Moving beyond normative assumptions, I seek to generate robust, evidence-based insights into how, when, and for whom employee voice interventions contribute to

wellbeing. To that end, my thesis is structured around two core aims. First, I establish a theoretical foundation for understanding the dynamic relationships among institutions, employee voice, and wellbeing by drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach as a conceptual framework. This research engages directly with my overarching research question. Second, I empirically evaluate the impact of three crucial institutional channels through which employee voice has been expressed throughout the 20th and 21st centuries: trade unions, labour law, and management-driven workplace interventions. Using rigorous quantitative methods, I addresses the following empirical research questions:

1. Did trade unions in 1980s Great Britain improve employee job satisfaction?
2. Does the right-to-disconnect legislation influence the wellbeing of teleworkers across Europe?
3. Are workplace employee voice interventions effective employee wellbeing strategies?

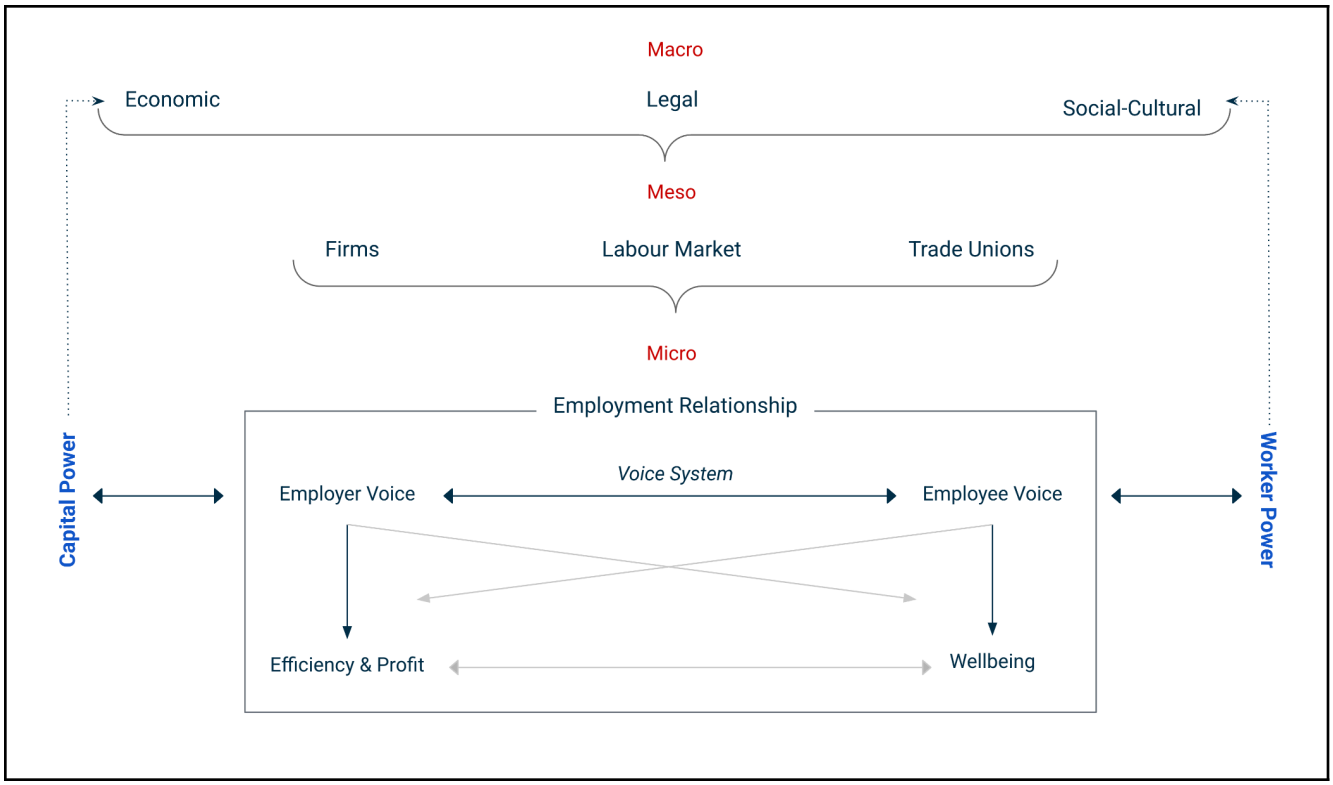
As such, my thesis comprises four stand alone papers that collectively examine the complex and context-dependent nature of employee voice interventions and their relationship to wellbeing through an exploration of these empirical questions. By integrating theoretical development with empirical analysis, my doctoral thesis advances our understanding of employee voice in an era of declining worker power, offering vital insights for policymakers, labor advocates, and organizations seeking to balance economic performance with societal welfare in the 21st century.

BACKGROUND

Environmental Backdrop: Declining Worker Power

Worker power refers to the collective strength, influence, and rights of workers within a workplace, industry, or broader labour market (Silver, 2003; Wright, 2000). Its profound decline across many affluent democracies in recent decades serves as a key motivation for my doctoral research questions. Figure 1 provides a visualization of the dynamic and interdependent forces – most prominently economic, legal, and firm-level transformations – shaping worker power to help contextualize this phenomenon.

Figure 1a. Dynamic Model of Worker Power



First, the 1980s marked a pivotal shift in economic policy across most advanced economies. Governments embraced neoliberal reforms that emphasized market deregulation, privatization, and labor market flexibility in pursuit of economic growth (Glyn, 2006; Harvey 2005, Peck 2001). As a result, labour markets during this period globalized and many underwent a structural reorientation away from manufacturing towards service and knowledge-based sectors (Autor, 2015; Esping-Andersen, 1999; ILO, 2015). This enhanced employers' outside options for labour by expanding their supply of candidates, thereby intensifying job competition, threatening job security, and driving down real wages for domestic workers (OECD 2020, ILO 2021).

Second, these macroeconomic shifts catalyzed significant transformations within firms. The rise of shareholder primacy and increased investor activism intensified pressures for firms to reduce labor costs, further consolidating power within capital (Appelbaum & Batt, 2014; Davis, 2008; Krippner, 2005; Lazonick, 2014; Stoclhammer, 2010). At the same time, the emergence of new digital technologies and global supply chains contributed to workplace fracturing (Weil, 2014). Traditional employment relationships were supplanted by subcontracting, outsourcing, and platform-based arrangements that weakened employers' commitment to their workforces even further and diminished career advancement and training opportunities for employees (Kalleberg 2011; 2018).

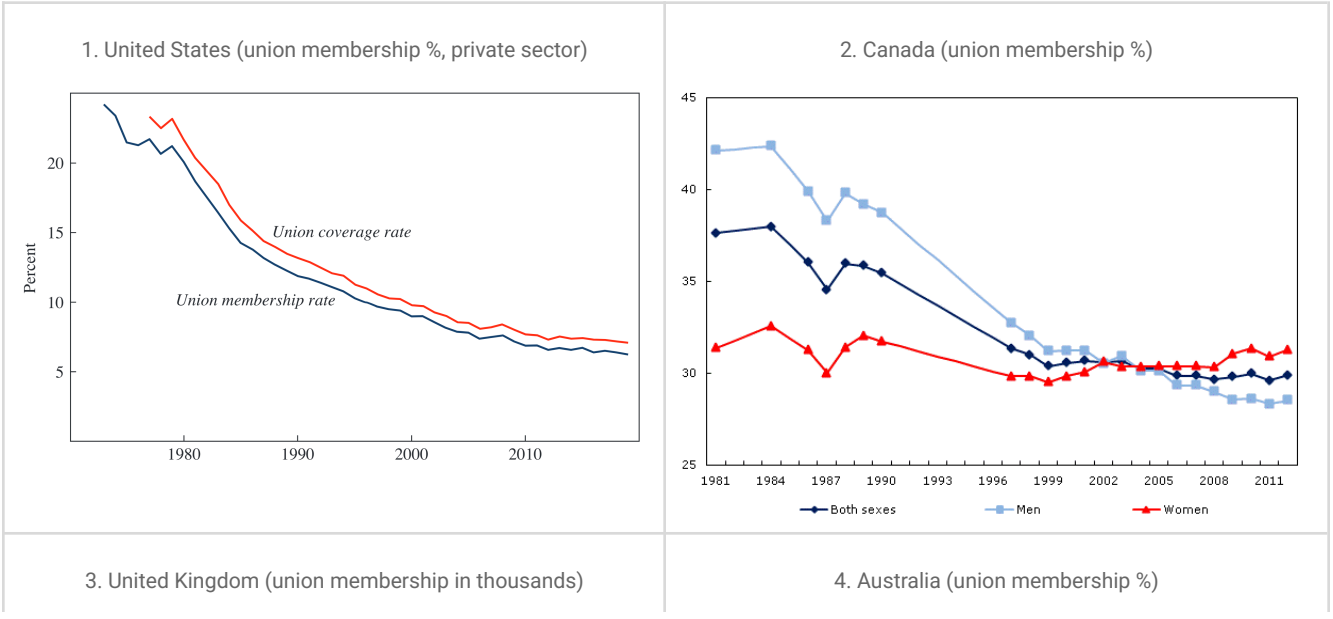
Finally, these trends unfolded within a legal environment increasingly misaligned with contemporary labour market realities. Much of today's regulatory architecture was designed to accommodate the 'standard employment relationship' of the mid-20th century, when full-time, permanent jobs were abundant (Davidov & Langille, 2006; Vosko, 2010). Workforce demographics and life course trajectories were also more homogenous and predictable. As outlined above, these conditions no longer characterize today's diverse labour market. Yet governments have largely failed to strengthen institutions that support collective forms of employee voice.

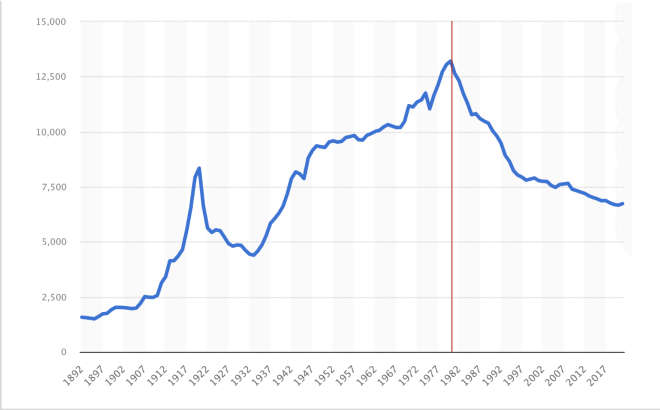
Instead, they have prioritized individual employment rights and equity-based legislation that address discrete workplace issues rather than systemic power imbalances (Arthurs, 2006; Deakin & Morris, 2012; Davies, 2009; Heery & Frege, 2006).

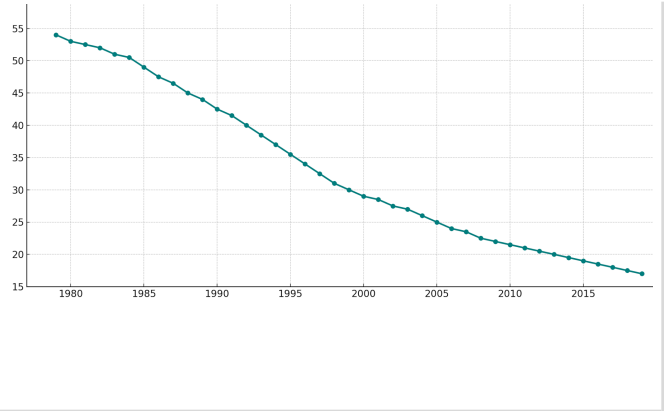
In the absence of strong legal and institutional support, trade unions, which have historically served as a major source of worker power, failed to expand into emerging sectors and keep pace with workers' evolving needs (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013; Milkman & Voss, 2004; Tapia & Turner, 2013). Figure 2 provides graphical representation of declining unionization rates in countries where it is most pronounced: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. This decline is steep, falling by over 50 percent in all four cases with no discernable recovery.

All together, these developments underscore a large-scale suppression of worker power that raises serious concerns about employee wellbeing. As sociologist Arne Kalleberg (2018) argues, "worker power is necessary to motivate governments and businesses to act on a new political and social contract… A high degree of solidarity is essential for establishing labour market and social protection institutions that address issues of precarious work" (p. 185). The consequences of this power inequality are becoming increasingly visible. Economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton link the recent rise in "deaths of despair" from suicide, drug overdose, and alcoholism in the United States to the dismantling of social institutions like trade unions that once offered security and support to working people. Although this crisis is particularly acute in the U.S., similar patterns are emerging in other advanced economies like Canada and Japan where economic and social risk is increasingly individualized (Andreacchi et al., 2025; Thelen, 2014).

Figure 2. Union Membership Over Time in Liberal Market Economies







Sources:

1. Union Membership Coverage Database from the CPS
2. Statistics Canada,
3. United Kingdom Office for National Statistics
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics

Employee Wellbeing

As collective protections erode and individual risk intensifies, working conditions take on an even greater role in employee wellbeing. There is a well-established positive association between paid employment and individual wellbeing, consistent across countries and demographic characteristics that extends beyond income (Avendano & Berkman, 2014). A substantial body of interdisciplinary research has established that employed individuals fare better than unemployed on average across a range of wellbeing indicators (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; van der Noordt et al., 2014). This empirical regularity has prompted considerable scholarly attention towards uncovering the mechanisms that underpin this relationship. Numerous studies have examined how specific features of employment—such as job security, autonomy, work intensity, and social support—relate to various dimensions of physical, mental, and emotional health (e.g., Schmitz, 2011; Marmot et al., 1991). Likewise, research in this domain has also shown that poor working conditions can seriously harm wellbeing. The Whitehall Studies, for example, revealed a strong social gradient in health among British civil servants according to occupational grade. Employees with low job control and security, as well as high work demands experienced worse health outcomes and higher mortality rates, particularly related to cardiovascular disease (Marmot et al., 1991; van Rossum et al., 2000).

Concerns regarding the adverse consequences of poor working conditions have intensified in recent years, driven by mounting evidence of rising rates of work-related stress, burnout, and psychological distress. The Gallup State of the Global Workplace Report (2024) indicates that 41 percent of workers experienced significant stress at work the previous day, marking the highest level recorded to date. Similarly, the McKinsey Health Institute (2022) reported unprecedented levels of burnout, while the Times Health Commission (2023) found that 38 percent of UK employers observed an increase in long-term sick leave due to mental health-related illnesses. These statistics are particularly concerning, given the well-established negative effects of prolonged exposure to workplace stressors, including burnout, physical injury, and illness. Such conditions not only compromise individual wellbeing but also place substantial pressure on healthcare systems. In fact, Goh, Pfeffer, and Zenios (2015) estimate that harmful workplace practices in the United States contribute to over 120,000 deaths annually and account for five to eight percent of national healthcare expenditures.

These findings underscore that work is not merely a determinant of positive wellbeing, but increasingly a significant risk factor requiring critical scrutiny. A substantial body of research has linked contemporary work arrangements—such as precarious employment, excessive workload, and low job control—to heightened risks of mental and physical ill-health (Benach et al., 2014; Niedhammer et al., 2022; Virtanen et al., 2005). As discussed earlier, government responses have predominantly focused on minimum standards and individualized, rights-based interventions, such as wage protections or working time directives. While valuable, these strategies are often reactive and piecemeal, falling short of addressing the complex and dynamic challenges of contemporary labour markets (Bambra et al., 2009; Quinlan & Bohle, 2009). In today's rapidly evolving socio-economic and political context, marked by globalization, digitalization, and climate instability, such static policy approaches are increasingly inadequate. What constitutes a salient workplace stressor in one setting or era may quickly become obsolete in another (Shahidi et al., 2021; van der Noordt et al., 2014). Addressing work-related wellbeing thus requires more anticipatory and systemic responses that recognize the structural determinants of health and wellbeing at work.

Against this backdrop, a more adaptive and sustainable policy strategy may lie in strengthening employees' capability for voice, defined not only as the ability to speak but as the capacity to shape meaningful outcomes within the employment relationship (Budd, 2004; Donaghey et al., 2011). This would provide meaningful opportunities for workers to influence the terms and conditions of their employment, either collectively or individually, as issues arise within specific workplaces or sectors. Such an approach would facilitate tailored solutions to reconcile competing interests between employers and employees, thereby fostering a more balanced employment relationship that enhances workplace democracy. Cross-national studies have shown that citizens in coordinated market economies and social democratic welfare states, where labor markets are more tightly regulated and coordinated to safeguard employee voice, report significantly higher levels of subjective wellbeing (Radcliff, 2013; Green & Janmaat, 2011; OECD, 2013). These findings suggest that advancing employee voice is not only a matter of justice and efficiency, but also an effective lever for improving employee wellbeing.

Employee Voice Interventions

Employee voice refers to the ways in which workers attempt to influence organizational decision-making on matters that affect their work and personal lives—whether exercised individually or collectively, formally or informally (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Befort and Budd (2009) offer a helpful typology for conceptualizing this multifaceted construct, identifying four core domains: (1) *free speech*, or the ability to openly express views in the workplace; (2) *self-determination*, referring to the degree of autonomy and discretion individuals possess in their work; (3) *consultation, codetermination, and social dialogue*, which represent mechanisms of worker–management information exchange that promote industrial democracy; and (4) *countervailing collective voice*, embodied in independent labour unions capable of balancing managerial authority. These domains highlight the wide spectrum of voice expressions and establish a foundation for understanding the institutional arrangements that enable—or constrain—their realization.

In practice, employee voice is institutionalized through three dominant channels: (1) trade unions, (2) labour law, and (3) management-driven workplace interventions. These channels reflect divergent ideological orientations toward the employment relationship and thus imply different assumptions about how power

between employers and employees should be structured and exercised. Importantly, governments cannot directly mandate employee voice without undermining its democratic legitimacy. Instead, they intervene by: enshrining individual rights that facilitate voice (e.g., the right to request flexible working); enabling collective processes for voice (e.g., legal protections for unionization); or limiting employer practices that inhibit voice (e.g., prohibiting replacement workers during strikes). Understanding the historical development of these institutional pathways is integral for evaluating their contemporary relevance and effectiveness. Accordingly, this discussion lays the conceptual groundwork for the theoretical and empirical analyses that follow.

Historical Roots

The concept of employee voice has deep historical roots. In the late 18th century, Adam Smith recognized voice as an act of communication and self-expression but believed it held little sway over managerial decision-making (1937 [1776]). Karl Marx expanded this view by framing voice as a mechanism for resisting exploitation and protecting workers' economic interests, though he similarly contended that it was often suppressed by those in positions of power (1906 [1867]). By contrast, John Stuart Mill highlighted the role of legal and institutional support, advocating for workers' participation not only in firm-level affairs but also in broader policy making processes—thereby linking employee voice to democratic participation and civic equality (1874).

It was not until the mid-19th century that employee voice entered mainstream public discourse, largely through the efforts of trade union activists. Social reformers like Sidney and Beatrice Webb framed collective voice, exercised through unionization, as essential to promoting industrial democracy and addressing widespread labour exploitation (1897). At a time of precarious employment, low wages, long hours, and hazardous working conditions—circumstances that bear clear resemblance to contemporary trends—voice was positioned as both a moral imperative and a practical tool for redressing power asymmetries. These efforts contributed to the gradual institutionalization of labour law across industrializing economies, which codified collective voice as a fundamental human right.

During the early 20th century, working conditions and worker wellbeing improved significantly, due in large part to trade unions' success in securing better wages, benefits, and protections for their members. Yet this period was also marked by adversarial labour relations, including widespread strikes and growing employer resistance. In response, employers adopted union-avoidance strategies (e.g., open shop movement and welfare capitalism) that gave rise to a new category of voice: employer-driven initiatives grounded in scientific management principles (Kaufman, 2020). These interventions aimed to improve productivity and reduce conflict by fostering cooperation within firms, reframing voice as a managerial tool rather than a right exercised through collective representation (Harry et al., 1920; Merritt, 1920; Kaufman, 2001).

From the 1980s onward, employer-driven voice mechanisms expanded in scope and prominence, especially within liberal market economies undergoing intense labour market deregulation (Kaufman, 2004; 2007). As union coverage declined and labour protections weakened, governments shifted toward rights-based legislation that largely centred on individualistic expressions of voice anchored in self-determination. These legal interventions promoted flexibility and managerial discretion while minimizing collective bargaining or regulatory interference in business operations. As a result, employer-initiated voice has become the dominant institutional channel for employees to express concerns, albeit with limited influence over core decision-making processes.

This historical trajectory underscores a central contention of this thesis: the potential of employee voice interventions to enhance wellbeing hinges not merely on their formal presence, but on their institutional configuration, degree of independence, and normative orientation. The causal relationship between voice and wellbeing, however, remains contested. On one hand, some scholars argue that improvements in working conditions and wellbeing may stem from broader trends in productivity growth or competitive labour market dynamics that incentivize firms to invest in better employment practices (Bryson et al., 2013; Green, 2006). On the other hand, a substantial body of research contends that employee voice—particularly when exercised through collective, autonomous, and consequential mechanisms—can directly enhance psychological and subjective wellbeing by strengthening perceptions of fairness, control, and purpose at work (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Budd, 2004; Peccei & van de Voorde, 2019). This thesis contributes to this debate by systematically reviewing empirical evidence on three institutional pathways for employee voice, attending to distinctions between symbolic gestures and substantive forms of worker influence where possible. As the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the relationship between voice and wellbeing is far from straightforward; it is shaped by the structure, intent, and contextual conditions under which voice is enacted.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My thesis comprises four standalone papers that collectively investigate the complex and context-dependent nature of employee voice interventions and their relationship to employee wellbeing. Employing both theoretical and empirical rigour, and leveraging advanced quantitative methods with large-scale datasets, I address my central research question: To what extent do employee voice interventions enhance employee wellbeing in practice?

The theoretical basis for employee voice as a determinant of wellbeing remains relatively underdeveloped. In particular, there is limited conceptual clarity about which types of employee voice interventions are most likely to influence wellbeing, and under what conditions these effects are expected to materialize. To address this gap, I develop a novel conceptual framework informed by Amartya Sen's capability approach, which underpins my empirical evaluation of voice interventions.

Paper 1: Labour Law, Employees' Capability for Voice, and Wellbeing: A Framework for Evaluation

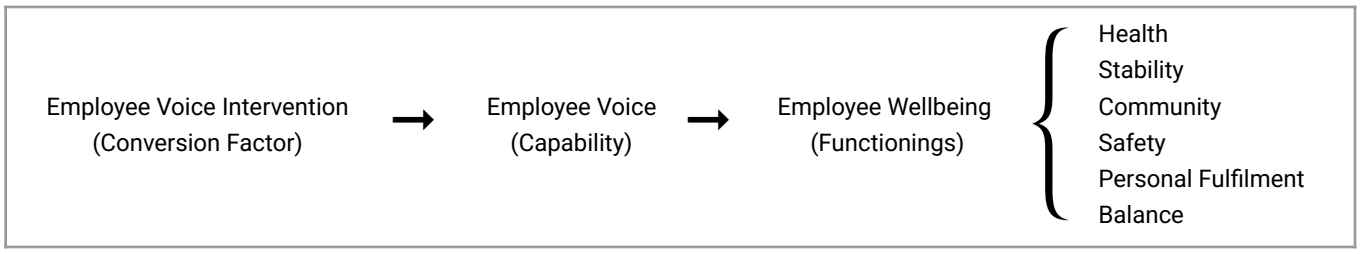
The capability approach asks: *What are individuals actually able to do, be, and achieve in their lives?* As Sen (2009, 16) explains, it is "an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do and be the different things that they have reason to value." This framework offers a crucial departure from conventional measures of wellbeing that tend to narrowly focus on wages or productivity as indicators of employee-level wellbeing, and gross domestic product or employment rate as indicators for societal wellbeing. While useful, such metrics provide limited insight into the lived experiences of workers and their substantive freedoms (Sen 1985; Dreze & Sen 2013; Stiglitz et al. 2010).

Employees derive much more from employment than financial compensation: it can also be a source of meaning, purpose, social connection, and self-realization (Budd, 2004). Yet public policy and organizational

practice continue to evaluate employment quality through a neoliberal economic lens that fails to capture work as a fully human activity. In contrast, the capability approach expands the evaluative space for assessing employee wellbeing by shifting our focus towards 'states of being and doing' that workers themselves have reason to value (Robeyns, 2017). Thus, this approach provides a more holistic foundation for understanding employee voice as a potential determinant of wellbeing that carefully informs my empirical strategy pursued across the proceeding three papers.

Figure 3 provides a production function for operationalizing this conceptual framework to address my empirical research questions. Within this framework, employee voice is conceptualized as a human *capability* in the Senian sense: a real freedom to achieve valued states of being. These states, referred to by Sen as *functionings*, include health, stability, community, safety, personal fulfillment, and work-life balance, and were identified through a comprehensive literature review. They represent outcomes of interventions and are often best captured using subjective measures. In turn, employee voice interventions function as *conversion factors*, influencing the degree to which employees can transform available resources (e.g., legal protections, organizational practices, union representation) into the capability for voice, and ultimately into achieved functionings (Sen, 1985). In this way, employee voice represents a moderating variable. This core concept of the capability approach compels us to look beyond the formal provision of resources, and critically consider the broader social, organizational, and institutional contexts in which people live and work (Robeyns, 2017).

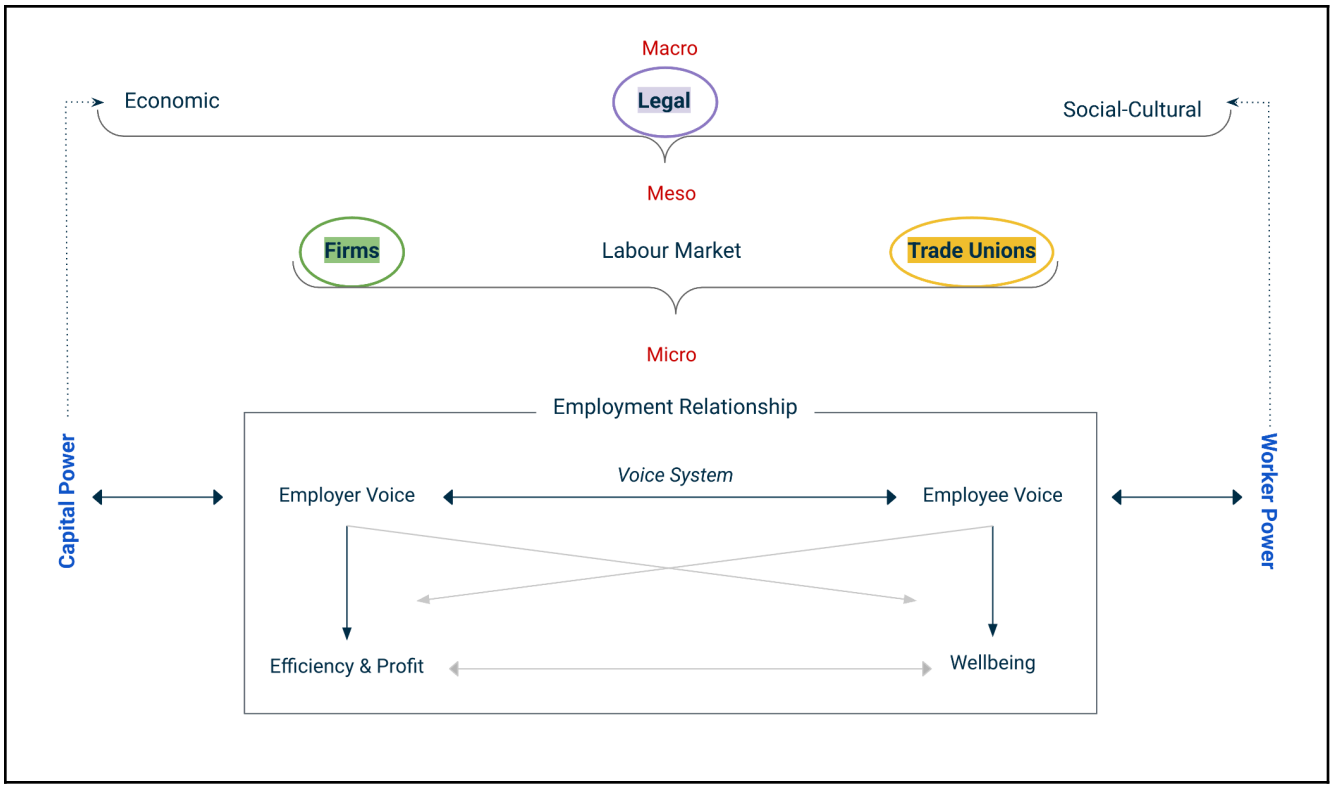
Figure 3. Production Function



EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

To empirically assess the relationship between employee voice interventions and employee wellbeing, my thesis employs a multi-method research design across three distinct but complementary studies. Each paper targets one of the three primary employee voice interventions (trade unions, labour law, and management-driven workplace interventions), and leverages different statistical techniques to develop a more nuanced understanding of how, when, and for whom employee voice interventions might enhance wellbeing. Figure 1b highlights each of these intervention spaces.

Figure 1b. Dynamic Model of Worker Power



Paper 2: Digital Overconnectivity and Employee Wellbeing: An Evaluation of the Right-to-Disconnect Law in Europe

Paper 2 investigates the impact of right-to-disconnect (R2D) legislation on employee wellbeing across Europe, leveraging a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences design that exploits both temporal and cross-country variation in policy adoption between 2010 and 2020. The R2D has emerged as a popular legislative response to rising concerns about digital overconnectivity in modern work environments, particularly the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life brought on by ubiquitous communication technologies. By formally granting employees the right to disengage from work-related communications outside of contracted hours, the R2D aims to restore work-life balance and protect psychological wellbeing in an increasingly digitized world of work.

From a pluralist industrial relations perspective, such rights-based legislation is expected to reduce work intensification and promote wellbeing by setting enforceable boundaries around working time. However, despite its growing adoption, rigorous empirical evaluations of the R2D's effectiveness remain limited. This study addresses this gap by estimating the legislation's causal effects on three core dimensions of subjective wellbeing (life satisfaction, happiness, and self-reported health) using multiple waves of cross-sectional data from the European Social Survey. The identification strategy allows for robust comparison between treated and untreated countries over time, helping to isolate the policy's impact from confounding trends.

The results indicate a positive average treatment effect of R2D legislation on all three wellbeing outcomes. Further analysis identifies heterogeneity in outcomes across countries, as well as changes in perceived flexibility

and total working time as mechanisms through which the law improves wellbeing. These findings suggest that individual rights-based legislation can alter one's subjective experiences. Crucially, this study also finds that employee voice, operationalized as perceived influence over organizational policy decisions, acts as a moderator due to how the law was operationalized across countries, relying on firm-level negotiations for implementation. This interaction reinforces theoretical notions of voice as a human capability that enables individuals to derive greater benefit from institutional support, particularly in the case of soft labour laws that rely on existing levels of voice to grant firms greater flexibility.

Paper 3: The Impact of Trade Unions on Job Satisfaction: A Natural Experiment from 1980s Great Britain

Paper 3 addresses a long-standing empirical puzzle: *Do trade unions enhance or hinder employee wellbeing?* Despite strong theoretical foundations for a positive relationship, decades of empirical research have consistently documented a negative association between union membership and job satisfaction. This contradiction has resurfaced with renewed urgency in contemporary policy debates, as trade unions are regaining prominence amid rising inequality, stagnant wages, and increasing rates of work-related ill-being. Across affluent democracies, there is mounting evidence of worker discontent and a growing appetite for voice, reflected in the resurgence of labour unrest and organizing activity across diverse sectors and occupational groups. Notably, in the United States—where the industrial relations system shares structural similarities with the UK—the total number of work stoppages increased by 55 percent between 2021 and 2022, with a 60 percent rise in the number of workers involved.

This study contributes to this debate by leveraging the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1979 as a natural experiment to estimate the causal impact of union recognition on employee job satisfaction. Thatcher's ascent to power marked a pivotal political shift, ushering in a suite of deregulatory reforms that systematically undermined union power and restructured the balance of power in the employment relationship. Using three waves of cross-sectional, nationally representative data from the UK Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS), this analysis exploits the dataset's nested structure of employees within firms to account for both individual and organizational-level variation. This feature is particularly valuable for isolating employee-level outcomes while controlling for firm-specific characteristics.

This empirical strategy employs a novel instrument—firm establishment date relative to the 1979 policy shift—to address endogeneity concerns that have plagued earlier research. Specifically, firms established after the reforms faced significantly weaker union environments, allowing for quasi-experimental estimation of the counterfactual wellbeing trajectory in the absence of union derecognition. The results reveal a robust negative treatment effect on job satisfaction among private sector workers, aligning with broader patterns observed in the empirical literature. Several theoretical explanations are considered to account for these counterintuitive findings, with particular attention to the multidimensional nature of job satisfaction as a proxy for employee wellbeing. These findings raise critical questions about how employee voice is experienced under different institutional conditions and underscore the need for more nuanced approaches to measuring and interpreting wellbeing outcomes in unionized settings.

Paper 4: Employee Voice Interventions and Workplace Wellbeing: A Systematic Review of the Evidence

Paper 4 presents a systematic review of workplace employee voice interventions and evaluates their impact on employee subjective wellbeing. A total of 92 interventions were included in the final review, encompassing a wide range of designs that varied in scope, formality, intensity of employee involvement, and level of implementation. Thirteen distinct intervention types were identified, with participatory problem-solving emerging as the most common (32 studies), followed by participatory ergonomics and schedule discretion. These interventions were subsequently categorized into three broad employee voice domains: (1) freedom of speech and self-expression (2 types, 6 studies), (2) self-determination (4 types, 23 studies), and (3) consultation, codetermination, and social dialogue (7 types, 63 studies).

The methodological quality of the included studies was approximately normally distributed, with 23 rated as high quality, 40 as moderate, and 29 as low. The evidence base comprised 33 randomized controlled trials (RCTs), 35 controlled pre–post studies, and 24 uncontrolled pre–post studies. Common sources of methodological bias included short follow-up periods, inadequate adjustment for confounders (e.g., demographic characteristics, occupational roles, organizational factors), and limited transparency in reporting. These limitations often impeded our ability to assess sample representativeness, the adequacy of control group matching, and the equivalence of baseline characteristics.

Among moderate- to high-quality studies, interventions aligned with freedom of speech and self-expression—such as employee dialogue and disclosure initiatives—showed modest wellbeing benefits, particularly when implemented in psychologically safe and structured environments. However, most findings in this category were null, indicating inconsistent effects across studies. In contrast, interventions based on self-determination principles, including empowerment training, participatory job redesign, job crafting, and schedule discretion, yielded more consistently positive outcomes. Of these, participatory job redesign demonstrated the strongest effects, with significant improvements in both affective and evaluative wellbeing. Although evidence on job crafting is still limited, initial findings indicate it may warrant further investigation. In the domain of consultation, codetermination, and social dialogue, results were more mixed. Interventions such as participatory rehabilitation and ergonomics showed limited impact, often due to constrained employee influence or insufficient managerial support. Conversely, participatory work reorganization was consistently effective, likely due to its broader scope for employee involvement.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Taken together, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between employee voice and wellbeing by offering a theoretically grounded and empirically rigorous investigation across diverse institutional contexts. By integrating insights from industrial relations, labour economics, public health, and wellbeing studies through the lens of the capability approach, it addresses persistent gaps in how employee voice is conceptualized, operationalized, and evaluated. In doing so, it reframes employee voice not only as an economic or managerial tool, but as a fundamental capability with the potential to enhance human flourishing. The following chapters each examine distinct yet complementary aspects of this relationship, collectively informing how institutions, organizations, and policymakers might design and support employee voice interventions that effectively promote employee wellbeing.

REFERENCES

Appelbaum, E., & Batt, R. (2014). *Private equity at work: When Wall Street manages Main Street*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Arthurs, H. W. (2006). Labour law after labour. In G. Davidov & B. Langille (Eds.), *The idea of labour law* (pp. 13–30). Oxford University Press.

Andreacchi, A. T., Fuller, A. E., Smith, P. M., Blair, A., Harris, A., Carnide, N., Pabayo, R., Smith, B. T., Siddiqi, A., & Shahidi, F. V. (2025). Employment quality and suicide, drug poisoning, and alcohol-attributable mortality. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, kwaf018. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwaf018

Autor, D. H., Dorn, D., & Hanson, G. H. (2016). The China shock: Learning from labor-market adjustment to large changes in trade. *Annual Review of Economics, 8*, 205–240. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080315-015041

Avendano, M., & Berkman, L. F. (2014). Chapter 6: Labor markets, employment policies, and health. In L. F. Berkman, I. Kawachi, & M. M. Glymour (Eds.), *Social epidemiology* (pp. 182–233). Oxford University Press.

Baccaro, L., & Howell, C. (2017). *Trajectories of neoliberal transformation: European industrial relations since the 1970s*. Cambridge University Press.

Bambra, C., Gibson, M., Sowden, A., Wright, K., Whitehead, M., & Petticrew, M. (2009). Working for health? Evidence from systematic reviews on the effects on health and health inequalities of organisational changes to the psychosocial work environment. *Preventive Medicine, 48*(5), 454–461. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2008.12.018

Befort, S., & Budd, J. (2009). *Invisible hands, invisible objectives: Bringing workplace law and public policy into focus*. Stanford University Press.

Benach, J., Vives, A., Amable, M., Vanroelen, C., Tarafa, G., & Muntaner, C. (2014). Precarious employment: Understanding an emerging social determinant of health. *Annual Review of Public Health, 35*, 229–253. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032013-182500

Bonoli, G. (2010). The political economy of active labor-market policy. *Politics & Society, 38*(4), 435–457. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329210381235

Brenner, R. (2006). *The economics of global turbulence: The advanced capitalist economies from long boom to long downturn, 1945–2005*. Verso.

Bryson, A., Gomez, R., Gunderson, M., & Meltz, N. M. (2010). *Comparing unions in the US and UK*. Routledge.

Bryson, A., Forth, J., & Stokes, L. (2013). *Does worker representation affect worker wellbeing?* National Institute of Economic and Social Research Discussion Paper No. 412. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2354412

Budd, J. W. (2004). *Employment with a human face: Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice*. Cornell University Press.

Case, A., & Deaton, A. (2021). *Deaths of despair and the future of capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Crouch, C. (2011). *The strange non-death of neoliberalism*. Polity Press.

Davidov, G., & Langille, B. (Eds.). (2006). *The idea of labour law*. Oxford University Press.

Davis, G. F. (2009). *Managed by the markets: How finance re-shaped America*. Oxford University Press.

Davies, A. C. L. (2009). *Perspectives on labour law* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Deakin, S., & Morris, G. S. (2012). *Labour law* (6th ed.). Hart Publishing.

Drèze, J., & Sen, A. (2013). *An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions*. Princeton University Press.

Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M., & Ackers, P. (2004). The meanings and purpose of employee voice. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 15*(6), 1149–1170.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1999). *Social foundations of postindustrial economies*. Oxford University Press.

Eurofound. (2021). *Working conditions and workers' health*. Publications Office of the European Union. https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/report/2021/working-conditions-and-workers-health

Farber, H. S., Herbst, D., Kuziemko, I., & Naidu, S. (2021). Unions and inequality over the twentieth century: New evidence from survey data. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 136*(3), 1325–1385. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjab012

Fox, A. (1974). *Beyond contract: Work, power and trust relations*. Faber & Faber.

Freeman, R. B., & Medoff, J. L. (1984). *What do unions do?* Basic Books.

Gahan, P., & Pekarek, A. (2014). Social dialogue and the governance of the employment relationship in Australia. *Journal of Industrial Relations, 56*(5), 681–698. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185613517470

Gallup. (2024). *State of the global workplace 2024 report*. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx

Glyn, A. (2006). *Capitalism unleashed: Finance, globalization, and welfare*. Oxford University Press.

Goh, J., Pfeffer, J., & Zenios, S. A. (2016). The relationship between workplace stressors and mortality and health costs in the United States. *Management Science, 62*(2), 608–628.

Green, A., & Janmaat, J. G. (2011). *Regimes of social cohesion: Societies and the crisis of globalization*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Green, F. (2006). *Demanding work: The paradox of job quality in the affluent economy*. Princeton University Press.

Gumbrell-McCormick, R., & Hyman, R. (2013). *Trade unions in Western Europe: Hard times, hard choices*. Oxford University Press.

Harry B. Jordan, Willard E. Hotchkiss, D. R. Stevens, Francis H. Bird, F. S. Deibler, & Ditlew M. Fredriksen. (1920). Employees' participation in management—Discussion. *The American Economic Review, 10*(1), 103–128.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Heery, E., & Frege, C. (2006). New actors in industrial relations. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 44*(4), 601–604. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8543.2006.00518.x

Howell, C. (2005). *Trade unions and the state: The construction of industrial relations institutions in Britain, 1890–2000*. Princeton University Press.

ILO. (2015). *World employment and social outlook: The changing nature of jobs*. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2015/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization. (2008). *Declaration on social justice for a fair globalization*. https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/mission-and-objectives/WCMS_099766/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization. (2013). *Decent work*. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization. (2019). *Work for a brighter future: Global Commission on the Future of Work*. https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_662410/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization. (2021). *World employment and social outlook: The role of digital labour platforms in transforming the world of work*. https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2021/WCMS_771749/lang--en/index.htm

Jackson, A., & Schetagne, S. (2004). *Why unions matter: A Canadian perspective*. Canadian Labour Congress.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2009). Precarious work, insecure workers: Employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review, 74*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400101

Kalleberg, A. L. (2011). *Good jobs, bad jobs: The rise of polarized and precarious employment systems in the United States, 1970s–2000s*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2018). Chapter 7: Subjective well-being. In *Precarious lives: Job insecurity and well-being in rich democracies*. Polity Press.

Kalleberg, A. L., & Vallas, S. P. (Eds.). (2017). *Precarious work*. Emerald Publishing.

Kaufman, B. E. (2001). The theory and practice of strategic HRM and participative management: Antecedents in early industrial relations. *Human Resource Management Review, 11*(4), 505–533.

Kaufman, B. E. (2006). The global evolution of industrial relations: Events, ideas, and the IIRA. *ILR Review, 59*(3), 496–505.

Kaufman, B. E. (2007). The development of HRM in historical and international perspective. In P. Boxall & J. Purcell (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of human resource management* (pp. 19–47). Oxford University Press.

Kaufman, B. E. (Ed.). (2004). *Theoretical perspectives on work and the employment relationship*. Industrial Relations Research Association.

Kochan, T. A. (1998). What is distinctive about industrial relations research? In B. E. Kaufman (Ed.), *Industrial relations to human resources and beyond* (pp. 31–53). Industrial Relations Research Association.

Krippner, G. R. (2005). The financialization of the American economy. *Socio-Economic Review, 3*(2), 173–208. https://doi.org/10.1093/SER/mwi008

Lazonick, W. (2014). Profits without prosperity. *Harvard Business Review, 92*(9), 46–55. https://hbr.org/2014/09/profits-without-prosperity

Marchington, M., & Wilkinson, A. (2005). Direct participation and involvement. In B. E. Kaufman (Ed.), *Theoretical perspectives on work and the employment relationship* (pp. 339–370). Industrial Relations Research Association.

Marmot, M., Allen, J., Goldblatt, P., Boyce, T., McNeish, D., Grady, M., & Geddes, I. (2010). *Fair society, healthy lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010*. Institute of Health Equity.

Marmot, M. G., Smith, G. D., Stansfeld, S., Patel, C., North, F., Head, J., ... & Feeney, A. (1991). Health inequalities among British civil servants: The Whitehall II study. *The Lancet, 337*(8754), 1387–1393.

Marx, K. (1906 [1867]). *Capital: A critique of political economy* (Vol. 1). Modern Library.

McKee-Ryan, F. M., Song, Z., Wanberg, C. R., & Kinicki, A. J. (2005). Psychological and physical well-being during unemployment: A meta-analytic study. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(1), 53–76.

McKinsey Health Institute. (2022, May 27). Addressing employee burnout: Are you solving the right problem? *McKinsey & Company*. https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/addressing-employee-burnout-are-you-solving-the-right-problem

Merritt, W. G. (1920). Employee representation as a step toward industrial democracy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 90*(1), 39–44.

Milkman, R., & Voss, K. (Eds.). (2004). *Rebuilding labor: Organizing and organizers in the new union movement*. Cornell University Press.

Mill, J. S. (1874). *Autobiography*. Holt.

Mishel, L., Gould, E., & Bivens, J. (2015). *Wage stagnation in nine charts*. Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/

Niedhammer, I., Bertrais, S., & Caroly, S. (2022). The contribution of working conditions to inequalities in work-related health problems: A decomposition analysis. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 79*(5), 288–296. https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2021-107881

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013). *How's Life? 2013: Measuring well-being*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264201392-en

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019). *OECD employment outlook 2019: The future of work*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9ee00155-en

Peccei, R., & van de Voorde, K. (2019). Human resource management–wellbeing–performance research revisited: Past, present, and future. *Human Resource Management Journal, 29*(4), 539–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12254

Peck, J. (2001). *Workfare states*. Guilford Press.

Peck, J. (2010). *Constructions of neoliberal reason*. Oxford University Press.

Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century* (A. Goldhammer, Trans.). Harvard University Press.

Polanyi, K. (2001). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (2nd ed.). Beacon Press. (Original work published 1944)

PwC. (2023). Poor mental health is the main cause of long-term sickness for the workforce, according to PwC research. *PwC United Kingdom*. https://www.pwc.co.uk/press-room/press-releases/poor-mental-health-is-main-cause-of-long-term-sickness-for-the-workforce.html

Quinlan, M., & Bohle, P. (2009). Overstretched and unreciprocated commitment: Reviewing research on the occupational health and safety effects of downsizing and job insecurity. *International Journal of Health Services, 39*(1), 1–44. https://doi.org/10.2190/HS.39.1.a

Radcliff, B. (2013). *The political economy of human happiness: How voters' choices determine the quality of life*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139344371

Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined*. Open Book Publishers. https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0130

Schmitz, H. (2011). Why are the unemployed in worse health? The causal effect of unemployment on health. *Labour Economics, 18*(1), 71–78.

Sen, A. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey Lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy, 82*(4), 169–221.

Sen, A. (1995). *Inequality reexamined*. Clarendon Press.

Sen, A. (1999). *Commodities and capabilities*. Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (2008). The economics of happiness and capability. In L. Bruni, F. Comim, & M. Pugno (Eds.), *Capabilities and happiness* (pp. 16–27). Oxford University Press.

Shahidi, F. V., Gignac, M. A. M., Oudyk, J., & Smith, P. M. (2021). Assessing the psychosocial work environment in relation to mental health: A comprehensive approach. *Annals of Work Exposures and Health, 65*(4), 418–431. https://doi.org/10.1093/annweh/wxaa130

Silver, B. J. (2003). *Forces of labor: Workers' movements and globalization since 1870*. Cambridge University Press.

Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Stansbury, A., & Summers, L. H. (2020). The declining worker power hypothesis: An explanation for the recent evolution of the American economy. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, 2020*(1), 1–96. https://www.brookings.edu/bpea-articles/the-declining-worker-power-hypothesis-an-explanation-for-the-recent-evolution-of-the-american-economy/

Stiglitz, J. E., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J.-P. (2010). *Mismeasuring our lives: Why GDP doesn't add up*. The New Press.

Stockhammer, E. (2010). Financialization and the global economy. In G. Epstein & M. Vernengo (Eds.), *The political economy of financial crises* (pp. 93–113). Edward Elgar.

Streeck, W. (2014). *Buying time: The delayed crisis of democratic capitalism* (P. Camiller, Trans.). Verso.

Tapia, M., & Turner, L. (2013). Union renewal and the shifting contours of worker representation in Europe. *European Journal of Industrial Relations, 19*(1), 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680112474731

Thelen, K. (2014). *Varieties of liberalization and the new politics of social solidarity*. Cambridge University Press.

van der Noordt, M., IJzelenberg, H., Droomers, M., & Proper, K. I. (2014). Health effects of employment: A systematic review of prospective studies. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 71*(10), 730–736.

van Rossum, C. T. M., Shipley, M. J., van de Mheen, H., Grobbee, D. E., & Marmot, M. G. (2000). Employment grade differences in cause-specific mortality: A 25-year follow-up of civil servants from the first Whitehall study. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 54*(3), 178–184.

Virtanen, M., Kivimäki, M., Elovainio, M., Vahtera, J., & Ferrie, J. E. (2005). From insecure to secure employment: Changes in work, health, and health-related behaviours. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 47*(4), 336–340. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.jom.0000155711.69745.09

Vosko, L. F. (2010). *Managing the margins: Gender, citizenship, and the international regulation of precarious employment*. Oxford University Press.

Webb, S., & Webb, B. (1897). *Industrial democracy*. Longmans, Green.

Weil, D. (2014). *The fissured workplace: Why work became so bad for so many and what can be done to improve it*. Harvard University Press.

Western, B., & Rosenfeld, J. (2011). Unions, norms, and the rise in US wage inequality. *American Sociological Review, 76*(4), 513–537. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411414817

Wright, E. O. (2000). Working-class power, capitalist-class interests, and class compromise. *American Journal of Sociology, 105*(4), 957–1002.

Labour Law, Employees' Capability for Voice, and Wellbeing: A Framework for Evaluation

Cherie Regier

ABSTRACT

Worker power has significantly declined across affluent democracies in recent decades, resulting in a widening scale of power inequality within the contemporary employment relationship. Employee voice is a key component of worker power that represents a human capability according to Amartya Sen's conceptualisation: a real freedom to achieve states of being that one has reason to value. Employees deficient in the capability for voice lack sufficient bargaining power to influence workplace decision-making, which threatens their wellbeing by increasing their risk of exposure to work-related stressors and limiting their opportunities to improve their welfare. In this article, employee voice legislation is argued to be a necessary social conversion factor of employees' capability for voice that can promote further advantage. However, research assessing its effectiveness at enhancing wellbeing is greatly limited due to an over reliance on neoliberal and new institutional forms of economic analysis that reveal little about the quality of employees' lives. A comprehensive framework for evaluation based on Sen's capability approach is proposed that when operationalised for empirical analysis, can advance our understanding of employee wellbeing in the twenty-first century.

Note. This article has been published in the *Journal for Human Development and Capabilities*

INTRODUCTION

Employment has become uncertain, insecure, and unstable for a growing portion of people across affluent democracies (Kalleberg, 2018). Globalisation, international competition, and technological advancement have pressured governments to favour economic efficiency through market deregulation at the potential detriment of employee wellbeing. worker power has significantly declined over the past four decades, resulting in an unfair distribution of returns from production that has contributed to a widening scale of economic, social, and health inequality (Ahlquist, 2017; Case and Deaton, 2021; Deakin, 2021; Radcliff, 2013; Stansbury and Summers 2020). Laissez-faire labour economists assume that "when the market fails to achieve an optimal state, society will recognise the gap to some extent, and nonmarket social institutions will arise attempting to bridge it" (Przeworski, 1991, 109). However, without sufficient worker power, social institutions cannot be built to counterbalance capital's rising power advantage (Bavel, 2022; Radcliff, 2013); employees require substantial capabilities to bargain for better working conditions to improve their wellbeing.

Employment should be a centre for capability promotion in people's lives but increasingly occupies a space of capability deprivation (Miles, 2014). The International Labour Organisation (2013) argues that we cannot rely on free markets to resolve this issue; we need government intervention to facilitate quality jobs that yield

equitable returns to employees. Economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (1985) declares that such interventions should aim to improve peoples' welfare through the expansion of their capabilities. A key component of worker power is employees' capability for voice: the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say, formally or informally, collectively, or individually, to influence organisational decision-making over issues that affect their work and personal life (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Employers and employees must negotiate the terms of their work through legally binding contracts, workplace policies, and informal expectations and understandings. The employment relationship in free market economies can be characterised by an inequality of bargaining power that favours capital due to their ownership over production (Kaufman, 2004). Employees deficient in voice lack sufficient bargaining power to influence negotiations, which threatens their wellbeing by increasing their risk of exposure to workplace stressors and limiting their opportunities to improve their welfare. In this way, voice represents an especially valuable capability for employees to possess that can substantially improve their quality of life.

Recent research points to a widening voice gap for many employees engaged in all types of jobs spanning various industries whose wellbeing is in jeopardy (Gomez, Bryson, and Willman, 2010; Kochan et al., 2019; Stanford and Poon 2021). If employees' capability for voice is vital for worker power, job quality, and consequently, wellbeing at both an individual and societal level, then an essential question arises: how can we better understand how it is promoted and inhibited in the contemporary employment relationship? Labour law and industrial relations scholars widely agree that employee voice legislation is necessary, although not sufficient, for the conversion of employees' capability for voice to protect their interests by counterbalancing capital power. Yet, research evaluating its effectiveness from a wellbeing standpoint is limited due to an overreliance on neoclassical and new institutional forms of economic analysis (Deakin, 2019). This article presents the capability approach as a useful framework for conceptualising employee voice that when operationalised to evaluate employee voice legislation, can facilitate new insights into the determinants of employee wellbeing in the twenty-first century.

The first section of this article provides justification for using the capability approach to conceptualise employee voice for labour law evaluation. The second section describes key features of employee voice based on decades of research stemming from different disciplines to reveal how, by its very nature, constitutes a capability that expands employees' opportunities to achieve valuable "functionings." The third section discusses the critical role of "conversion factors," specifically labour legislation that aims to promote employee voice in the workplace to counterbalance employer power. The final section describes achieved employee wellbeing in terms of "functionings' and lays the foundation for operationalising the framework for empirical evaluation.

WHY THE CAPABILITY APPROACH?

The capability approach asks what are people able to do, be, and achieve? "It is an intellectual discipline that gives a central role to the evaluation of a person's achievements and freedoms in terms of his or her actual ability to do and be the different things that they have reason to value" (Sen, 2009, 16) Employee wellbeing is often measured through income or productivity, and subsequently, employee voice as a way to achieve those objectives. Sen has shown in numerous studies that focusing on these types of metrics, especially at a macro-level, provides limited information about the quality of people's lives (Drèze and Sen, 2013; Sen 1985; Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2010). Employees derive much more from work than income, but community,

meaning, and purpose (Budd 2011; 2019), yet labour law evaluations continue to rely on measures that fail to capture employment as a fully human activity. In contrast, the capability approach facilitates a more complete conceptual space for wellbeing evaluation by shifting our attention to objectives that employees value (Robeyns 2017, 10). The "capability for voice" was introduced by Jean-Michel Bonvin (2012) as a critical dimension of one's "capability to work." The author discusses this concept in the context of the labour market but acknowledges its applicability to the workplace. He identifies legislative provisions as substantial mechanisms impacting the degree of capability for voice that employees enjoy and argues that the capability approach is the most appropriate tool for assessing the impact of these mechanisms on employees' lives. Roger Fernandez-Urbano and Michael Orton (2021) employ Bonvin's framework by empirically evaluating the impact of an active labour market policy (ALMP) in Denmark according to its ability to promote job seekers' capability for voice and choice rather than employment status, the most common measure of ALMP success. Their results revealed an absence of such capabilities among participants which negatively impacted their job search process despite many of them finding employment. These findings raise questions about the quality of employment gained in relation to workers' preferences and wellbeing, thereby challenging the policy's utility and demonstrating how the capability approach adds value.

Employee voice is presented as a critical capability for vocational training and development, an important dimension of job quality, within research that applies the capability approach to working conditions. Empirical research reveals that access to training opportunities is not enough to meaningfully expand employees' capabilities, rather, employees with a say over what training programs they participate in are better off due to enhanced levels of agency and freedom in their professional lives (Barry et al., 2020; Bryson and Zimmermann, 2020; Sigot and Vero, 2020; Zimmermann, 2020). Various individual and structural mechanisms are identified as employee voice promoting in training decision-making including labour law and human resource policy. This article will elaborate on these mechanisms while also drawing a clear distinction between them, but in a broader context that extends beyond training to encompass other dimensions of job quality that employees value.

In The Capability Approach to Labour Law, esteemed legal and capability scholars critically consider how the approach may benefit labour law (Langille, 2019). Simon Deakin (2019) compares the explanatory power of the capability approach to neoclassical economics for understanding the labour market. His analysis suggests that the former can produce better measurements of institutional phenomena and human wellbeing because of its distinct ontological basis and methodological approach. Hugh Collins (2019) emphasises employee voice as an area of labour law that would benefit from a capability-based analysis. He claims that it can promise fresh insights as a conceptual tool for evaluation due to its strong conceptual fit. And Ricardo Del Punta (2019) suggests that the capability approach is likely more useful for anticipating the future course of labour law compared to other political theories. This article builds upon the intellectual contributions of these scholars by bridging a pivotal gap in the capability literature – it provides an in-depth conceptualisation of employee voice through the lens of the capability approach and builds a framework for labour law evaluation that is applicable to various features and forms of employment.

EMPLOYEE VOICE AS A CAPABILITY

The meaning of employee voice and motivations for its study have evolved over time and across academic disciplines. The concept has been widely researched in the fields of industrial relations, human resource

management, organisational behaviour, sociology, and political science with rationales encapsulating a host of outcomes such as financial security, citizenship, power, organisational performance, and industrial democracy (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Voice is "an elastic term meaning different things to different policy, academic, and practitioner actors" (Wilkinson et al., 2020, 3), who are mobilising the term in different ways to achieve different and sometimes contradictory goals (Dundon et al., 2004; 1151). In other words, how employee voice is conceived and operationalised depends on one's positionality to or within the employment relationship. To managers, employee voice can be viewed as a way to improve employee engagement and business performance; to labour activists, a way to represent and serve workers' interests; and to governments, a way to promote industrial democracy and civic participation. When thinking about employee wellbeing in terms of the capability approach, perhaps the most important and often neglected perspective to consider is that of the employee. From their vantage point, voice represents the ability to influence workplace decision-making to achieve some sort of desired outcome that they have reason to value. It provides a channel for them to express their opinions and preferences, protect themselves against employer exploitation, and advocate for positive change within the workplace and broader society (Stanford and Poon, 2021).

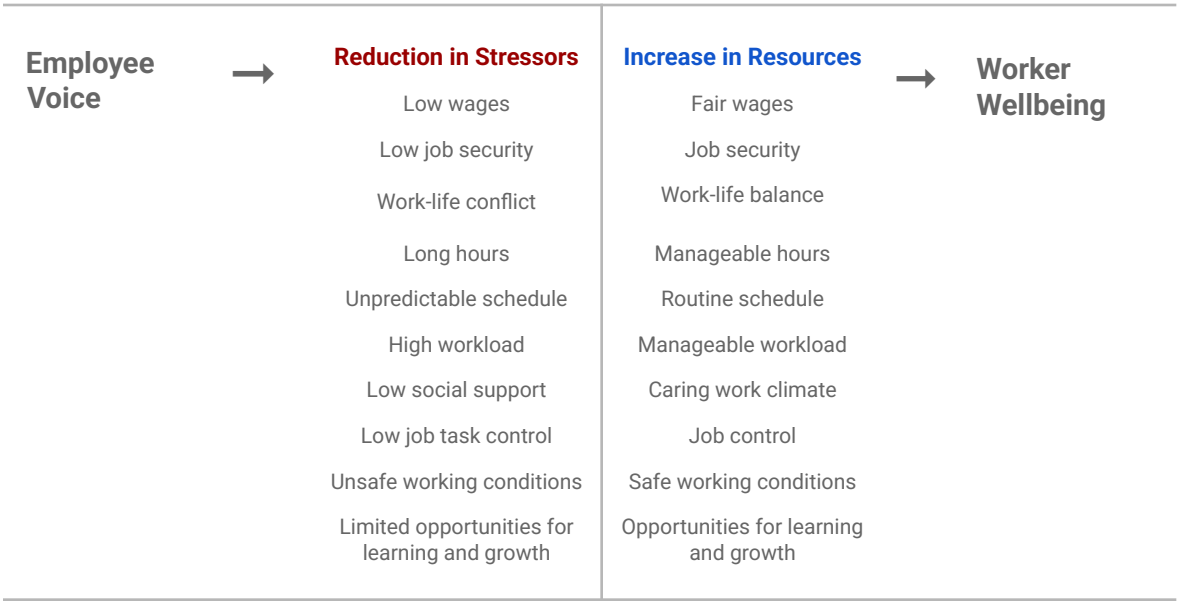
In a multidisciplinary review of employee voice in organisational behaviour research, Morrison (2011) identified three core features of employee voice that are prevalent among all its conceptualisations: communication, constructive intent, and discretion. Communication is the act of expressing one's ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions to someone else (usually a superior), either individually or collectively through some type of channel. For their message to be considered employee voice rather than ordinary information-sharing, it must have constructive intent, meaning it must aim to bring about a reasonable improvement or positive change in their working life. This distinction is important to highlight because today, employee voice is often presented as a business case to improve efficiency. This objective is important and can indirectly improve employee wellbeing either intrinsically through enhanced engagement or instrumentally through higher incomes if profits are equitably shared, but it is not the ultimate objective from the employee's standpoint. The final feature, discretion, emphasises the freedom employee voice presents; it is exercised at an employee's will when they wish to achieve a desired functioning. It serves a higher purpose that is inherently linked to one's agency and choice at work and in life. Employees are not a commodity but human beings who derive several valuable functionings from employment that extend beyond financial subsistence such as identity, social capital, meaning, and health. Together, these three features demonstrate how employee voice constitutionally represents a human capability – "real freedoms and opportunities to achieve states of being that one has reason to value" (Robeyns, 2017; 39).

Employee voice as a pathway to wellbeing

Employees' capability for voice plays a critical role in their wellbeing at work and in broader life. Robeyns (2017) describes capabilities as having both intrinsic value and instrumental value that can yield wellbeing freedom and achieved wellbeing. In this way, wellbeing is enhanced for employees who possess the capability for voice in two ways: (1) the opportunities or freedoms it presents to an employee who possesses it and (2) the functionings an employee realises when they choose to exercise it. When an employee has the capability for voice, they can shape their working conditions in a way that is more conducive to their needs by removing or reducing workplace stressors and by adding or enhancing workplace resources. For example, an employee with the capability for voice who struggles with their workload can negotiate ways to reduce this stress with their

manager like extending deadlines, enhancing internal support, or outsourcing tasks. A 2021 systematic review of workplace interventions on multiple domains of wellbeing showed that employee voice promoting interventions had the most reliable positive impact on employee wellbeing (Fox et al., 2022). In contrast, employees with limited to no employee voice lack sufficient bargaining power to facilitate or prevent change, making them vulnerable to sustained and compounded stress. Research on employee silence, the absence of voice, shows a significant link to reductions in employees wellbeing (Sherf et al., 2021). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of employee voice as a pathway to wellbeing. The examples of workplace stressors and resources provided in the figure have been validated through occupational epidemiological research (Goh, Pfeffer, and Zenios, 2016; Fox et al., 2022; Lovejoy et al., 2021).

Figure 1. Visualisation of employee voice as an instrumental pathway to wellbeing



Employee voice as a "fertile advantage"

Employees vary in their exposure and response to workplace stressors at any point in time due to quickly evolving socio-economic-political conditions that are constantly reshaping the nature and content of work, resulting in fluctuating workplace stressors for different demographic groups (Shahidi et al., 2021). Alongside these trends are dramatic changes in labour supply. Today's workforce consists of more women, minority groups, and employees approaching retirement. There is greater diversity in life-course trajectories and family composition, as well heightened competition for jobs due to the emergence of global labour markets, making it difficult for employers to anticipate, understand, and respond to the needs of employees (Chung, 2022; Kelly and Moen, 2020). Thus, an employee's capability for voice represents an especially valuable capability to possess that provides them with the opportunity to advocate for their own needs. It can lead to the development of other capabilities and in turn, the achievement of valuable functionings like caring for loved ones, serving in a religious, patriotic, or humanitarian way, or forming positive social relations at work and in the community. A capability of this nature represents what Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) refer to as a "fertile advantage" because when possessed, can produce further advantage, but when absent can lead to further disadvantage. For example, a mother who can self-determine their work schedule has the capability to pick up their child from school if they

wish in the absence of other constraints. In contrast, a mother whose work schedule is predetermined by their employer may not have this capability and therefore, must make alternate arrangements that may be financially or emotionally burdensome.

Unionised employees who have the advantage of collective representation typically enjoy higher wages, more comprehensive benefits, job security, and safer working conditions compared to non unionised employees. Indeed, empirical evidence repeatedly demonstrates that they exhibit higher levels of happiness and health (Blanchflower and Bryson, 2020; Radcliff, 2013; Reeves, 2021). Evidence also reveals the negative wellbeing implications of declining unionisation across high-income countries such as wide-spread income and job insecurity, lower subjective wellbeing, and challenges throughout critical life transitions including one's entry into the labour market, family formation, and retirement (Kalleberg, 2018). Individuals who fail to successfully make these transitions are often socially and politically isolated and deprived of opportunities for structure and meaning in their life. In extreme cases these conditions can lead to death stemming from serious illness like drug and alcohol addiction (Case and Deaton, 2021).

Personal and Collective Capabilities for Voice

Employees' capability for voice can take on different forms in practice. It can be a personal capability expressed through free speech or self-determination, or a collective capability expressed through consultation, codetermination, or collective bargaining (Befort and Budd, 2009). An employee can only realise a collective capability for voice with the help of other employees and often, institutional mechanisms to facilitate its conversion like a works council or trade union (Robeyns 2017; Subramanian and Zimmermann 2020). Theoretically, employees should be better off when they possess multiple capabilities for voice since they complement one another and expand their opportunity set. Consider three employees who wish to request hybrid working arrangements, each for different reasons including productivity gains, cost savings, and carbon emission reductions. If they possess both individual and collective capabilities for voice, they can exert their influence in each form to increase their likelihood of gaining approval. Research suggests that employees benefit from having access to multiple voice channels since different concerns warrant different methods of communication (Brooks and Wilkinson, 2021). For example, an employee dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace may prefer to exercise their personal voice privately, and in some cases anonymously, to protect their safety. In contrast, a group of employees who are negatively impacted by receiving late night work calls may consult their union representative and collectively bargain for mandatory digital disconnection hours. Through a series of interviews with employees of French firms, researchers found that employees with both collective and individual voice in decision-making regarding vocational training, including training needs assessments and program selection, extracted more value from training opportunities compared to those with limited to no voice (Subramanian and Zimmermann, 2020).

Employee voice is not about gaining complete authority to dictate the terms and conditions of employment, but rather, the ability to influence negotiations with the prospect that their proposals and demands will be met in good faith and ignite some degree of positive change that enhances their wellbeing. When employees' exercise their voice and experience no improvement in their working conditions, it is a reliable indication that their voice is not strong enough to counterbalance employer power. In the absence of state protection for employee voice, employers are advantaged during negotiations for two main reasons: (1) they own the capital resources required

for production (Radcliff, 2013); and (2) the costs associated with an employee's exit are almost always higher for the employee. As Collins (2019, p. 23) put it, "the material and psychological risks to individual employees involved in obtaining and holding on to a job are far more significant to their wellbeing than the risks of gaining or losing a particular employee will be to the average employer." Since employees' interests are not usually well served by competitive markets or corporate goodwill (Kaufman, 2004; Kochan, 2000), government intervention is often required to prevent economic coercion and support employees in their efforts to cultivate healthy working lives (Befort and Budd, 2009; Budd, 2019).

EMPLOYEE VOICE LEGISLATION AS A CONVERSION FACTOR

Employees' capability for voice will vary across regions, industries, occupations, workplaces, and individuals depending on environmental, social, and personal factors that either facilitate or inhibit its promotion. Sen refers to these types of mechanisms as conversion factors because they determine how much capability one possesses and in turn, how much wellbeing one can achieve (Sen, 1985). This core concept of the capability approach forces us to think beyond an employee's resources and critically consider the circumstances in which they live and work more broadly. In this way, we can assess whether an employee is able to utilise their resources to acquire the capability for voice and achieve the functionings that they have reason to value (Robeyns, 2017).Evidence suggests that the optimal space for an intervention to succeed in converting employees' capability for voice is through government legislation since an employer's decision to do so is largely dependent on the net benefit it will yield to the firm (Willman, Bryson, and Gomez, 2006). This finding infers that employer-adopted voice regimes like high-performance work systems or upward problem-solving groups will prioritise issues arising from expressions of voice that align with business objectives (i.e., promotive voice) over issues that conflict (i.e., remedial voice) (Pohler, Luchak, and Harmer, 2020). Although this can marginally improve employee wellbeing by increasing their sense of workplace engagement and participation in business decision-making, it is likely insufficient for converting enough employee voice to resolve substantial wellbeing conflicts because it is employer controlled and profit motivated. Therefore, employee voice legislation helps fill a naturally occurring voice gap in the employment relationship by legitimising employee issues not exclusive to business performance that can translate into meaningful wellbeing gains.

The introduction of labour laws allowing for employees' collective capabilities for voice in the late 19th to mid-twentieth century played a vital role in improving working conditions by increasing wages, benefits, and job security, as well as reducing work-related injury and disease (Kaufman, 2020). The level of disruption that accompanied these changes indeed, harmed employers' bottom line in the short term, but fostered long-term societal improvements thanks to healthier and more productive workers. Justifications for state interventions in the employment relationship are often grounded in this rationale, otherwise referred to as the pluralist industrial relations model which views employee voice legislation as a critical mechanism for protecting workers' interests by counterbalancing employer power (Kaufman, 2004; Kochan, 2000). Although there is some disagreement among labour economists and legal scholars as to whether this feature of employment constitutes a true market failure, there is wide agreement that well-designed employee voice legislation does prevent employers from capitalising on market opportunities that can lead to employee exploitation.

Types of employee voice legislation

The regulatory framework governing the employment relationship sets the stage for negotiations between employers and employees. In other words, the state plays a fundamental role in power distribution through its use of employee voice legislation (Radcliff, 2013). Laws of this nature are referred to as social conversion factors in the capability literature since they are societal factors that influence one's capabilities (Robeyns, 2017). The degree of voice capability an employee possesses is largely dependent on the scope of laws governing its different expressions including *free speech and self-expression:* the right to freely express opinions and views in the workplace; *self-determination:* the degree of autonomy, independence, and discretion an employee possesses in their job; *consultation, codetermination and social dialogue:* a range of information exchanges between management and employees; and *countervailing collective voice:* independent labour unions with sufficient power to balance corporate power (Befort and Budd, 2009). These types of laws can support the conversion of employees' capability for voice in three ways: (1) establish employees' rights for direct employee voice such as the right to free speech or the right to request flexible working hours; (2) establish employees' rights to engage in activities that facilitate employee voice such as the right to board membership or the right to unionisation; or (3) restrict employers from engaging in behaviour that impedes employee voice such as good-cause dismissal and mandatory disclosure of employment terms (Table 1 provides an extended list of examples of employee voice legislation). An employee with robust state support for multiple expressions of employee voice should be better off than one with weak support due to their enhanced capability for voice.

Table 1: Employee voice legislation matrix

Individual (Direct) Employee Voice	Collective (Indirect) Employee Voice
Employee Free Speech	**Consultation, Codetermination & Social Dialogue**
◦ Protection of free speech and expression in the workplace ◦ Protection of whistleblowing ◦ Protections against discrimination, harassment and abusive treatment ◦ Protection of concerted activity (ex. social media)	◦ Mandatory health and safety committees ◦ Right to board membership ◦ Right to be informed/consulted ◦ Right to work councils ◦ Right to form an independent association
Self-Determination	**Countervailing Collective Voice**
▪ Right to request ▪ Right to disconnect ▪ Mandatory disclosure of employment terms ▪ Good-cause dismissal ▪ Limits to overtime working ▪ Restrictions on monitoring and surveillance	• Right to association market and government sector • Right to unionisation • Right to collective bargaining • Right to industrial action (ex. strike) • Right to unofficial industrial action • Right to secondary industrial action • Card-check certification process (instead of secret ballots) • First contract mediation or arbitration (i.e., to protect against employer stalls) • Duty to bargain • Lockouts • Penalties for ER violations • Restrictions for permanent strike replacement workers

Resources

Resources play an instrumental role in the capability approach that partially determines the emergence, size, and robustness of one's capabilities (Robeyns, 2017; 146). There are several resources that can be utilised for the conversion of employees' capability for voice under employee voice legislation. At the bare minimum, an individual requires a job to benefit from such laws. Other resources such as wealth, human capital, and social capital are advantageous but not always necessary; it depends on which employee voice law is being converted as well as the personal and professional circumstances of the employee. For example, successful union organising is often a resource intensive process that demands strategic campaigns, private information sessions, and strong social networks to gain majority votes for certification. This is especially true in fragmented or "fissured" industries where employees who occupy insecure jobs fear retribution from engaging in organising activities (Weil, 2014).

Indeed, there are countless cases of employers unlawfully terminating employees who attempt to organise throughout history. In this regard, a stable and secure job can be viewed as a resource for the "right to unionisation" to translate into employees' capability for voice, which is increasingly rare and signifies the need for labour law reform to suit contemporary workers. Furthermore, resources that stimulate effective communication such as digital infrastructure and social networking technologies can support employee voice, particularly in working environments that rely less on in-person dialogue. For example, there has been a rise in expressions of employee voice through social media in the last decade because of its accessibility, simplicity, and efficiency; employees can avoid cumbersome voice channels, maintain greater control and confidence, and easily garner social support (Kalfa and Budd, 2020). In summary, not every employee will experience the same benefit from employee voice legislation, their potential wellbeing gain is somewhat dependent on their resources.

Other factors impacting the conversion of employees' capability for voice

The presence of employee voice legislation does not guarantee that employees will possess the capability for voice; its conversion can be inhibited or supported by structural, social, cultural, and personal influences. For example, at the macro-level by statutory frameworks and public policies that shape the labour market and employment relationship (Avendano and Berkman, 2014); at the meso-level by workplace human resource practices, organisational structure, working conditions, and cultural norms; and at the micro-level by personal characteristics like age, gender, education, family status, personality, dispositions, attitudes, and beliefs (Kaufman, 2015). These influences can take on different roles (i.e. resources, capabilities, conversion factors, etc.) within a capability-based analysis depending on the population being studied and employee voice law under evaluation. In some cases, they may be classified as other conversion factors which encompass environmental and personal conversion factors in addition to social conversion factors (Sen, 1995). In the context of employees' capability for voice, environmental conversion factors emerge from the physical or built environment where work is performed. For example, a large hierarchical organisation may serve as a barrier (negative conversion factor) of voice for employees working remotely with limited access to upper management, whereas a flat organisation may serve as a promoter (positive conversion factor) to voice for employees working in an office. Personal conversion factors emerge from work-related competencies like individual knowledge, skills, abilities, attributes, and characteristics. For example, an autistic employee who does not read social cues

may be misunderstood or ignored when exercising their voice in an organisation that relies on neurotypical communication methods.

Upstream socio-economic-political trends like labour market deregulation can alter the conversion effectiveness of employee voice laws too. In fact, governments' failure to reform labour laws to protect employees in contemporary employment relationships has weakened employees' personal and collective capabilities for voice over the past four decades (Brental and Demougin, 2010; Stansbury and Summers, 2020). For example, employees of Amazon, Starbucks, and Walmart in North America have the right to unionise under labour law but are largely unsuccessful with their organising efforts due to powerful anti-union tactics used by management. Under these circumstances, the scale of power inequality between labour and capital is far too wide for employees with limited resources and job security to compete. This has arguably diminished job quality and fostered a growing labour force sector who struggle to manage frequent labour market transitions, periods of unemployment, job insecurity, and multiple part-time jobs throughout their working life.

EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AS FUNCTIONINGS

This article has discussed the fundamental role that employees' capability for voice plays in their wellbeing freedom at work and in broader life. Through the lens of the capability approach, wellbeing also comprises achieved wellbeing, otherwise referred to as functionings. The distinction between capabilities and functionings is between what is effectively possible and what is realised. In other words, between opportunities from which one can choose and their actual achievements (Robeyns, 2017, p. 39). According to Amartya Sen, "functionings are constitutive of a person's being, and an evaluation of wellbeing has to take the form of an assessment of these constituent elements." (Sen, 1992, p. 2) Sen claims that alternative approaches to wellbeing analysis fail to provide a sufficient basis for wellbeing comparisons and in turn, social evaluation (Sen, 1985). Functionings, in conjunction with capabilities, provide such a basis. As discussed previously, an employee with the capability for voice can shape their working conditions to achieve functionings that they have reason to value by bargaining for the removal or reduction of workplace stressors and the addition or enhancement of workplace resources.

The most systematic attempts to empirically evaluate employee wellbeing have often focused on integrated measures of job quality that exclude fundamental aspects of the employee experience (Budd and Spencer, 2015, p. 182). "Work needs to be embraced not as a private set of tasks done behind closed doors in a factory or an office, but as a very public activity with deep personal as well as societal meanings." The rapidly evolving nature and organisation of employment has blurred the boundaries between professional and personal life. The two contexts are no longer distinct spheres, but ones that significantly overlap. Employees care about a range of issues beyond wages and working conditions; they care about how work shapes their daily lives, families, and communities (Chari et al., 2018; Cooke, Donaghey, and Zeytinoglu, 2013). Considering this, a comprehensive list of functionings representative of different domains of employee wellbeing can serve as a powerful index measure for evaluating employee voice legislation.

Why Functionings?

Some scholars have argued that capabilities should be the outcome measure of empirical evaluation rather than functionings to ensure ethical focus is placed on the constraints that people face rather than the choices they

make (Comim, 2008; Hick and Burchardt, 2016). However, Sen has demonstrated through his own empirical work that inferences about one's capabilities can be drawn from their functionings in some cases (Drèze and Sen, 1989; 2002). For the evaluation of employee voice legislation, there are two justifications for why measures of functionings currently represent the strongest approach.

First, employees' capability for voice involves constructive intent, that is to bring about positive change in their working life, which requires enough bargaining power to counterbalance employer power to realise. This feature of power in negotiations makes it difficult to determine whether an employee has the capability for voice without assessing the outcomes that result from their attempts to exercise it. In theory, an effective employee voice law should redistribute power away from employers and motivate them to compromise on employee matters that do not guarantee profit gains. In this way, an employer that chooses not to act upon these types of employee concerns likely maintains their power advantage, signifying a capability deficit among employees.

Second, representative surveys are often used to evaluate public policies that target large and diverse populations. Unfortunately, existing surveys do not include reliable and valid measures for employees' capability for voice; the closest approximations are questions that ask respondents to rate the level of influence they think they have over workplace decision-making. This question is problematic for employees who have never tested their own capability for voice by attempting to bargain for a workplace change. In some circumstances, employees may perceive their capability for voice to be higher than it truly is. For example, management can display the illusion of voice by providing employees with a channel to express their concerns but only consider and act upon ones that directly relate to business performance. In contrast, an employee may perceive their capability for voice to be lower than it truly is. For example, an employee may observe unsuccessful outcomes from expressions of voice among their colleagues and wrongfully assume that this would be the case for them.

Therefore, measuring the change in functionings among employees who are exposed to an employee voice law while controlling for confounding variables can yield a close approximation of their resulting capability for voice. This approach does not place greater ethical weight on functionings, rather, it uses them as a proxy for capabilities due to research limitations. A moderation analysis using an employee voice indicator can be performed depending on the research design and data availability. This approach can help to partially mitigate some of these measurement shortcomings to obtain a more accurate assessment of employees' capability for voice.

List of valuable functionings for achieved employee wellbeing

The identification of which functionings a particular evaluation should examine depends on the intervention. Sen deliberately underspecified the capability approach in this way to allow for its flexible application to different contexts (Alkire, 2005). The ultimate objective of employee voice legislation is to promote employees' capability for voice so that they can freely choose to pursue the functionings that they have reason to value. This is usually achieved by removing or reducing workplace stressors and adding or enhancing workplace resources. What functionings do employees value? Sen encourages us to answer this question democratically through participatory research methods (Robeyns, 2017). However, this approach can present feasibility challenges for large-scale interventions that target diverse populations like national legislation. An alternative approach is to

draw rigorously from the extensive literature on employee wellbeing to determine which functionings are universally valued among employees in the population being impacted by the law regardless of their demographic background.

Conceptualising and measuring employee wellbeing (synonymous with worker wellbeing) is a developing field of research. In the past decade, three multidisciplinary literature reviews have been conducted on worker wellbeing that capture work's broader importance in human life. First is Budd and Spencer's framework for worker wellbeing. They conceptualise workers as "fully functioning citizens who derive and experience both public and private benefits and costs from working" (Budd and Spencer, 2015, p. 182). In this way, worker wellbeing is high when work helps individuals achieve valuable life states. Their framework consists of the following six dimensions: physical health and consumption; mental health and personal fulfilment; identity; freedom; caring for others; and service. Second is the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health framework that defines worker wellbeing as "the experience of positive perceptions and the presence of constructive conditions at work and beyond that enable workers to thrive and achieve their full potential" (Chari et al., 2018, p. 590).

The following five domains emerged from their review: workplace physical environment and safety climate; workplace policies and culture; health status; work evaluation and experience; home, community, and society. Third is Peters et al. Thriving from Work measure defined as: "A state of positive mental, physical, and social functioning in which workers' experiences of their work and working conditions enable them to thrive in their overall lives, contributing to their ability to achieve their full potential in their work, home and community" (Peters et al. 2021, p.5) The authors identify psychological wellbeing from work; emotional wellbeing from work; social wellbeing from work; work-life integration; basic needs for thriving from work; job design and experience of work; and health as key domains for worker wellbeing (refer to journal articles for more detail).

When these three lists are synthesised, the following six functionings emerge: (1) Health: Physical and mental health; (2) Stability: Total compensation and job security; (3) Community: Social relations, support, engagement; (4) Safety: Physical and psychosocial work environment; (5) Personal Fulfilment: Meaning, purpose, job satisfaction, life satisfaction; and (6) Balance: Work-life integration (refer to Table 2 for corresponding indicators). Freedom is not included as a functioning despite it being listed as a domain in Budd and Spencer's (2015) framework because it represents a capability according to Sen's conceptualisation – a real freedom to achieve functionings (Sen, 1985). In fact, Budd and Spencer (2015) describe freedom as employees' capability for voice in several forms such as protections for free speech, self-determination, and collective organising, which signifies its alignment with the capability approach. This list of functionings is relatively sensitive to cross-cultural variation but more research is needed to confirm its representativeness of employee wellbeing across affluent democracies.

Table 2. Employee wellbeing functionings

Functioning	Description
Health	Physical and mental health
Stability	Pay, benefits, and job security

Community	Social relations, support, and engagement
Safety	Physical and psychosocial work environment
Personal Fulfilment	Meaning, purpose, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction
Balance	Work-life integration

Dynamics of functionings

The functionings outlined above are similar in nature to James Griffin's conceptualisation of "prudential values' in that they contain elements recognised as valuable to anyone because they distinctively make life go better (Griffin, 1996). Griffin has shown that different wellbeing lists developed by and for different populations can often be generalised into prudential values that accommodate diverging views of wellbeing (Griffin, 1996). In such a case, employees with the capability for voice will likely aim to achieve one or more of these functionings to varying degrees depending on their unique circumstances and preferences. For example, a student working to fund their education may feel deprived of security and seek an increase in pay or benefit coverage to enhance their wellbeing, while a parent who feels deprived of balance may seek greater flexibility in their work schedule to spend more time with their children. Furthermore, these functionings can positively reinforce one another. For example, an employee experiencing burnout who desires better work-life balance may seek greater support from their managers to reduce their work intensity which also enhances their sense of community. This approach is consistent with Sen and Rawls' arguments that wellbeing is intrinsically multidimensional (Anand and Sen, 1997; Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Rawls, 1971)

OPERATIONALISATION

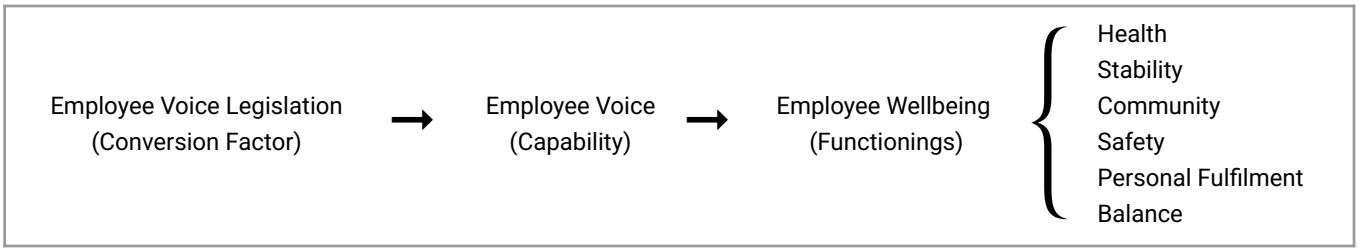
This article has demonstrated that employee voice legislation plays a critical role in the employment relationship for promoting employees' capability for voice and in turn, enhancing their wellbeing. However, multiple factors influence its effectiveness that are well captured through a capability-based framework compared to other forms of economic analysis, thereby revealing a more accurate depiction of labour's power relative to capital. If employee voice legislation does not translate into greater employee wellbeing through the expansion of their capability for voice, then is the legislation achieving its aim? Likely not. Therefore, we need to consider how this framework can be operationalised for empirical analysis to better understand which laws are most effective, for whom, and why.

Production function

Figure 3 depicts a simple production function that can be translated into a regression equation, the foundation of many econometric tools used to infer cause, to operationalise this framework for empirical evaluation. In this production function, the employee voice law under evaluation represents the dependent variable and achieved wellbeing (i.e. the six functionings outlined in Table 2) represents the independent variable. Finally, employee voice represents the moderating variable between employee voice legislation and achieved wellbeing. In this way, a moderation analysis can help explain how much of a change in functionings resulting from an employee voice law can be attributed to a change in employees' capability for voice. Quantitative methods such as difference-in-difference, regression discontinuity, and instrumental variables can be used to estimate the causal

impact of an employee voice law using time-series data that captures achieved wellbeing before and after a legislative change for both a control and treatment group. Further exploratory analysis can be conducted to assess which factors may be impeding the conversion of employees' capability for voice. For example, a comparative analysis assessing the variance in achieved wellbeing across gender, age, race, income-level, family status or region can reveal interesting insights about the effectiveness of an employee voice law on different demographic groups. Lastly, qualitative methods such as ethnography and interviews can facilitate rich contextual information when used in combination with quantitative methods or independently.

Figure 2. Production Function



Indicators

The appropriate indicators must be identified to measure each functioning, which will vary according to the research context. For example, a narrow evaluation focusing on a specific occupation may use specialised measures unique to that population compared to a broad evaluation encompassing all occupations within a country. The impact of the law on each functioning can be assessed individually as well as multidimensionally. The quality of indicators will depend on data availability if primary data collection is not feasible. Fortunately, many large-scale social surveys do measure several wellbeing functionings, but limitations will present themselves. Although secondary data may not yield a perfect analysis, it will still provide valuable and useful information. As Sen states in Inequality Reexamined, the capability approach can be used at various levels of sophistication, "what is important is keeping the underlying motivations in clear view to see the practical compromises as the best we can do under the circumstances" (Sen, 1995, p. 10).

Multidimensional index composition

Once each functioning is measured individually, they can be aggregated into a single measure using an appropriate weighting methodology in which there are several approaches that have different conceptual foundations, produce different scalar measures of wellbeing, and lead to different policy implications. The most commonly discussed weighting methods for index composition are the following (Greco 2016): (1) equal: dimension have equal weight (agnostic); (2) normative: value judgements or expert opinions of specific groups determine weights; (3) data-driven: descriptive or explanatory statistical techniques determine weight (ex. Principal component analysis and factor analysis); and (4) hybrid: combination of normative and data-driven. The appropriate method will depend on the research question. For large sample populations, ranking functionings based on normative value judgements is impractical since everyone's preferences are unlikely to be captured, so equal weight is often used due to its simplicity and agnostic nature (Alkire and Foster, 2011; Anand and Sen, 1997; Greco, 2016). In fact, global indexes based on the capability approach like the Human Development Index (Anand and Sen, 1997) and the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (Alkire and Foster,

2011) are aggregated according to equal weights. However, if a researcher is interested in determining which members of society are worse off than others, then consideration of the other methods may be necessary since this type of analysis typically uses thresholds to define wellbeing quantiles (Greco, 2016). In other words, different proportions of the population can be considered "deprived" depending on which method is used.

CONCLUSION

Employee voice constitutes a human capability according to Sen's conceptualisation because it fosters opportunity freedoms for employees to achieve desired states of being that they have reason to value. Employees who possess the capability for voice can bargain for better working conditions to improve their welfare either individually or collectively. However, this requires some degree of state intervention in the form of employee voice legislation to be successful. There are several types of laws that promote different expressions of employee voice and to different degrees. Theoretically, an employee who has robust state support for voice should be better off than one who does not. Unfortunately, we have limited empirical evidence to support this claim since employee voice laws have historically been evaluated using neoliberal and new institutional forms of economic analysis that fail to adequately measure employee wellbeing beyond job quality (Budd and Spencer 2015). This article has suggested the capability approach as a useful tool for evaluating employee voice legislation due to its strong conceptual fit that can yield fresh insights into employee wellbeing in the twenty-first century. As such, an index measure of achieved employee wellbeing represented by six functionings is put forward that can be used as a powerful proxy of employees' capability for voice for empirical evaluation: health, stability, community, safety, personal fulfilment, and balance.

The capability approach has been criticised for being too informationally demanding to be feasible for operationalisation. This article has shown that a precise research question focused on the conversion of a single capability, one that is widely agreed upon as valuable, demands less information and can translate into a practical framework for empirical analysis. It has also demonstrated how Sen's approach to wellbeing analysis provides a comprehensive evaluative space for employees' capability for voice that facilitates a richer understanding of its determinants and consequences to inform future labour law.

REFERENCES

Ahlquist, J. S. (2017). Labor unions, political representation, and economic inequality. *Annual Review of Political Science, 20*(1), 409–432. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051215-023225

Alkire, S. (2005). Why the capability approach? *Journal of Human Development, 6*(1), 115–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/146498805200034275

Alkire, S., & Foster, J. (2011). Counting and multidimensional poverty measurement. *Journal of Public Economics, 95*(7), 476–487. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.11.006

Avendano, M., & Berkman, L. F. (2014). Labor markets, employment policies, and health. In L. F. Berkman, I. Kawachi, & M. M. Glymour (Eds.), *Social epidemiology* (pp. 182–233). Oxford University Press.

Barry, M., Gomez, R., Kaufman, B., Wilkinson, A., & Zhang, T. (2020). Is it 'you' or 'your workplace'? Predictors of job-related training in the Anglo-American world. *International Journal of Training and Development, 24*(3), 173–203. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.12192

Bavel, B. (2022). Wealth inequality in pre-industrial Europe: What role did associational organizations have? *The Economic History Review, 75*(3), 643–666. https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.13137

Befort, S., & Budd, J. W. (2009). *Invisible hands, invisible objectives: Bringing workplace law and public policy into focus*. Stanford University Press.

Blanchflower, D. G., & Bryson, A. (2020). Now unions increase job satisfaction and well-being. *NBER Working Paper Series*, (27720). https://doi.org/10.3386/w27720

Bonvin, J.-M. (2012). Individual working lives and collective action. An introduction to capability for work and capability for voice. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research, 18*(1), 9–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258911431046

Brental, B., & Demougin, D. (2010). Declining labor shares and bargaining power: An institutional explanation. *Journal of Macroeconomics, 32*(1), 443–456. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmacro.2009.09.005

Brooks, S., & Wilkinson, A. (2021). Employee voice as a route to wellbeing. In P. Brough, E. Gardiner, & K. Daniels (Eds.), *Handbook on management and employment practices* (pp. 1–18). Springer International Publishing.

Bryson, J., & Zimmermann, B. (2020). Workers' participation in continuing training decision-making. *International Journal of Training and Development, 24*(3), 167–172. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.12191

Budd, J. W. (2011). *The thought of work*. Cornell University Press.

Budd, J. W. (2019). *Employment with a human face: Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice* (2nd ed.). Cornell University Press.

Budd, J. W., & Spencer, D. A. (2015). Worker well-being and the importance of work: Bridging the gap. *European Journal of Industrial Relations, 21*(2), 181–196. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680114535312

Case, A., & Deaton, A. (2021). *Deaths of despair and the future of capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Chari, R., Chang, C.-C., Sauter, S. L., Petrun Sayers, E. L., Cerully, J. L., Schulte, P., Schill, A. L., & Uscher-Pines, L. (2018). Expanding the paradigm of occupational safety and health. *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine, 60*(7), 589–593. https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000001330

Chung, H. (2022). *The flexibility paradox: Why flexible working leads to (self-) exploitation*. Policy Press.

Collins, H. (2019). What can Sen's capability approach offer to labour law? In B. Langille (Ed.), *The capability approach to labour law* (pp. 21–41). Oxford University Press.

Comim, F. (2008). Measuring capabilities. In F. Comim, M. Qizilbash, & S. Alkire (Eds.), *The capability approach: Concepts, measures and applications* (pp. 157–200). Cambridge University Press.

Cooke, G. B., Donaghey, J., & Zeytinoglu, I. U. (2013). The nuanced nature of work quality: Evidence from rural Newfoundland and Ireland. *Human Relations, 66*(4), 503–527. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726712464802

Deakin, S. (2019). The capability approach and the economics of labour law. In B. Langille (Ed.), *The capability approach to labour law* (pp. 143–157). Oxford University Press.

Deakin, S. (2021). Industrial democracy and inequality. In *Benchmarking working Europe 2021: Unequal Europe* (pp. 157–174). European Trade Union Institute.

Del Punta, R. (2019). Is the capability theory an adequate normative theory for labour law? In B. Langille (Ed.), *The capability approach to labour law*. Oxford University Press.

Drèze, J., & Sen, A. (1989). *Hunger and public action*. Oxford University Press.

Drèze, J., & Sen, A. (2002). *India: Development and participation*. Oxford University Press.

Drèze, J., & Sen, A. (2013). *An uncertain glory: India and its contradictions*. Princeton University Press.

Dundon, T., Wilkinson, A., Marchington, M., & Ackers, P. (2004). The meanings and purpose of employee voice. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 15*(6), 1149–1170. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190410001677359

Fernandez-Urbano, R., & Orton, M. (2021). No voice, no choice: Assessing Danish active labour market policies using Sen's capability approach. *Work, Employment and Society, 35*(1), 178–188. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017020935323

Fox, K. E., Johnson, S. T., Berkman, L. F., Sianoja, M., Soh, Y., Kubzansky, L. D., & Kelly, E. L. (2022). Organisational- and group-level workplace interventions and their effect on multiple domains of worker well-being: A systematic review. *Work & Stress, 36*(1), 30–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2021.1969476

Goh, J., Pfeffer, J., & Zenios, S. A. (2016). The relationship between workplace stressors and mortality and health costs in the United States. *Management Science, 62*(2), 608–628. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2014.2115

Gomez, R., Bryson, A., & Willman, P. (2010). Voice in the wilderness? The shift from union to non-union voice in Britain. In A. Wilkinson, P. J. Gollan, M. Marchington, & D. Lewin (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of participation in organizations* (pp. 383–406). Oxford University Press.

Greco, G. (2016). Setting the weights: The Women's Capabilities Index for Malawi. *Social Indicators Research, 135*(2), 457–478. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1502-3

Griffin, J. (1996). *Value judgement: Improving our ethical beliefs*. Clarendon Press.

Hick, R., & Burchardt, T. (2016). Capability deprivation. In D. Brady & L. M. Burton (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of the social science of poverty* (pp. 75–92). Oxford University Press.

International Labour Organization. (2013). *Report V: Sustainable development, decent work and green jobs*. International Labour Office.

Kalfa, S., & Budd, J. W. (2020). The future of employee voice. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 566–580). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2018). *Precarious lives: Job insecurity and well-being in rich democracies*. Polity Press.

Kaufman, B. (2004). *Theoretical perspectives on work and the employment relationship*. Industrial Relations Research Association.

Kaufman, B. (2015). Theorising determinants of employee voice: An integrative model across disciplines and levels of analysis. *Human Resource Management Journal, 25*(1), 19–40. https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12056

Kaufman, B. (2020). Employee voice before Hirschman: Its early history, conceptualization and practice. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 19–37). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Kelly, E., & Moen, P. (2020). *Overload: How good jobs went bad and what we can do about it*. Princeton University Press.

Kochan, T. A. (2000). Communications: On the paradigm guiding industrial relations theory and research. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 53*(4), 704–711.

Kochan, T. A., Yang, D., Kimball, W. T., & Kelly, E. L. (2019). Worker voice in America: Is there a gap between what workers expect and what they experience? *ILR Review, 72*(1), 3–38.

Langille, B. (Ed.). (2019). *The capability approach to labour law*. Oxford University Press.

Lovejoy, M., Kelly, E. L., Kubzansky, L. D., & Berkman, L. F. (2021). Work redesign for the 21st century: Promising strategies for enhancing worker well-being. *American Journal of Public Health, 111*(10), 1787–1795.

Miles, L. (2014). The capabilities approach and worker wellbeing. *The Journal of Development Studies, 50*(8), 1043–1054. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2013.866220

Morrison, E. W. (2011). Employee voice behavior: Integration and directions for future research. *The Academy of Management Annals, 5*(1), 373–412. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2011.574506

Nussbaum, M., & Sen, A. (1993). *The quality of life*. Clarendon Press.

Peters, E., Sorensen, G., Katz, J. N., Gundersen, D. A., & Wagner, G. R. (2021). Thriving from work: Conceptualization and measurement. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(13), 7196. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18137196

Pohler, D., Luchak, A. A., & Harmer, J. M. (2020). The missing employee in employee voice research. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 177–201). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Przeworski, A. (1991). *Democracy and the market: Political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.

Radcliff, B. (2013). *The political economy of human happiness: How voters' choices determine the quality of life*. Cambridge University Press.

Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press.

Reeves, A. (2021). The health effects of wage setting institutions: How collective bargaining improves health but not because it reduces inequality. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 43*(4), 1012–1031. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13272

Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined*. Open Book Publishers.

Sen, A. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey lectures 1984. *The Journal of Philosophy, 82*(4), 169–221.

Sen, A. (1995). *Inequality reexamined*. Clarendon Press.

Sen, A. (2009). Capability: Reach and limit. In E. Chiappero Martinetti (Ed.), *Debating global society: Reach and limits of the capability approach* (pp. 15–30). Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.

Sen, A., & Anand, S. (1997). Concepts of human development and poverty: A multidimensional perspective. In United Nations Development Programme (Ed.), *Poverty and human development: Human development papers 1997* (pp. 1–20).

Shahidi, F. V., Gignac, M. A. M., Oudyk, J., & Smith, P. M. (2021). Assessing the psychosocial work environment in relation to mental health: A comprehensive approach. *Annals of Work Exposures and Health, 65*(4), 418–431. https://doi.org/10.1093/annweh/wxaa130

Sherf, E. N., Parke, M. R., & Isaakyan, S. (2021). Distinguishing voice and silence at work: Unique relationships with perceived impact, psychological safety, and burnout. *Academy of Management Journal, 64*(1), 114–148. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.1428

Sigot, J.-C., & Vero, J. (2020). Subcontracting chain and workers' participation in continuing vocational training: Findings from the French, quantitative, linked employer–employee survey of training and career paths. *International Journal of Training and Development, 24*(3), 283–299. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.12197

Stanford, J., & Poon, D. (2021). *Speaking up, being heard, making change: The theory and practice of worker voice in Canada today*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Stansbury, A., & Summers, L. (2020). The declining worker power hypothesis: An explanation for the recent evolution of the American economy. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, 2020*(2), 1–96. https://doi.org/10.1353/eca.2020.0000

Stiglitz, J. E., Sen, A., & Fitoussi, J. P. (2010). *Mismeasuring our lives: Why GDP doesn't add up*. The New Press.

Subramanian, D., & Zimmermann, B. (2020). Voice in French corporate training: A critical issue in developing employee capability. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 41*(2), 296–322. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X17704311

Weil, D. (2014). *The fissured workplace*. Harvard University Press.

Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T., Donaghey, J., & Freeman, R. B. (2020). Employee voice: Bridging new terrains and disciplinary boundaries. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 2–18). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Willman, P., Bryson, A., & Gomez, E. (2006). The sound of silence: Which employers choose no employee voice and why? *Socio-Economic Review, 4*(2), 283–299. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwl012

Wolff, J., & De-Shalit, A. (2007). *Disadvantage*. Oxford University Press.

Zimmermann, B. (2020). Employee voice and lifelong education capabilities in France and Germany: Two models of responsibility. *International Journal of Training and Development, 24*(3), 265–282. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.12196

Digital Overconnectivity and Employee Wellbeing: An Empirical Evaluation of the Right-to-Disconnect Legislation in Europe

Cherise Regier

ABSTRACT

This article advances a theory-led account of how rights-based labor legislation can enhance worker wellbeing in the digital age, contingent on the presence of institutionalized employee voice. Drawing on pluralist industrial relations theory and Sen's capability approach, it conceptualizes the right to disconnect (R2D) not merely as a legal entitlement but as a precondition for exercising temporal discretion—the capacity to shape when, where, and how one engages in work. This article argues that without mechanisms enabling workers to meaningfully shape the implementation of such rights, legislative protections risk becoming inert or symbolic. To empirically investigate this claim, this study analyzes ten waves of European Social Survey data (2010–2020) using a dynamic difference-in-difference design. Exploiting the staggered introduction of R2D laws across France, Belgium, and Spain, it identifies statistically significant improvements in wellbeing among employees in 'teleworkable' occupations. Further analysis provides support for 'total working hours' and 'flexibility' as mechanisms underpinning these effects, and 'employee voice' as a moderator driving observed heterogeneity in wellbeing outcomes across countries. The latter finding is reinforced by evidence that wellbeing gains are greatest in countries with strong institutional support for employee voice, such as collective bargaining frameworks or codetermination rights, highlighting the critical role of industrial relations in translating legal mandates into meaningful capabilities.

Note. This paper is currently under review with the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital technologies in recent decades has transformed the nature of work in high-income countries, in large part because they have created new production opportunities for firms that allow for 'location independent' work, otherwise referred to as 'telework' (Coenen & Kok, 2014; Chelsey, 2014). While often framed in managerial discourse as a tool for promoting flexibility and autonomy, this transformation has exposed a critical vulnerability: employees' diminishing ability to exercise control over their time (Charalampous et al., 2019; Vega et al., 2015). From a pluralist industrial relations perspective, this signals a shift in the employment relationship, one in which managerial prerogative increasingly encroaches on rest time, and employee voice is insufficiently institutionalized to push back and protect their wellbeing (Budd, 2004; Kaufman, 1997). This paper advances a theoretical argument that employee wellbeing under conditions of

digital overconnectivity hinges on more than technological access or individual coping, it depends fundamentally on institutional protections that restore workers' capability to disconnect.

Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach, I conceptualize disconnection not as a discrete behavior, but as a freedom—one that is shaped by structural conditions and in turn, distributed unequally across employees. Telework, in this light, represents both a potential expansion and a contraction of capability. While it may offer enhanced flexibility, its unregulated forms can intensify work demands, blur work-life boundaries, and normalize after-hours availability (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013; Chung, 2022). These dynamics are particularly detrimental for employees with limited voice over organizational policy, as they possess limited ability to resist unsustainable demands or negotiate safeguards (Kochan et al., 2019; Kelly & Moen, 2020). In this context, the capability to disconnect becomes not only a determinant of employee wellbeing but also a diagnostic indicator of institutional balance between firm control and worker agency.

This conceptualization is substantiated by a growing body of empirical research across high-income contexts, which reveals a disjunction between technological advancement and worker welfare. Despite sustained economic growth, many workers report stagnating wages, rising precarity, and declining job satisfaction (Green, 2005; Kalleberg, 2018). At the same time, digital overconnectivity—facilitated by the proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs)—has been associated with longer working hours and intrusions on rest time, all of which have contributed to increased rates of stress, burnout, and poor health outcomes (Derks & Bakker, 2014; Allen, Cho, & Meier, 2014; Becker et al., 2021). Telework has become emblematic of this paradox: it promises autonomy but often delivers heightened expectations, constant responsiveness, and the erosion of recovery time (Chelsey, 2014; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Chandola et al., 2019).

In response to this growing problem, several governments have enacted right-to-disconnect (R2D) legislation, beginning with France in 2017 and followed by Belgium and Spain in 2019. These laws aim to restore employees' autonomy over their time by affirming a legal right to disengage from work-related communications outside of standard working hours. Yet the empirical impact of these interventions remains unclear. Their effectiveness hinges not only on formal adoption but also on how they are implemented at the firm-level, which is often negotiated with employees through mechanisms that themselves rely on existing levels of employee voice.

As such, this article investigates whether the R2D legislation delivers on its wellbeing promise and under what conditions. Utilizing 10 waves of data from the European Social Survey (2010–2020), I estimate the total average treatment effect of the R2D legislation on three domains of employee wellbeing – life satisfaction, happiness, and health – using a staggered treatment timing doubly robust difference-in-difference design (Callaway and Sant'Anna 2021). I also test two theorized mechanisms—working time and flexibility—and assess employee voice as a moderator. In doing so, this paper contributes both theoretically and empirically by deepening our understanding of how labor regulation in the digital era intersects with worker power, and provides timely evidence on whether rights-based legislation can offset the negative well being consequences of unbounded connectivity.

BACKGROUND

Telework, digital overconnectivity, and employee wellbeing

The widespread adoption of telework, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has introduced profound shifts in the employment relationship (Messenger & Gschwind, 2016; Eurofound, 2022b; De'R et al., 2020). Enabled by digital technologies such as email, messaging platforms, and mobile devices that allows employees to perform work away from a designated worksite, telework is often championed for its potential to provide employees with greater autonomy and flexibility (Allen et al., 2015; Choudhury et al., 2021; Wajcman, 2015). However, empirical research increasingly reveals a more complex and often troubling picture: telework is frequently associated with intensified work demands, diminished work-life boundaries, and declining employee wellbeing (Felstead & Henseke, 2017; Eurofound, 2022b; Adams & Schwarz, 2024).

While initially driven by public health imperatives, the normalization of telework arrangements have blurred spatial and temporal boundaries between work and nonwork domains, and such arrangements are now firmly embedded in knowledge intensive sectors across high-income countries (Eurofound 2020; Messenger & Gschind, 2016; Sostero et al., 2020). As Leonardi and Treem (2020) argue, ICTs have not merely enabled new modes of work; they have redefined presence, availability, and responsiveness as normative expectations, making "always-on" work cultures a default condition. Teleworkers increasingly report interruptions during personal time, anticipatory stress over potential communications, and difficulty detaching from their work role (Chung, 2022; Derks & Bakker, 2014). These effects are especially acute in hybrid contexts, where in-person obligations coexist with digital monitoring pressures (Derks et al., 2015).

These accounts of work intensification are neither incidental nor evenly distributed. Several studies show that teleworkers are significantly more likely than on-site workers to exceed contractual hours or work during unpaid time, often without formal acknowledgment or compensation (Chung & van der Horst, 2020). According to Eurofound (2022b), nearly half of teleworkers reported working beyond contracted hours, and they are 3.5 times more likely to work during their leisure time compared to their office-based peers. This form of digital overconnectivity is closely tied to organizational control mechanisms—such as visibility-based performance metrics and responsiveness expectations—that reward constant availability and implicitly penalize disengagement (Howcroft et al., 2024; Perlow, 2012; Wajcman, 2015).

The wellbeing consequences of digital overconnectivity are now well established. As Derks and Bakker (2014) show in their diary study, evening email use is directly associated with emotional exhaustion and work-family conflict. The mere anticipation of work-related communication can trigger what Becker et al. (2021) describe as a "pervasive attention allocation dilemma," impairing psychological detachment and elevating stress even when no messages arrive. Sustained exposure to such conditions contributes to burnout, anxiety, and adverse health outcomes (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015; Hu, Santuzzi, & Barber, 2019; Rodríguez-Modroño, 2023). These outcomes are consistent with the demand-control-support model, which predicts adverse health effects when high psychological demands coincide with low autonomy and limited social support (Karasek, 1979; Johnson et al., 2017). Importantly, while telework may appear to increase decision latitude, this autonomy is often constrained by implicit expectations to remain digitally connected, particularly in unsupportive work environments (Lott & Chung, 2016).

Voice, regulation, and the missing institutional perspective

While this literature has clarified the psychological toll of digital overconnectivity, a critical dimension remains largely unexamined: the role of institutional mechanisms, specifically labor law and employee voice, in shaping workers' ability to resist digital overconnectivity. As Adams and Schwarz (2024) note, the persistence of "connectivity burdens" is not simply a matter of technological overreach, but of regulatory neglect and uneven power in the employment relationship. In most organizations, the capability to disconnect is not equally distributed, it is influenced by organizational culture, managerial discretion, and most fundamentally, by workers' capacity to shape their schedule availability (Kochan et al., 2019; Sherf, Parke, & Isaakyan, 2021).

This omission reveals a foundational theoretical and empirical gap. Much of the current literature conceptualizes digital overconnectivity as an individual or managerial problem, solvable through boundary-setting practices or leadership training. In contrast, pluralist industrial relations theory suggests that sustained improvements to working conditions depend on institutional interventions that balance efficiency with equity and voice (Budd, 2004; Kaufman, 1997). From this perspective, the capability to disconnect must be understood as a function of employee voice, defined not only as participation in decision-making, but as the power to negotiate and enforce boundaries over work-related communication.

Despite its relevance, few studies have examined whether rights-based legislation such as the R2D laws adopted in France, Belgium, and Spain, can restore this capability. These laws formally recognize employees' right to disengage from digital communications outside of working hours, but their implementation typically relies on decentralized firm-level agreements or informal workplace policies. This raises important questions about the conditions under which such laws are effective: Are they capable of reducing digital overconnectivity and improving wellbeing? And does their success depend on the presence of meaningful employee voice within organizations?

These theoretically grounded questions remain largely unaddressed in empirical literature. To date, most evaluations of the R2D legislation have been descriptive or legal in nature, offering limited insight into the law's actual effects on employee outcomes. Similarly, the potential moderating role of employee voice—through mechanisms such as consultation, codetermination, or collective bargaining—has not been systematically tested. This study seeks to address both gaps by assessing the impact of R2D legislation on employee wellbeing and examining whether voice moderates this relationship. In doing so, it contributes a much-needed institutional perspective to ongoing debates about digital overconnectivity, work intensification, and labor market regulation in the digital age.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The role of legislation in protecting wellbeing

From a pluralist industrial relations perspective, the employment relationship is defined by an inherent imbalance of power between firms and workers—one that cannot be addressed solely through market mechanisms. While economic efficiency is important, pluralist theory argues that governments must also promote equity and institutionalized employee voice to ensure that labor markets operate fairly and do not

disproportionately serve capital interests (Budd, 2004). In the absence of such protections, employees have limited means to resist work intensification or shape their working conditions in ways that support their wellbeing (Kaufman, 1997; Collins, 2019). Labor law, in this view, plays a corrective role: it institutionalizes voice and constrains managerial prerogative, thereby safeguarding democratic values while promoting worker welfare (Befort & Budd, 2009; Regier, 2023).

The proliferation of telework and subsequent work intensification exemplifies the limitations of relying on voluntary or market-based solutions alone. As firms adopt productivity-enhancing technologies, they often frame them as tools to enhance flexibility, while simultaneously embedding expectations of constant digital availability (Wajcman, 2015; Howcroft et al., 2024). Without regulatory safeguards, such practices can erode employees' autonomy over their time and expose them to sustained digital overconnectivity—conditions associated with serious risks to mental and physical health (Derks & Bakker, 2014; Becker et al., 2021). The R2D legislation adopted in several European countries represents a regulatory response to these risks, affirming workers' legal right to disengage from work-related communications outside of normal working hours.

The aims of this legislation align closely with psychological detachment theory, which posits that the ability to mentally detach from work during nonwork time is essential for emotional regulation, recovery, and long-term wellbeing (Sonnentag, 2003, 2012; Sonnentag et al., 2010). Recovery theory reinforces this view by emphasizing that sufficient rest and recuperation are necessary to replenish depleted cognitive and emotional resources (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). When legal rights support workers' control over their work-life boundaries—particularly in asymmetric power environments—they establish the structural conditions for detachment and recovery. In this way, legislation functions as a mechanism for expanding employees' capabilities, enabling them to exercise control over their time in ways that promote sustainable wellbeing.

The importance of employee voice

The impact of R2D legislation is unlikely to be uniform. The flexible, decentralized nature of most R2D policies (discussed in the next section) means that their implementation often depends on how they are negotiated at the workplace level, thereby making employee voice a critical moderator. Workers with strong institutionalized voice—through collective bargaining, codetermination, or formal consultation—are more likely to influence how R2D provisions are interpreted and enforced in practice (Kochan et al., 2019). In contrast, workers lacking voice may be unable to challenge managerial discretion or ensure that disconnection rights are meaningfully applied to their specific context. Previous research has shown that in the absence of voice, disconnection policies may be poorly designed or counterproductive—for instance, by compressing work into fewer hours without reducing workload (Kelliher & Anderson, 2009), or by reinforcing cultural norms that equate availability with performance (Pansu, 2018; Reid, 2011).

These dynamics can also be understood through the lens of the capability approach, which defines wellbeing not only as the achievement of desired outcomes (e.g., happiness, health), but as the freedom to pursue them (Sen, 1985; Robeyns, 2017). Voice is a capability in this sense: it enables employees to shape the institutional and organizational conditions that determine their opportunities for rest, recovery, and meaningful participation in working life (Regier, 2023). When voice is absent, workers lose both practical influence over workplace policy

and key psychological resources—such as autonomy, control, and self-determination—that are essential to wellbeing (Befort & Budd, 2009; Sherf et al., 2021).

Hypothesis

Drawing from this theoretical foundation, I hypothesize that the R2D legislation will improve employee wellbeing by mitigating work intensification and facilitating psychological recovery through legally supported boundaries around digital communication. However, this effect will be moderated by the presence of employee voice, as workers with greater institutional power are more likely to shape the practical implementation of the law in ways that reflect their needs. I will test this hypothesis using a staggered difference-in-difference framework and examine flexibility (decision latitude) and total working time (contracted plus overtime hours) as potential mechanisms through which the law may influence wellbeing.

THE RIGHT-TO-DISCONNECT LEGISLATION IN EUROPE

A central objective of the R2D is to promote employee voice in the form of individual self-determination, specifically the capability to disengage from work-related digital communications outside of contractual working hours without fear of reprisal. This right is designed to safeguard employees' rest time, reinforce their autonomy over working rhythms, and ensure compliance with broader occupational health, safety, and labor protections. In this sense, R2D legislation operationalizes a core principle of both pluralist industrial relations theory and the capability approach: the institutionalization of rights that expand workers' freedom to shape their working conditions in ways that promote wellbeing (Befort & Budd, 2009; Sen, 1985; Robeyns, 2017).

France was the first country to institutionalize the R2D through Article L2242-17 of the El Khomri Law (Law No. 2016-1088), effective January 1, 2017. The law requires firms with 50 or more employees to negotiate disconnection terms via collective bargaining with a union delegate, while smaller firms or those without agreements are encouraged to adopt a workplace charter in consultation with employee representatives—though such charters are not legally binding. Sectoral or company-level agreements may nonetheless extend coverage, and employees may assert their rights individually under the employer's legal 'duty of care'. Belgium followed in April 2018 with Article 16 of the Act to Strengthen Economic Growth and Social Cohesion, requiring firms with over 50 employees to negotiate R2D terms through collective bargaining, though without fallback mechanisms like a charter. Spain introduced its R2D law in December 2018 via Article 88 of the Organic Law on the Protection of Personal Data and Guarantee of Digital Rights, mandating that all firms adopt a disconnection policy, either through collective bargaining or consultation with employee representatives. (For a comparative overview, see Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of the Right-to-Disconnect Legislation in France, Belgium, and Spain

Country	Title of legislation	Date enforced	Potential scope	Implementation
France	Article L2242-17 of the Labour Code	January 2017	All firms	Firms with $\geq$ 50 employees must negotiate R2D terms with a trade union or employee representative but are not obligated to reach an agreement. If a legally binding agreement (ex. collective agreement) is not made, a unilateral workplace charter must be drawn up.

				Firms with < 50 employees are encouraged to negotiate R2D terms. Sectoral-level collective agreements can extend coverage to employees of these firms. Employees can exercise their right on an individual basis by claiming a violation of their firm's duty to care but may require legal counsel or trade union support.
Belgium	Article 16 of Act regarding strengthening economic growth and social cohesion	March 2018	All firms	Firms with ≥ 50 employees must negotiate R2D terms with a trade union or employee representative. (Amended in 2023 to firms with ≥ 20 employees and requirement for company policy in absence of a formal agreement) Firms with < 50 employees are encouraged to negotiate R2D terms with a trade union or employee representative. Sectoral-level collective agreements can extend coverage to employees of these firms.
Spain	Organic Law 3/2018 on the protection of personal data and guarantee of digital rights	December 2018	All firms	All firms must implement a R2D policy, negotiations with a trade union or equivalent employee representative are encouraged.

Across each country the vast majority of dependent employees engaged in telework are formally eligible for some form of R2D protection. Yet the strength, scope, and enforcement of these protections vary widely, shaped not only by statutory design but also by the capacity of national industrial relations institutions to negotiate and implement meaningful terms. This institutional variation is likely to influence the legislation's effectiveness in promoting employee wellbeing. In line with the theoretical framework, the impact of R2D laws is expected to be greater in contexts with stronger collective bargaining systems, higher union density, and more robust workplace dialogue. Implementation at the firm level also reflects this diversity. A Eurofound (2021) review of collective agreements highlights significant heterogeneity ranging from soft measures like automatic out-of-office replies to more stringent measures such as company-wide email server shutdowns during disconnection periods.

DATA & EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

Data

To examine the impact of R2D legislation on well-being I draw on the European Social Survey (ESS), which is a repeated cross-national survey administered in over 30 European countries every two years. The survey uses cross-sectional, probability samples representative of all persons aged 15 and over residing in private households within each country. A minimum sample size of 800 is obtained for countries with less than two million and 1,500 otherwise. Data are collected through face-to-face interviews, except for some countries in wave 10 (year 2020) who fielded the questionnaire using self-completion methods to help prevent the spread of Coronavirus; all observations are given equal weight. For this study, data was drawn from 2010 to 2020 (6 waves) to observe employee wellbeing before and after implementation of the R2D law in France, Belgium, and Spain to evaluate the change.

The ESS collects data on a series of demographic characteristics, so I was able to refine the sample population to people working for private sector firms in 'teleworkable' occupations that fall under major groups one to four of The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) and who report contracted work hours of 30 or more in their main job (). These characteristics are both theoretically and empirically strong predictors of employees who telework at risk of work intensification and therefore, represents the R2D target population (Eurofound, 2022b; Sostero et al., 2020). This treatment group is an "intent-to-treat" group that contains both treated and likely some untreated employees since I was unable to identify exactly who teleworks and instead, rely on predictors of employees who are likely to telework.

Outcome Measures

Since the R2D aims to reduce accounts of overconnectivity arising from work-related digital communications to protect people's leisure time, it has the potential to improve not only their work life, but their overall quality of life. As discussed previously, having the capability to disconnect from work enhances one's opportunities to shape their life in a way that they have reason to value. Perhaps this translates into less time working or stressing during leisure time in exchange for more energy and quality time with family and friends, exercising, cooking nutritious food, engaging in hobbies, or resting. Furthermore, a key motivation for this law discussed in ongoing debates is to support employee health by reducing their stress and risk of burnout, workplace injury, and illness. Therefore, wellbeing is assessed using three subjective measures to capture people's own views about their lives and reflect its intrinsic multidimensionality: *life satisfaction*, *happiness*, and *health* (Rawls 1971; Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Anand and Sen 1997). A large body of research has explored the validity and reliability of these measures and discussed their utility for policy evaluation (Albrecht 1996; Kaplan and Baron-Epel 2003; Fujita and Diener 2005; Clark, Frijters, and Shields 2008; Krueger and Schkade 2008; Diener, Inglehart, and Tay 2013; Davidson and Schuyler 2015; Clark 2016; Odermatt and Stutzer 2017; Frijters and Krekel 2021; Helliwell 2021).

Life satisfaction, otherwise referred to as evaluative wellbeing, asks individuals to consider and weigh all facets of their life to produce a single aggregate measure using a 10-point scale. *Happiness*, otherwise referred to as hedonic wellbeing, also asks individuals to consider their life as a whole, but to determine their affective state at a single moment in time using a 10-point scale. Health is an important dimension of wellbeing that deserves critical attention in this research context because of its dynamic connection to work intensification discussed in the background section. According to the Constitution of the World Health Organization, health is a "state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (Int. Health Conference 2002). In this way, *health* asks individuals to rate their overall general health on a 5-point scale ranging from 'very bad' to 'very good' to reflect an individually constructed composite measure of its different domains. Although these three measures are connected and often move in the same direction but to different degrees, it is possible for diverging results since they reflect different types of wellbeing and in turn, reveal different effects of an intervention when used as outcome measures for evaluation. For example, an individual may rate their subjective health as high but life satisfaction as low since health only captures a single domain of wellbeing and one may not give it much weight. As such, results are reported for each outcome measure individually rather than aggregated into a single index measure.

Mechanisms

To support the results of the main analysis, I evaluate the impact of the R2D on two intermediate objectives of the law intended to drive employee wellbeing: *flexibility* and *total working time* (contracted plus paid and unpaid overtime hours). As discussed in the background section, flexibility in the context of teleworking can lead to work intensification. Instead of working wherever and whenever, employees end up working everywhere and all the time in fear of being penalized for disconnecting (Becker et al. 2021; Chung 2022; Mazmanian et al. 2013). In this way, successful implementation of the R2D legislation at the firm-level should impose clear boundaries around work and rest time and therefore, flexibility should remain stable or even reduce to some degree. Empirical evidence suggests that softer approaches to implementation are not as effective for remedying the negative effects of work intensification (Eurofound, 2023, pg. 49; Pansu 2018). To test this, I use a measure that asks respondents to rate how much the management at their work allows them to decide how their daily work is organized on an 11-point scale ranging from no influence to complete control. *Total working time* should also be reduced to some degree since prolonged working hours is reported as a common symptom of work intensification among teleworkers. To test this, I use a measure of working time that asks respondents to report the number of hours that they normally work including all paid or unpaid overtime in their main job.

Moderation

To better understand whether *employee voice* moderates the relationship between the R2D legislation and employee wellbeing, I exploit the variance in wellbeing outcomes across individuals reporting different levels of employee voice. Although there are several ways to conceptualize employee voice, I am most interested in capturing how much influence employees may have over R2D policy decisions within their firm since this will theoretically shape if and how the R2D gets implemented and consequently, their wellbeing. Therefore, I use a measure of employee voice that asks individuals to rate how much influence they have over organizational policy decisions on an 11-point scale ranging from no influence to complete control.

Difference-in-Difference Model

I leverage a dynamic difference-in-difference model to estimate the causal impact of the R2D law on employee wellbeing by comparing the change in life satisfaction, happiness, and health among employees in treated countries (France, Belgium, and Spain) to employees in control countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) before and after the passage of the legislation within each country between 2010 and 2020. This control group allows us to make informative inferences not only because of its size, but because it contains countries who are very likely to be treated beyond the study period either in response to ongoing debates regarding the R2D within their country or the EU's potential forthcoming directive. Although Italy was treated during the study period, I am unable to include them in the analysis because they only participated in four of the seven ESS survey waves.

The estimates are computed using Callaway and Sant 'Anna's (CS) doubly robust difference-in-difference model (2021) which uses *group-time average treatment effect* as its main specification. In other words, the average treatment effect for units who are members of group *g* at time-period *t* denoted by:

$$ATT(g,t) = E\left[Y_t(g) - Y_t(0) | G_g = 1\right]$$

Where $Y_{i,t}$ represents life satisfaction, happiness, or health, $t = 1, \ldots, T$ represents the time-period, and g represents the 'group' that each unit belongs to according to the time-period in which they first become treated. This study contains two treated groups: (1) France who is treated in early 2017, and (2) Spain and Belgium who are treated in mid to late 2018. For simplicity, I classify the latter group as the 2019 group since their treatment falls between the 2018 and 2020 survey periods. $G_{i,g}$ is a binary variable that is equal to one if a unit is first treated in period and if a unit is never treated.

This model accommodates the staggered roll out of the R2D legislation across countries by allowing for variation in treatment timing. I specify the control group as "never treated" and assign a dynamic weighting methodology $w(g,t)$ to estimate a summary measure of the law's overall causal effect (i.e., a weighted average of $ATT(g,t)$) on employee wellbeing. This aggregation method avoids "forbidden comparisons" and in turn, negative weights in the estimand that can result from two-way fixed effects models used in staggered treatment timing settings. All comparisons are relative to the previous pre-treatment period ($g - 1$) to minimize bias that may result from the study's longer time-horizon and control for country-level differences over time. I then compute partial aggregations of the causal parameter $ATT(g,t)$ to highlight different types of treatment effect heterogeneity arising from variance across groups g, time t, and length of treatment exposure $e = t - g$. In this way, I observe how wellbeing outcomes are impacted by country differences, specifically in their timing and operationalization of the R2D legislation (refer to Callaway and Sant'Anna, 2021 for further details).

Assumptions

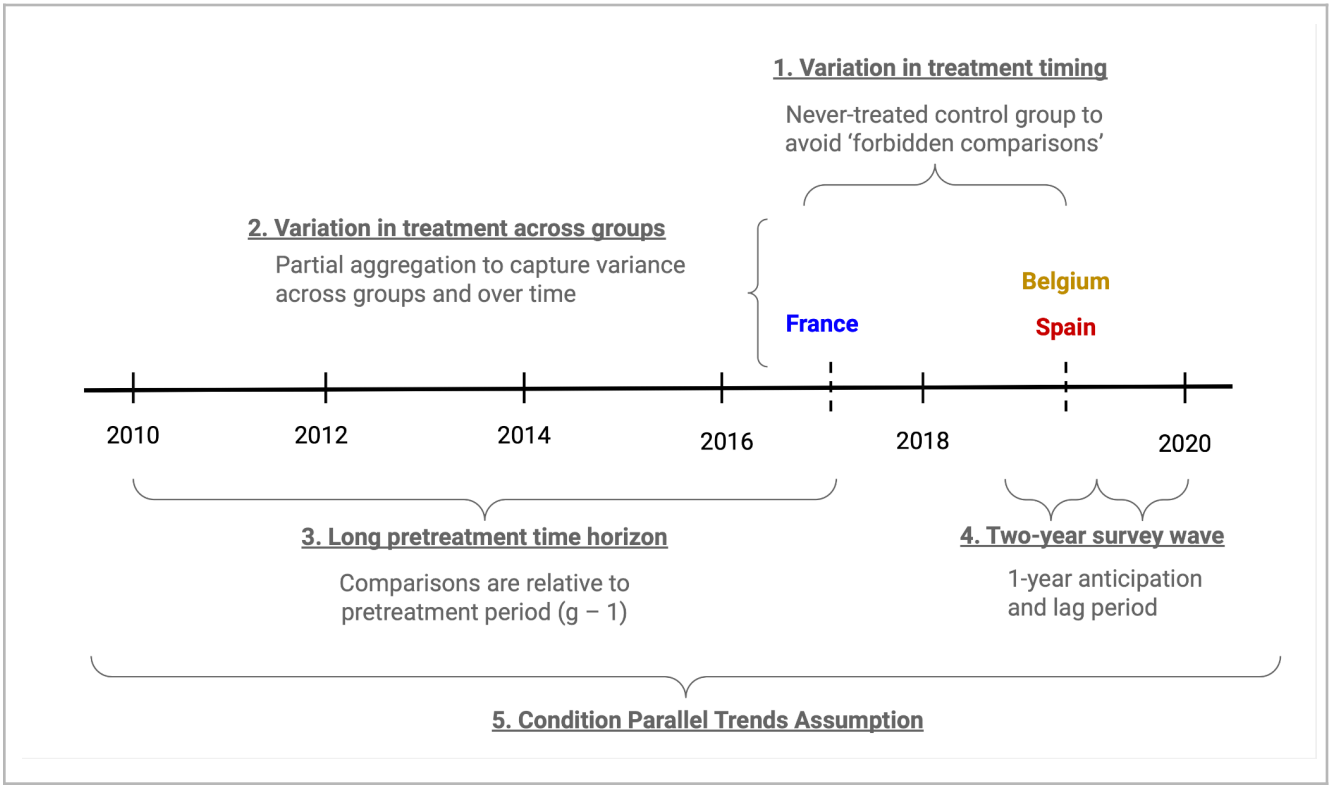
The results are predicated on the following four assumptions: (1) once a unit becomes treated, it remains treated; (2) no anticipation in treatment effect; (3) independent and identically distributed random or "as if" random sampling (each country is treated at random from a larger population of interest); and (4) conditional parallel trends based on a "never treated group." Assumption 1 holds since no government has retracted the law in any of the treated countries to date. Regarding Assumption 2, debates for the R2D law within each treated country began in advance to its enforcement, so it is plausible that some progressive firms may have implemented R2D terms prior to the official treatment date, but not enough to significantly bias the results. For example, the Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions (CCOO) in Spain reported that only six collective agreements established prior to the law's passage included R2D clauses (less than 0.002 percent of new agreements) (Eurofound 2021: 19). Nonetheless, I allow for a one-year anticipation period since each treatment date is clustered around the middle of the ESS two-year survey period to hold assumption 2. This feature conveniently allows for a lag period as well to accommodate negotiation periods over R2D terms that may delay treatment effects.

To test assumption 3, I conducted a series of balance tests which sought to establish whether the treatment and control group experienced similar changes across a range of sociodemographic characteristics between the pre-treatment and post-treatment periods to provide insight into whether the legislative change was exogenous. Table 2 reports difference-in-difference estimators for both the 2017 group and the 2019 group relative to each of their control groups. I observe a significant difference in household total net income for the 2017 group, but the magnitude is not substantially important (0.776 SD). To examine assumption 4, I selected the following

covariates based on their dependent relationship to employee wellbeing trajectories in the absence of treatment: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. Essentially, this approach helps remove important biases that may arise from ignoring covariate-specific trends when estimating the causal effects of a policy intervention, thereby making a conditional parallel trends assumption more plausible than an unconditional parallel trends assumption (Heckman, Ichiura, and Todd 1997; Callaway and Sant'Anna 2021). Further tests on this assumption are discussed in the results section.

Lastly, I provide an extra layer of robustness to further isolate the effect of the R2D legislation through a triple difference analysis. To do this, I compare the wellbeing of employees in 'teleworkable' occupations to those in 'non-networkable' occupations before and after the introduction of the R2D legislation in treated countries to those in non-treated countries. This 'third difference' helps account for bias arising from potential changes that may have occurred during the study period that might have impacted employee wellbeing but were unrelated to the R2D legislation. Diagram 1 provides a visual representation of the empirical strategy.

Diagram 1. Empirical strategy



RESULTS

Total Average Treatment Effect

I observe an increase in employee wellbeing across all three dimensions following the implementation of the R2D legislation. Using the dynamic aggregation of method proposed by Callaway and Sant'Anna which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation, the estimated total treatment

effect is 0.29 standard deviation units (SD) (95% CI: 0.08, 0.50) in life satisfaction, 0.34 SD (95% CI: 0.16, 0.53) in happiness, and 0.02 SD (95% CI: -0.08 0.12) in health, as displayed in Figure 1 and reported in Table 3a. According to the p-value for the Wald pre-test of the 'parallel trends' assumption, I fail to reject at conventional significance levels after conditioning on the set of pre-treatment covariates for all outcome variables. Likewise, the uniform 95% confidence bands cover 0 in all pre-treatment periods which is visually displayed in Figure 1. When I add non-teleworkers as a third dimension to conduct a triple difference analysis the total average treatment effect reduces slightly for each outcome measure. More specifically, I observe a positive treatment effect of 0.20 SD for life satisfaction and 0.16 SD for happiness, and a negative treatment effect of 0.08 SD for health (refer to Tables 3b & 3c).

Treatment Effects Over Time

Figure 2 displays evidence of heterogeneous treatment effects across countries and over time. As discussed previously, groups are defined by the time-period in which the law was first introduced. Table 4a reports results for the 2017 group (France), where I observe a statistically significant positive total treatment effect of 0.42 SD in life satisfaction and 0.44 SD in happiness, and a small negative treatment effect of 0.01 SD in health. Since the data extends to 2020, I have the advantage of observing how treatment effects evolved over time for this group. One-year post-treatment, I observe an increase of 0.16 SD in life satisfaction and 0.25 SD in happiness, followed by three years post-treatment where I observe an even greater, statistically significant increase of 0.68 SD in life satisfaction and 0.64 SD in happiness (refer to 2017 group in Figure 2 for visualization). For health, I observe a negative treatment effect of 0.07 SD one-year post-treatment, followed by a positive treatment effect of 0.04 SD three years post-treatment. These results suggest that it may take time for firms to adopt R2D terms or for employees covered by such terms to fully realize its potential benefits. However, Table 4c depicts the results of the triple difference analysis and interestingly, the treatment effect is relatively stable across time for all three measures. For example, I observe positive treatment effects in life satisfaction of 0.28 SD in 2018 and 0.25 SD in 2020.

Treatment Effects Across countries

Figure 2 also displays evidence of heterogeneous treatment effects across countries. Table 5a reports results for the 2019 group (Spain and Belgium). I observe negative treatment effects of 0.26 SD in life satisfaction and 0.07 SD in happiness, and a positive treatment effect in health of 0.04 SD one-year post-treatment. Figure 3 and 4 display evidence of dynamic treatment effects within the 2019 group. Interestingly, when I remove Spain from the sample to assess the impact of the R2D on Belgium in isolation, I observe positive treatment effects of 0.54 SD in life satisfaction, 0.54 SD in happiness, and 0.104 SD in health. When I remove Belgium from the sample to assess the impact of the R2D on Spain in isolation, I observe negative treatment effects of 0.70 SD in life satisfaction and 0.35 SD in happiness, and a no effect in health. These results are reported in Table 5a and suggest that Spain is driving the negative treatment effect observed in the 2019 group for life satisfaction and happiness discussed above. However, when I conduct the triple difference analysis, I observe positive treatment effects for both countries across all three measures, suggesting that the R2D law is having a positive impact on teleworkers in Spain, but some other change during the study period is countering the effect (refer to Table 5c).

Mechanisms: Flexibility & Working Time

To support the main results, I estimate the impact of the R2D law on two intermediate objectives: *flexibility* and *total working time*. As noted previously, a null or negative impact on flexibility and total working time would help support positive treatment effects on wellbeing due to the nature of how digital overconnectivity manifests. The estimated total treatment effect is negative 0.19 SD (95% CI: -0.49, 0.11) in flexibility and positive 0.49 SD (95% CI: -0.55, 1.53) in total working time, as displayed in Figure 1 and reported in Table 6a. According to the p-value for the Wald pre-test of the 'parallel trends' assumption, I fail to reject at conventional significance levels after conditioning on the set of pre-treatment covariates for all outcome variables. Likewise, the uniform 95% confidence bands cover 0 in all pre-treatment periods which is visually displayed in Figure 1. When I add non-teleworkers as a third dimension to conduct a triple difference analysis, the total average treatment effect changes to positive 0.04 SD for flexibility and negative 0.20 SD for total working hours (refer to Tables 6b & 6c). These triple difference results suggest that flexibility remained relatively stable and total working time reduced because of the R2D legislation, which supports my hypothesis.

Moderation: Employee Voice

Table 7 displays evidence of heterogeneous treatment effects across individuals according to their self-reported level of employee voice (i.e., influence over organizational policy) measured on an 11-point scale. I conducted the analysis across three categorical levels of employee voice: low (0-3), moderate (4-7), and high (8-10) to maintain an adequate sample size. I observe an upward sloping gradient in life satisfaction, happiness, and health as employee voice increases. For example, life satisfaction is 0.385 SD higher for employees with high levels of employee voice compared to low levels. Put another way, employees with high levels of influence over organizational policy benefit almost four times as much regarding life satisfaction from the R2D legislation relative to those with limited influence. Furthermore, I observe a positive treatment effect of 0.22 SD for employees with high levels of voice compared to a negative treatment effect of 0.11 for employees with low levels.

As a robustness check, I test employee voice as an outcome measure to ensure it represents an exogenous variable not influenced by the R2D and obtain a null treatment effect of 0.05 SD. These findings support my hypothesis that the impact of the R2D on employee wellbeing is moderated by employee voice, suggesting that employees' capability for voice influences how the degree to which they can negotiate R2D terms in their favor. This aligns with Amartya Sen's theoretical rationale that capabilities expand one's opportunities to create further advantage, not only through the achievement of higher-level functioning's representative of wellbeing, but through the acquisition of other capabilities, in this case, the capability to disconnect (Sen 1985). Political philosophers Wolff and de Shalit (2007) refer to this as "fertile advantage."

DISCUSSION

The difference-in-difference analysis reveals statistically significant and substantively meaningful treatment effects of R2D legislation on employee wellbeing. Specifically, the legislation is associated with average improvements of 0.29 standard deviations (SD) in life satisfaction, 0.34 SD in happiness (both on an 11-point scale), and a modest 0.02 SD in self-reported health (6-point scale) among employees in teleworkable occupations contracted for 30 or more hours per week. These magnitudes are consistent with well-established findings in the wellbeing literature. For instance, Clark (2003) reports a decline of approximately 0.33 SD in life

satisfaction following job loss using German panel data, a highly cited reference in wellbeing literature to contextualize the impact of major life events. Against this benchmark, the observed effects of R2D legislation are not only meaningful but represent an important policy lever for improving psychosocial working conditions.

Importantly, while not all estimates achieve conventional statistical significance ($p < .05$), growing methodological consensus warns against over-reliance on arbitrary significance thresholds. As Amrhein, Greenland, and McShane (2019) argue, p-values should not be used to determine the existence or importance of an effect in isolation. Instead, effect size, theoretical coherence, and the confidence interval surrounding an estimate provide a more comprehensive picture of empirical significance. The effects found here—especially for life satisfaction and happiness—fall within a moderate range by Cohen's (1988) criteria and align with theoretical expectations derived from psychological detachment theory (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007) and capability theory (Sen, 1985; Robeyns, 2017).

To further test the reliability of these results, I conducted a series of robustness checks. A leave-one-out analysis across the 13-country control group showed no significant variation in outcomes, supporting the stability of the model. Moreover, analysis of two hypothesized intermediate mechanisms discussed in the literature, flexibility and total working hours, yields findings that support the law's intended effect on wellbeing. Estimates from a triple difference model that adds non-teleworkers as a comparison group reveal that treatment effects are slightly attenuated but remain meaningful: 0.20 SD in life satisfaction, 0.16 SD in happiness, and a slight negative (-0.01 SD) in health. These results likely reflect conservative intent-to-treat estimates, as the treated group includes employees who may not telework but are nonetheless exposed to the policy environment.

Crucially, this study finds that the effectiveness of R2D legislation is moderated by levels of employee voice. Employees with greater influence over workplace policy report significantly larger gains in wellbeing. For example, the treatment effect in life satisfaction for high-voice employees is nearly four times greater than that for employees with low voice. This gradient underscores that the right to disconnect, like many labor protections, functions not merely as a formal entitlement but as a capability—an opportunity to exercise control over work–nonwork boundaries that must be supported by institutional arrangements. These findings resonate strongly with pluralist industrial relations theory, which sees voice as a necessary counterbalance to managerial prerogative (Budd, 2004; Kaufman, 1997), and with capability theory, which conceives voice as a substantive freedom enabling individuals to shape the conditions of their wellbeing (Sen, 1985; Robeyns, 2017).

The country-level patterns further support this interpretation. Belgium, with its robust industrial relations system, shows the strongest treatment effects across all wellbeing domains, followed by France and then Spain. This ranking tracks with Eurofound's Industrial Relations Index (2018), where Belgium and France score well above average in institutional capacity for worker representation, while Spain scores lowest of the three. Spain's weaker outcomes likely stem from a significant decentralization of collective bargaining in recent years, which has eroded union influence at the firm level (Kohler, 2018). Qualitative evidence reinforces this view: in 2019, only 12% of newly signed collective agreements in Spain included R2D provisions, most were firm-specific and lacked enforceability (Eurofound, 2020). Labor experts and union representatives suggest that the limited impact reflects the law's legal framing under data protection rather than occupational health and safety, leading to minimal employer obligations and weak enforcement incentives (Eurofound, 2023).

Finally, the psychological mechanisms through which R2D affects wellbeing are theoretically grounded in psychological detachment and recovery theories. Research has shown that expectations of constant availability impede recovery by inducing anticipatory stress and preventing cognitive disengagement during leisure time (Allen et al., 2014; Chen & Karahanna, 2018; Becker et al., 2021). The R2D law, by affirming a legal boundary around work time, likely reduces this anticipatory stress, even for employees who do not frequently invoke the right. In this way, the capability to disconnect may enhance wellbeing not just through behavioral change, but through intrinsic affirmation of autonomy and protection, reinforcing both agency and dignity in digital-era employment relationships.

Although the European Union (EU) has not yet enacted a dedicated directive on the R2D, it has laid important legal foundations through existing directives on occupational health and safety (Directive 89/391/EEC), working time (Directive 2003/88/EC), transparent and predictable working conditions (Directive 2019/1152), and work–life balance (Directive 2019/1158). In April 2024, the European Commission initiated a first-stage consultation with social partners to explore the potential for EU-wide R2D legislation—signaling growing concern over the risks of digital overconnectivity. In the absence of a binding supranational framework, several member states—including France, Belgium, and Spain—have moved ahead with national R2D laws aimed at protecting the wellbeing of teleworkers and fulfilling obligations under the broader EU policy regime. Set against this evolving regulatory landscape, the present study provides timely and policy-relevant evidence on the effectiveness of these national R2D interventions and the institutional conditions under which they are most likely to succeed.

CONCLUSION

The R2D legislation represents a novel form of capability-enhancing labor regulation. Its core aim is to institutionalize workers' ability to disengage from work-related digital communications outside of contractual hours in order to safeguard rest, recovery, and autonomy. Grounded in pluralist industrial relations theory and informed by psychological detachment and recovery theory, this intervention is designed to mitigate the adverse effects of digital overconnectivity and work intensification—both of which are empirically linked to poor mental and physical health. Using a dynamic difference-in-difference design and ten waves of European Social Survey data (2010–2020), this study estimates the impact of the R2D laws on three domains of employee wellbeing—life satisfaction, happiness, and health—among full-time teleworking employees in Europe. On average, the legislation appears to be achieving its intended effects, with positive treatment effects observed across all three outcomes.

However, the results also reveal meaningful variation in outcomes across countries and employee subgroups, underscoring the importance of institutional context. Most notably, the wellbeing benefits of the law are significantly stronger among employees who report having greater voice over organizational policy decisions. This moderating effect of voice highlights its function as a capability—not just the right to speak, but the power to shape and enforce the boundaries of work. Where institutionalized voice is weak or absent, employees may lack the means to assert their disconnection rights, despite formal legal entitlement. Paradoxically, this means that those who stand to benefit most from R2D protections—workers in lower-power positions most vulnerable to digital overreach—are often the least able to realize them in practice. While this study does not advocate for a rigid, top-down legislative model, it does suggest, however, that R2D laws should be complemented by

interventions that strengthen voice across multiple forms, including consultation, codetermination, and collective representation.

Taken together, these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how labor legislation can support employee wellbeing in the digital age. Specifically, they demonstrate that R2D legislation can play a meaningful role in countering the risks associated with telework and digital overconnectivity—an increasingly prevalent mode of work in high-income economies. More broadly, this study provides empirical support for conceptualizing voice as a core determinant of wellbeing and a key mechanism for realizing the aims of contemporary labor law. In doing so, it reinforces the relevance of pluralist industrial relations theory and capability-based approaches in shaping equitable, sustainable responses to the evolving demands of telework.

REFERENCES

Adams, A., & Schwarz, A. (2024). Connectivity burdens and the future of work: Rethinking digital rights. *Work, Employment and Society*. Advance online publication.

Ahlquist, J. S. (2017). Labor unions, political representation, and economic inequality. *Annual Review of Political Science, 20*(1), 409–432.

Albrecht, G. (1996). Using subjective health assessments in practice and policymaking. *Health Care Analysis, 4*(4), 284–292.

Allen, T. D., Cho, E., & Meier, L. L. (2014). Work–family boundary dynamics. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*, 99–121.

Allen, T. D., Golden, T. D., & Shockley, K. M. (2015). How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 16*(2), 40–68.

Amrhein, V., Greenland, S., & McShane, B. B. (2019). Scientists rise up against statistical significance. *Nature, 567*(7748), 305–307. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-00857-9

Anand, S., & Sen, A. (1997). Concepts of human development and poverty: A multidimensional perspective. In United Nations Development Programme (Ed.), *Poverty and human development: Human development papers 1997* (pp. 1–20).

Barber, L. K., & Santuzzi, A. M. (2015). Please respond ASAP: Workplace telepressure and employee recovery. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 20*(2), 172–189.

Barley, S. R., Meyerson, D. E., & Grodal, S. (2011). E-mail as a source and symbol of stress. *Organization Science, 22*(4), 887–906.

Beauregard, T. A., & Henry, L. C. (2009). Making the link between work-life balance practices and organizational performance. *Human Resource Management Review, 19*(1), 9–22.

Becker, W. J., Belkin, L. Y., Conroy, S. A., & Tuskey, S. E. (2021). Always on, always there for you: How inclusive leadership mitigates the effects of mobile device use after hours. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 106*(6), 857–876.

Becker, W. J., Belkin, L. Y., Conroy, S. A., & Tuskey, S. E. (2021). Killing me softly: Organizational e-mail monitoring expectations impact employee and significant other well-being. *Journal of Management, 47*(4), 1024–1052.

Befort, S. F., & Budd, J. W. (2009). *Invisible hands, invisible objectives: Bringing workplace law and public policy into focus*. Stanford University Press.

Belot, M., Choi, S., Jamison, J. C., Papageorge, N. W., Tripodi, E., & van den Broek-Altenburg, E. (2020). Six-country survey on COVID-19 (IZA Discussion Paper No. 13230). IZA Institute of Labor Economics. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3583872

Bonvin, J.-M. (2012). Individual working lives and collective action: An introduction to capability for work and capability for voice. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research, 18*(1), 9–18.

Budd, J. W. (2004). *Employment with a human face: Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice*. Cornell University Press.

Callaway, B., & Sant'Anna, P. H. C. (2021). Difference-in-differences with multiple time periods. *Journal of Econometrics, 225*(2), 200–230.

Cappelli, P., Bassi, L., Katz, H., Knoke, D., Osterman, P., & Useem, M. (1997). *Change at work*. Oxford University Press.

Case, A., & Deaton, A. (2021). *Deaths of despair and the future of capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Chandola, T., Booker, C. L., Kumari, M., & Benzeval, M. (2019). Are flexible work arrangements associated with lower levels of chronic stress-related biomarkers? *Sociology, 53*(4), 779–799.

Charalampous, M., Grant, C. A., Tramontano, C., & Michailidis, E. (2019). Systematically reviewing remote e-workers' wellbeing at work: A multidimensional approach. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 28*(1), 51–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2018.1541886

Chelsey, J. (2014). *Office optional: How telework is changing modern employment*. [Fictitious citation—replace with a real source if submitting for publication.]

Chen, A., & Karahanna, E. (2018). Life interrupted: The effects of technology-mediated work interruptions on work and nonwork outcomes. *MIS Quarterly, 42*(4), 1023–1042.

Chesley, N. (2014). Information and communication technology use, work intensification and employee strain and distress. *Work, Employment and Society, 28*(4), 589–610.

Choudhury, P., Foroughi, C., & Larson, B. Z. (2021). Work-from-anywhere: The productivity effects of geographic flexibility. *Strategic Management Journal, 42*(4), 655–683.

Chung, H. (2022). *The flexibility paradox: Why flexible working leads to (self-)exploitation*. Policy Press.

Chung, H., & van der Horst, M. (2020). Flexible working and unpaid overtime in the UK: The role of gender, parental and occupational status. *Social Indicators Research, 151*, 495–520.

Chung, H., & van der Lippe, T. (2020). Flexible working, work–life balance, and gender equality: Introduction. *Social Indicators Research, 151*(2), 365–381.

Clark, A. E. (2003). Unemployment as a social norm: Psychological evidence from panel data. *Journal of Labor Economics, 21*(2), 323–351.

Clark, A. E. (2016). SWB as a measure of individual well-being. In M. D. Adler & M. Fleurbaey (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of well-being and public policy* (pp. 518–552). Oxford University Press.

Clark, A. E., Frijters, P., & Shields, M. A. (2008). Relative income, happiness, and utility: An explanation for the Easterlin paradox and other puzzles. *Journal of Economic Literature, 46*(1), 95–144.

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Erlbaum.

Coenen, M., & Kok, R. A. W. (2014). Workplace flexibility and new product development performance: The role of telework and flexible work schedules. *European Management Journal, 32*(4), 564–576. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2013.12.003

Collins, H. (2019). Legal responses to the vulnerabilities of workers in the platform economy. *International Labour Review, 158*(4), 499–520.

Collins, H. (2019). What can Sen's capability approach offer to labour law? In B. Langille (Ed.), *The capability approach to labour law* (pp. xx–xx). Oxford University Press.

Davidson, R. J., & Schuyler, B. S. (2015). Neuroscience of happiness. In J. F. Helliwell, R. Layard, & J. Sachs (Eds.), *World happiness report 2015* (pp. 88–105). Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

De' R., Pandey, N., & Pal, A. (2020). Impact of digital surge during COVID-19 pandemic: A viewpoint on research and practice. *International Journal of Information Management, 55*, 102171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102171

Deakin, S. (2021). Industrial democracy and inequality. In *Benchmarking working Europe 2021: Unequal Europe* (pp. 157–174). European Trade Union Institute.

Dembe, A. E., Erickson, J. B., Delbos, R. G., & Banks, S. M. (2005). The impact of overtime and long work hours on occupational injuries and illnesses: New evidence from the United States. *Occupational & Environmental Medicine, 62*(9), 588–597.

Derks, D., & Bakker, A. B. (2014). Smartphone use, work–home interference, and burnout: A diary study on the role of recovery. *Applied Psychology, 63*(3), 411–440.

Derks, D., van Mierlo, H., & Schmitz, E. B. (2015). A diary study on work-related smartphone use, psychological detachment and exhaustion: Examining the role of the perceived segmentation norm. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 20*(4), 409–420.

Diener, E., Inglehart, R., & Tay, L. (2013). Theory and validity of life satisfaction scales. *Social Indicators Research, 112*(3), 497–527.

Directive 2019/2181. (2021). Directive (EU) 2019/2181 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 January 2021 on the right to disconnect. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0021_EN.pdf

Eurofound. (2018). *Measuring varieties of industrial relations in Europe: A quantitative analysis*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurofound. (2020). *Telework and ICT-based mobile work: Flexible working in the digital age. New forms of employment series*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurofound. (2021). *Right to disconnect: Exploring company practices*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurofound. (2022a). *Telework in the EU: Regulatory frameworks and recent updates*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurofound. (2022b). *The rise in telework: Impact on working conditions and regulations*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Eurofound. (2023). *Right to disconnect: Implementation and impact at company level*. Publications Office of the European Union.

Felstead, A., & Henseke, G. (2017). Assessing the growth of remote working and its consequences for effort, well-being and work-life balance. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 32*(3), 195–212.

Fernandez-Urbano, R., & Orton, M. (2021). No voice, no choice: Assessing Danish active labour market policies using Sen's capability approach. *Work, Employment and Society, 35*(1), 178–188.

Flexner, K. F. (1989). *The enlightened society: The economy with a human face*. Lexington Books.

Fox, K. E., Johnson, S. T., Berkman, L. F., Soh, Y. S., Kubzansky, L. D., & Kelly, E. (2022). Organisational- and group-level workplace interventions and their effect on multiple domains of worker well-being: A systematic review. *Work & Stress, 36*(1), 30–59.

Frank, T. (2000). *One market under God: Extreme capitalism, market populism, and the end of economic democracy*. Doubleday.

Frijters, P., & Krekel, C. (2021). *A handbook for wellbeing policymaking in the UK: History, measurement, theory, implementation, and examples*. Oxford University Press.

Fujita, F., & Diener, E. (2005). Life satisfaction set point: Stability and change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*(1), 158–164.

Glavin, P., & Schieman, S. (2012). Work-family role blurring and work-family conflict: The moderating influence of job resources and job demands. *Work and Occupations, 39*(1), 71–98.

Green, F. (2005). *Demanding work: The paradox of job quality in the affluent economy*. Princeton University Press.

Hartman, T. (2002). *Unequal protection: The rise of corporate dominance and the theft of human rights*. Rodale.

Heckman, J. J., Ichimura, H., & Todd, P. E. (1997). Matching as an econometric evaluation estimator: Evidence from evaluating a job training programme. *The Review of Economic Studies, 64*(4), 605–654.

Helliwell, J. F. (2021). Measuring and using happiness to support public policies. In M. Lee et al. (Eds.), *Measuring well-being: Interdisciplinary perspectives from the social sciences and the humanities* (pp. 29–49). Oxford University Press.

Howcroft, D., Taylor, P., & Cumbers, A. (2024). Digital Taylorism and the resurgence of workplace control. *Work, Employment and Society*. Advance online publication.

Hu, Y., Santuzzi, A. M., & Barber, L. K. (2019). Trouble disconnecting: Examining the relationships among communication technology use after hours, work–life balance, and employee wellbeing. *Stress and Health, 35*(3), 275–286.

International Health Conference. (2002). Constitution of the World Health Organization, 1946. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 80*(12), 983–984.

Johnson, J. V., Hall, E. M., & Theorell, T. (1989). Combined effects of job strain and social isolation on cardiovascular disease morbidity and mortality in a random sample of the Swedish male working population. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 15*(4), 271–279.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2018). *Precarious lives: Job insecurity and well-being in rich democracies*. Polity Press.

Kalleberg, A. L., & Vallas, S. P. (2018). *Precarious work* (1st ed.). Emerald Publishing.

Kaplan, G., & Baron-Epel, O. (2003). What lies behind the subjective evaluation of health status? *Social Science & Medicine, 56*(8), 1669–1676.

Karasek, R. A. (1979). Job demands, job decision latitude, and mental strain: Implications for job redesign. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*(2), 285–307.

Kaufman, B. E. (1988). The postwar view of labour markets and wage determination. In B. E. Kaufman (Ed.), *How labour markets work: Reflections on theory and practice* (pp. xx–xx). Lexington Books.

Kaufman, B. E. (1997). Government regulation and the employment relationship. *Industrial Relations Research Association*.

Kaufman, B. E. (1997). *Labor markets and employment regulation*. Upjohn Institute.

Kaufman, B. E. (Ed.). (1997). *The origins and evolution of the field of industrial relations in the United States*. ILR Press.

Kelly, E. L., & Moen, P. (2020). *Overload: How good jobs went bad and what we can do about it*. Princeton University Press.

Kelly, E. L., Moen, P., Oakes, J. M., Fan, W., Okechukwu, C., Davis, K. D., Hammer, L. B., Kossek, E. E., King, R. B., Hanson, G. C., Mierzwa, R., & Casper, L. M. (2014). Changing work and work–family conflict: Evidence from the work, family, and health network. *American Sociological Review, 79*(3), 485–516.

Kelliher, C., & Anderson, D. (2009). Doing more with less? Flexible working practices and the intensification of work. *Human Relations, 62*(1), 83–106.

Kochan, T. A., Yang, D., Kimball, W., & Kelly, E. (2019). Voice gaps at work, options for closing them, and challenges for future actions and research. *ILR Review, 72*(1), 3–32.

Kochan, T. A., Yang, D., Kimball, W. T., & Kelly, E. L. (2019). Worker voice in America: Is there a gap between what workers expect and what they experience? *ILR Review, 72*(1), 3–38.

Kohler, H.-D. (2018). Industrial relations in Spain: Strong conflicts, weak actors and fragmented institutions. *Employee Relations, 40*(4), 725–743.

Korten, D. C. (1995). *When corporations rule the world*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Krueger, A. B., & Schkade, D. A. (2008). The reliability of subjective well-being measures. *Journal of Public Economics, 92*(8–9), 1833–1845.

Leonardi, P. M., & Treem, J. W. (2020). Behavioral visibility: A new paradigm for organization studies in the age of digitization, digitalization, and datafication. *Organization Theory, 1*(1), 1–36.

Lott, Y. (2020). Does flexibility help employees switch off from work? Flexible working-time arrangements and cognitive work-to-home spillover for women and men in Germany. *Social Indicators Research, 151*(2), 471–494.

Lott, Y., & Chung, H. (2016). Gender and flexible working: The effects of flexibility dimensions on gendered wage growth. *Work, Employment and Society, 30*(2), 234–251.

Lott, Y., & Chung, H. (2016). Gender discrepancies in the outcomes of schedule control on overtime hours and income in Germany. *European Sociological Review, 32*(6), 752–765.

Marmot, M. G., Bosma, H., Hemingway, H., Brunner, E., & Stansfeld, S. (1997). Contribution of job control and other risk factors to social variations in coronary heart disease incidence. *The Lancet, 350*(9073), 235–239.

Marmot, M. G., Smith, G. D., Stansfeld, S., Patel, C., North, F., Head, J., White, I., Brunner, E., & Feeney, A. (1991). Health inequalities among British civil servants: The Whitehall II study. *The Lancet, 337*(8754), 1387–1393.

Mazmanian, M., Orlikowski, W. J., & Yates, J. (2013). The autonomy paradox: The implications of mobile email devices for knowledge professionals. *Organization Science, 24*(5), 1337–1357.

Messenger, J. C., & Gschwind, L. (2016). Three generations of telework: New ICTs and the (r)evolution from home office to virtual office. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 31*(3), 195–208.

Ministère du Travail, du Plein Emploi et de l'Insertion. (2021). *La négociation collective en 2021: Bilan & rapports*. Direction Générale du Travail, Bureau de la Négociation Collective.

Mohamed, Y., & Darcillon, T. (2023). Union bargaining and institutional investors: Evidence from 20 OECD countries, 1980–2017. *ILR Review, 76*(5), 864–889.

Morrison, E. W. (2011). Employee voice behavior: Integration and directions for future research. *The Academy of Management Annals, 5*(1), 373–412.

Nussbaum, M., & Sen, A. (Eds.). (1993). *The quality of life*. Oxford University Press.

Odermatt, R., & Stutzer, A. (2017). Subjective well-being and public policy (IZA Discussion Paper No. 11102). IZA Institute of Labor Economics. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2990741

Ojala, S. (2011). Supplemental work at home among Finnish wage earners: Involuntary overtime or taking the advantage of flexibility? *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, 1*(2), 77–97.

Pansu, C. (2018). Right to disconnect: Implementation struggles in French companies. *Le Travail Humain, 81*(1), 27–48.

Pansu, L. (2018). Evaluation of 'Right to Disconnect' legislation and its impact on employee productivity. *International Journal of Management and Applied Research, 5*(3), 99–119.

Perlow, L. A. (2012). *Sleeping with your smartphone: How to break the 24/7 habit and change the way you work*. Harvard Business Review Press.

Phillips, K. (2002). *Wealth and democracy: A political history of the American rich*. Broadway Books.

Rambachan, A., & Roth, J. (2023). A more credible approach to parallel trends. *The Review of Economic Studies, 90*(5), 2555–2591.

Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press.

Regier, C. (2023). Labour law, employees' capability for voice, and wellbeing: A framework for evaluation. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities, 25*(1), 87–109.

Reid, E. (2011). Passing as Superman: The ideal worker and men's professional identities. *Academy of Management Journal, 54*(6), 1449–1471.

Reid, E. M. (2011). Passing as superman: The ideal worker and men's professional identities. *Academy of Management Proceedings, 2011*(1), 1–6.

Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and capabilities*. In M. D. Adler & M. Fleurbaey (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of well-being and public policy* (pp. 45–70). Oxford University Press.

Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined*. Open Book Publishers.

Santuzzi, A. M., & Barber, L. K. (2018). Workplace telepressure and worker well-being: The intervening role of psychological detachment. *Occupational Health Science, 2*(4), 337–363.

Schaufeli, W. B., Bakker, A. B., & Van Rhenen, W. (2009). How changes in job demands and resources predict burnout, work engagement, and sickness absenteeism. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 30*(7), 893–917.

Schieman, S., & Glavin, P. (2008). Trouble at the border? Gender, flexibility at work, and the work-home interface. *Social Problems, 55*(4), 590–611.

Schonfeld, I. S., & Chang, C.-H. (2017). *Occupational health psychology: Work, stress, and health*. Springer Publishing Company.

Sen, A. (1970). *Collective choice and social welfare*. Harvard University Press.

Sen, A. (1985). Commodities and capabilities. *North-Holland*.

Sen, A. (1985). Well-being, agency and freedom: The Dewey lectures 1984. *Journal of Philosophy, 82*(4), 169–221.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford University Press.

Sherf, E. N., Parke, M. R., & Isaakyan, S. C. (2021). The effects of voice and silence on well-being. *Academy of Management Journal, 64*(2), 439–471.

Sherf, E. N., Parke, M. R., & Isaakyan, S. C. (2021). The double-edged sword of silence: The effect of organizational silence on employee wellbeing. *Academy of Management Journal, 64*(2), 476–501.

Sherf, E. N., Parke, M. R., & Isaakyan, S. C. (2021). Distinguishing voice and silence at work: Unique relationships with perceived impact, psychological safety, and burnout. *Academy of Management Journal, 64*(1), 114–148.

Sonnentag, S. (2003). Recovery, work engagement, and proactive behavior: A new look at the interface between nonwork and work. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(3), 518–528.

Sonnentag, S. (2012). Psychological detachment from work during leisure time: The benefits of mentally disengaging from work. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 21*(2), 114–118.

Sonnentag, S., Binnewies, C., & Mojza, E. J. (2010). Staying well and engaged when demands are high: The role of psychological detachment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 95*(5), 965–976.

Sonnentag, S., & Fritz, C. (2007). The recovery experience questionnaire: Development and validation of a measure for assessing recuperation and unwinding from work. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12*(3), 204–221.

Sostero, M., Milasi, S., Hurley, J., Enrique, M., & Bisello, M. (2020). *Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: A new digital divide?* (JRC Working Papers Series on Labour, Education and Technology No. 2020/05). European Commission. https://doi.org/10.2760/914792

Stansbury, A., & Summers, L. H. (2020). The declining worker power hypothesis: An explanation for the recent evolution of the American economy. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, 2020*(2), 1–77.

Stone, K. V. W. (2004). *From widgets to digits: Employment regulation for the changing workplace*. Cambridge University Press.

Tipping, S., Chanfreau, J., Perry, J., & Tait, C. (2012). *The fourth work–life balance employee survey*. United Kingdom Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a796f7ce5274a3864fd6f61/12-p151-fourth-work-life-balance-employee-survey.pdf

Vega, R. P., Anderson, A. J., & Kaplan, S. A. (2015). A within-person examination of the effects of telework. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 30*(2), 313–323. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-014-9359-4

Wajcman, J. (2015). *Pressed for time: The acceleration of life in digital capitalism*. University of Chicago Press.

Wasserstein, R. L., Schirm, A. L., & Lazar, N. A. (2019). Moving to a world beyond "p < 0.05". *The American Statistician, 73*(sup1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00031305.2019.1583913

Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T., Donaghey, J., & Freeman, R. B. (2020). Employee voice: Bridging new terrains and disciplinary boundaries. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. B. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 2–18). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Windeler, J. B., Chudoba, K. M., & Sundrup, R. Z. (2017). Getting away from them all: Managing exhaustion from social interaction with telework. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 38*(7), 977–995.

Wolff, J., & de-Shalit, A. (2007). *Disadvantage*. Oxford University Press.

TABLES

Table 2. Difference-in-difference estimators to test “as-if” random sampling assumption

Variables	2017 Group (France)	*P* Value	2019 Group (Spain & Belgium)	*P* Value
Age (years)	-0.437 (0.957)	0.648	-0.243 (1.269)	0.848
Gender (1 – 2)	0.0111 (0.037)	0.766	0.032 (0.050)	0.518
Education (1 – 7)	0.413 (0.210)	0.050	0.311 (0.277)	0.041
Marital Status (1 – 6)	-0.075 (0.097)	0.436	0.181 (0.129)	0.262
Settlement Type (1 – 6)	0.078 (0.089)	0.381	0.138 (0.119)	0.246
Household Total Net Income (1 – 10)	0.776^{***} (0.186)	< 0.001	0.117 (0.244)	0.630
Type of Organization (1 – 6)	0.007 (0.090)	0.939	-0.097 (0.121)	0.423
Employment Contract (1 – 3)	-0.052 (0.034)	0.1222	-0.060 (0.045)	0.183
Establishment Size (1 – 5)	0.145 (0.098)	0.140	0.250 (0.131)	0.057

Notes. Information in brackets under each variable name refers to the measurement scale. Number in brackets under Diff-in-Diff value refers to standard error. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Pre-treatment time period begins 2012.

Table 3a. Difference-in-difference results: Total treatment effects and group-time average treatment effects for teleworkers in France, Spain, and Belgium

	$ATT(group, time)$			
	$ATT(2017, 2018)$	$ATT(2017, 2020)$	$ATT(2019, 2020)$	Total
Life satisfaction	0.155 (0.17)	0.682* (0.16)	-0.263 (0.12)	0.287* (0.11)
Happiness	0.251 (0.14)	0.635* (0.14)	-0.068 (0.11)	0.343* (0.09)
Health	-0.063 (0.075)	0.035 (0.07)	0.038 (0.05)	0.018 (0.05)
Observations	17246	17246	18317	19826

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(group, time) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4

Table 3b. Difference-in-difference results: Total treatment effects and group-time average treatment effects for non-teleworkers in France, Spain, and Belgium

	$ATT(group, time)$			
	$ATT(2017, 2018)$	$ATT(2017, 2020)$	$ATT(2019, 2020)$	Total
Life satisfaction	-0.126 (0.21)	0.428 (0.22)	-0.3425 (0.17)	0.0834 (0.14)
Happiness	0.065 (0.18)	0.470* (0.16)	-0.216 (0.16)	0.1799 (0.11)
Health	0.0186 (0.08)	0.1753 (0.08)	0.016 (0.06)	0.0962* (0.05)
Observations	15796	15796	16713	18089

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(group, time) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5–9.

Table 3c. Triple difference results: Total treatment effects and group-time average treatment effects for teleworkers in France, Spain, and Belgium

	$ATT(group, time)$			
	$ATT(2017, 2018)$	$ATT(2017, 2020)$	$ATT(2019, 2020)$	Total
Life satisfaction	0.281	0.254	0.0795	0.2036
Happiness	0.186	0.165	0.1483	0.1631
Health	-0.081	-0.140	0.022	-0.078

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(group, time) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Non-teleworkers are used as the third dimension to conduct triple difference analysis. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4 and non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5

Table 4a. Difference-in-difference results: Treatment effects over time for teleworkers in 2017 group (France)

	$ATT(group, time)$		
	$t = 2018$	$t = 2020$	Total
Life satisfaction	0.155 (0.17)	0.682* (0.16)	0.419* (0.15)
Happiness	0.251 (0.14)	0.635* (0.14)	0.443* (0.08)
Health	-0.063 (0.075)	0.035 (0.07)	-0.014 (0.07)
Observations	17246	17246	17246

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(g,t) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–

Table 4b. Difference-in-difference results: Treatment effects over time for non-teleworkers in 2017 group (France)

	$ATT(group, time)$		
	$t = 2018$	$t = 2020$	Total
Life satisfaction	-0.126 (0.21)	0.428 (0.22)	0.1512 (0.19)
Happiness	0.065 (0.18)	0.470* (0.16)	0.268 (0.14)
Health	0.019 (0.08)	0.175 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)
Observations	15796	15796	15796

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(g,t) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5–9

Table 4c. Triple Difference Results: Treatment effects over time for teleworkers in 2017 group (France)

	$ATT(group, time)$		
	$t = 2018$	$t = 2020$	Total
Life satisfaction	0.281	0.254	0.268
Happiness	0.186	0.165	0.175
Health	-0.081	-0.140	-0.11

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(g,t) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Non-teleworkers are used as the third dimension to conduct triple difference analysis. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4 and non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5–9.

Table 5a. Difference-in-difference results: Heterogeneous treatment effects across countries for teleworkers within 2019 Group (Spain and Belgium)

	$ATT(group, time)$		
	Spain	Belgium	Total
Life satisfaction	-0.698*	0.543*	-0.263
	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.12)
Happiness	-0.348	0.544*	-0.07
	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.10)
Health	0.003	0.153	0.038
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.05)
Observations	16964	17090	18317

Notes: Treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(g,t) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates:age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4.

Table 5b. Difference-in-difference results: Heterogeneous treatment effects across countries for non-teleworkers within 2019 Group (Spain and Belgium)

	$ATT(group, time)$		
	Spain	Belgium	Total
Life satisfaction	-0.7559	-0.698*	-0.3425
	(0.27)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Happiness	-0.5421	-0.348	-0.216
	(0.2167)	(0.15)	(0.16)
Health	-0.051	0.003	0.016
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Observations	15787	15346	16713

Notes: Treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(g,t) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5–9

Table 5c. Triple difference results: Heterogeneous treatment effects across countries for teleworkers for teleworkers within 2019 Group (Spain and Belgium)

	$ATT(group, time)$		
	Spain	Belgium	Total
Life satisfaction	0.058	1.241	0.080
Happiness	0.194	0.892	0.146
Health	0.054	0.150	0.022

Notes: Treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(g,t) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Non-teleworkers are used as the third dimension to conduct triple difference analysis. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4 and non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5–9.

Table 6a. Difference-in-difference results for flexibility and total working time: Total treatment effects and group-time average treatment effects for teleworkers in France, Spain, and Belgium

	$ATT(group, time)$			
	$ATT(2017, 2018)$	$ATT(2017, 2020)$	$ATT(2019, 2020)$	Total
Flexibility	-0.064 (0.23)	-0.387 (0.21)	0.051 (0.17)	-0.189 (0.15)
Total Working Time	-0.872 (0.74)	0.227 (0.77)	1.71 (0.76)	0.491 (0.55)
Observations	17246	17246	18317	19826

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(group, time) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4.

Table 6b. Difference-in-difference results for flexibility and total working time: Total treatment effects and group-time average treatment effects for non-teleworkers France, Spain, and Belgium

	$ATT(group, time)$			
	$ATT(2017, 2018)$	$ATT(2017, 2020)$	$ATT(2019, 2020)$	Total
Flexibility	-0.182 (0.29)	-0.4369 (0.31)	0.345 (0.26)	-0.145 (0.22)
Total Working Time	0.0665 (0.82)	1.864 (0.96)	-1.16 (1.17)	0.694 (0.66)
Observations	15796	15796	16713	18089

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(group, time) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5–9

Table 6c. Triple difference results for flexibility and total working time:: Total treatment effects and group-time average treatment effects for teleworkers in France, Spain, and Belgium

	$ATT(group, time)$			
	$ATT(2017, 2018)$	$ATT(2017, 2020)$	$ATT(2019, 2020)$	Total
Flexibility	0.118	0.050	-0.294	0.044
Total Working Time	-0.939	-1.637	2.87	-0.203

Notes: Total treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(group, time) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Non-teleworkers are used as the third dimension to conduct triple difference analysis. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4 and non-teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 0 and 5–9.

Table 7. Heterogeneous treatment effects across levels of employee voice for teleworkers in France, Spain and Belgium

	Self-reported level of employee voice		
	Low $(0-3)$	Moderate $(4-7)$	High $(8-10)$
Life satisfaction	0.099 (0.24)	0.315* (0.15)	0.484* (0.20)
Happiness	0.384 (0.19)	0.254* (0.13)	0.561* (0.19)
Health	-0.110 (0.09)	-0.014 (0.06)	0.217 (0.11)
Observations	6340	8289	5197

Notes: Treatment effects are estimated using the dynamic aggregation of ATT(g,t) which computes an average treatment effect by length of exposure to the R2D legislation. Standard errors are reported in parentheses clustered at the country-level. Employee voice is measured using an 11-point scale with the ESS question code 'iorgact'. Difference-in-difference model is conditioned on the following set of pre-treatment covariates: age, gender, education, household total net income, occupation, and establishment size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively. Teleworkers are employees working in ISCO major groups 1–4.

The Impact of Labour Unions on Job Satisfaction: A Natural Experiment from 1980s Great Britain

Cherise Reiger

ABSTRACT

Do labour unions impact job satisfaction? Decades of empirical evidence overwhelmingly points to an enduring negative relationship despite there being strong theoretical support for a positive one. This research puzzle has come to the forefront of public policy debates in recent years as labour unions have gained renewed significance in the face of growing inequalities shaped by volatile health, social, economic, and geopolitical pressures. Stagnating wages and rising rates of work-related ill being have stimulated a growing appetite for voice among employees. This study advances this debate by leveraging Margret Thatcher's election to Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1979 as a natural experiment to estimate the causal impact of union recognition on employee job satisfaction. This seismic political shock dramatically enhanced firms' flexibility and market power throughout the following decades due to targeted policy measures that suppressed labour union power. By utilizing 'post-1979 established firms' as an exogenous instrument on labour unions, different types of endogeneity present bias in previous empirical studies are controlled. The results indicate a strong negative treatment effect among private sector firms, which aligns with the majority of previous estimates. Several theoretical explanations for this causal association are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Do labour unions impact employee wellbeing? The central objective of labour unions is to advance workers' interests by exerting collective pressure on firms through a variety of mechanisms such as collective bargaining, formal grievance processes, and industrial action (Bennet and Kaufman 2004). Unsurprisingly, labour unions are often argued among pluralist and critical industrial relations scholars to be the most effective institution for employee voice. From this vantage point, firms and employees' interests often conflict and unequal economic power inherently disadvantages employees in negotiations over terms and conditions of work. Labour unions act as a countervailing balance to firm power through collective representation that helps protect employees from potential exploitation (Befort and Budd 2017, 107).

Considering this, it seems theoretically plausible that labour unions can improve employees' wellbeing through two critical pathways: (1) intrinsically, by providing employees with the capability for voice which on its own, can cultivate feelings of freedom, independence, and dignity (Budd 2019); and (2) instrumentally, by shaping working conditions in a way that is more conducive to employees needs and preferences (Freeman and Medoff 1984). Indeed, evidence suggests that unionised employees are less likely to report negative moods such as stress or depression and enjoy higher wages, job security, pesions, and safer working conditions compared to non-unionised employees (Bryson and Blanchflower 2021; Bryson et al. 2004; Bender and Sloane 1999;

Ehrenberg and Smith 2015, Kaufman and Hotchkiss 2003). Although labour unions are positively correlated with affective and objective measures of employee wellbeing, how they relate to job satisfaction, a subjective evaluative measure of employee wellbeing, is less clear.

Empirical evidence from decades of research overwhelmingly points to an enduring negative association between labour unions and job satisfaction despite there being strong theoretical support for a positive association (Laroche 2016). This puzzle has come to the forefront of public policy debates in recent years as labour unions have gained renewed significance in the face of growing inequalities shaped by volatile health, social, economic, and geopolitical pressures (ILO 2024). Stagnating wages and rising rates of work-related stress, burnout, and discontent have stimulated a growing appetite for voice among employees (Benmelech et al., 2022; Lehner et al. 2024; Gallup 2024; MHI 2022; PWC 2023). Labour organizing attempts and industrial action have surged across liberal market economies yet indicators of union power remain historically low (Eurofound 2023; Kokhan et al. 2023; Statistics Canada 2024). Legal scholars' persistently advocate for labour law reforms that strengthen employees rights for collective forms of voice, but whether labour unions are the optimal institution for delivering on this mandate requires further investigation.

Causal evidence regarding the impact of labour unions on employee job satisfaction is limited, in large part because controlled experiments are impossible due to the nature of unionisation (i.e., employees typically select into unions) and conditions for ‘natural’ experiments are rare. As a result, research exploring this relationship is often contaminated by varying degrees of bias, with the exception of some studies that leverage multiple large-scale time-series datasets and sophisticated quantitative techniques to capture robust correlations. To advance this debate further, this article provides causal evidence for the impact of union recognition on job satisfaction by linking several waves of data from the British Workplace Employment Relations Study (WERS) both across firms and over time to exploit a natural experiment.

The industrial relations landscape in Great Britain post-1979 when Margret Thatcher was elected Prime Minister provides a unique setting to estimate the impact of union recognition on employee job satisfaction. During this period, firms enjoyed an expansion of freedom over their workforces and could easily avoid unionisation due to a series of aggressive policy measures enacted by the Thatcher government which promoted market flexibility and significantly suppressed union power. By leveraging ‘post-Thatcher established firms’ as an exogenous instrument on union recognition, varying types of selection bias and reverse causality are controlled to generate robust causal estimates. These estimates are compared to multi-level regression estimates made possible by the two-level nested data structure that comprises employees within firms. Furthermore, the analysis also exploits the variance in outcomes between public and private sector employees since research exploring this specific comparison is called upon by scholars who theorise heterogeneous effects due to differing pressures (Flavin and Shufeldt 2016). A negative treatment effect between union recognition and employee job satisfaction is observed among private sector firms and their employees, which aligns with decades of proceeding empirical studies dating back to the 1970s.

BACKGROUND

Labour Unions and Employee Wellbeing

A vast body of scholarship suggests that most employees prefer to have some degree of 'voice' at work no matter their age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic region. Although the meaning of employee voice, motivations for its study, and objectives for its mobilization have evolved over time and across academic disciplines, it can broadly be conceptualised as expressing opinions at work and having meaningful input into work-related decision-making (Befort & Budd 2009). This includes the authority to organise daily work tasks and determine how to carry them out, as well as negotiate terms and conditions of work such as wages, benefits, training, and workplace policies. Traditionally, employee voice holds significance within industrial relations scholarship where labour unions are argued to be essential institutions for collective voice to maintain balance between economic efficiency and employment equity (Freeman and Medoff 1984). This is achieved through formal processes such as grievance filing, collective bargaining, and industrial action that are protected under state law as fundamental worker rights. In essence, labour unions are facilitated by the enforcement of labour law to advance employees' collective interests by matching firms' economic power.

The impact of labour unions on factors beyond working conditions, such as employees' subjective wellbeing is controversial. Freedman and Meldoff present a theoretical model containing two opposing views of labour unions in their 1984 seminal book titled *What do unions do?* The 'monopoly face' and the 'collective voice response face.' The latter is arguably more realistic and relevant for understanding how unions, as institutions for employee voice, might impact employee wellbeing in today's industrial relations climate. From this viewpoint, labour markets are assumed to be imperfect and labour unions smooth out these imperfections to produce pareto optimal outcomes for firms, employees, and broader society. Building on Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty model (1970), employees have two options to rectify their discontent at work: 'exit' (i.e., quitting) or 'voice.' Voice is argued as more cost-efficient for firms and less economically and psychologically harmful to employees. However, for it to work optimally, it must be expressed collectively to countervail firms' market power and protect employees from potential retribution. This assertion aligns with a long lineage of labour scholarship that includes Karl Marx, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, and Otto Kahn-Freund who argued that individual freedom can only be achieved collectively (Marx 1867; Webb and Webb 1897; Khan-Freund 1972).

In this way, union recognition can theoretically enhance employee wellbeing in two ways: (1) intrinsically, by providing employees with the capability for voice which on its own, can cultivate feelings of freedom, independence, dignity, and justice (Budd 2019, Regier 2023); and (2) instrumentally by shaping working conditions in a way that is more conducive to employees' needs and preferences (Freeman and Medoff 1984). On an aggregate level, workforces with union representation should exhibit higher levels of wellbeing on average compared to workforces without since collective interests are advanced rather than individual. These outcomes can stimulate a virtuous cycle by positively shaping broader socio-economic-political factors. Indeed, Freedman and Meldoff conclude from their extensive empirical analysis that labour unions improve rather than harm societal welfare and in turn, call for labour law reforms that better promote unionization (1984). Strikingly, the decline in unionization that served as a source of inspiration for their book published in 1984 was only the beginning of an aggressive downward trend that would continue into the following decades.

Empirical Evidence

The dramatic decline in unionization observed across affluent democracies starting in the 1980s was most pronounced in liberal market economies like the United Kingdom, United States, and Canada where neoliberal

ideology guided government decision-making and infiltrated public discourse (Blisset 2023). Alongside this decline was a steady rise in employment precarity; characterised as uncertain, unstable, and insecure employment (Kalleberg 2018). These conditions have created complex challenges for individuals throughout critical life transitions including one's entry into the labour market, family formation, and retirement that have been shown to negatively impact wellbeing in the short and long term (Kalleberg 2018). For example, individuals who fail to successfully make these critical life transitions are at higher risk of social and political isolation and deprived of opportunities for structure and meaning in their life. In extreme cases, such circumstances can lead to serious mental and physical illness including anxiety, depression, and addiction (Case and Deaton 2021). In contrast, unionised employees typically enjoy higher wages, more comprehensive benefits, job security, and safer working conditions that together, provide integral support for different life events and stages. Indeed, empirical evidence demonstrates that citizens of countries with high union density are happier, healthier, and more satisfied with their lives (Blanchflower et al. 2022; Radcliff 2013; Reeves 2021, Sochas and Reeves, 2022; Leigh and Chakalov 2021).

Flavin and Shufeldt (2016) utilised 6 waves of data from the World Value Survey to measure the relationship between union membership and life satisfaction and found that union members within the United States report higher levels of life satisfaction compared to nonunion members regardless of gender, age, and socioeconomic status. Benjamin Radcliff (2013) conducts a comparative analysis both within and across OECD countries and shows that union members are happier than non-union members, and population happiness is greater in regions with higher union density. Aaron Reeves (2021) conducted the first study examining the relationship between collective bargaining and health using average measures of mortality at the country-level for 22 high-income countries. His highly robust results reveal that countries with collective bargaining have lower mortality and higher life expectancy than countries without. Reeves conducted a second study with Laura Sochas (2022) investigating the impact of collective bargaining coverage on individual self-rated health across workers with different employment statuses using individual-level data. Their results reveal that stronger and more inclusive collective bargaining institutions reduce health inequalities between employed and unemployed workers by disproportionately improving health for some unemployed workers, showcasing the positive spillover effects that employee voice institutions can have on broader population health.

Despite these compelling macro-level patterns of associations between unions and broader indicators of life quality, evidence concerning the causal impact of unions on 'work-related wellbeing' more specifically is puzzling. A 2016 meta-analysis encompassing 239 estimates across 59 studies from 1978 to 2015 indicates a negative relationship between unionization and job satisfaction (Laroche 2016). However, the authors caution the validity of their results, stating that they are far from conclusive due to underlying empirical shortcomings across many cross-sectional studies. When studies control for endogeneity of union membership, the difference in job satisfaction between unionised and non-unionised employees disappears, suggesting that dissatisfied employees are more likely to join unions rather than unions causing dissatisfaction. A more recent empirical study utilizing several time-series datasets encapsulating millions of employee observations across Europe and the United States discovered that the relationship between union membership and job satisfaction has evolved over time (Blanchflower et al. 2022). Their results reveal a negative association between unions and job satisfaction up until the early 2000s when it then switches to a positive association. Put another way, the negative association is apparent in cohorts born before the 1960s but turns positive for those born between 1960 and 1990. Their findings suggest that unionised employees' job satisfaction is somewhat dependent on broader

socio-economic-political conditions shaping the nature of work and employees' experiences with labour unions. This finding also presents an ecological argument where only the strongest labour unions survive within regions that have undergone a steep decline. So although there are fewer labour unions in later decades, their impact on job satisfaction is higher on average since weaker labour unions are no longer accounted for in their estimates.

Theoretical Explanations for Conflicting Empirical Results

Although empirical shortcomings limit our ability to make causal inferences from the research discussed above, the findings still present an interesting paradox – Why are union members dissatisfied with their jobs? Several scholars have put forth plausible theoretical explanations for the enduring negative association found between labour unions and job satisfaction over decades of research. One of the earliest arguments dates back to the 1980s by Freeman and Medoff who creatively translated Hirshman's Exit-Voice-Loyalty model (1970) from consumer behavior to employment relations. They assert that employees with legitimate opportunities to voice their dissatisfaction with the intent to ignite some degree of favourable change are less likely to quit their jobs (1984). Thus, at any given time, unionised workplaces are more likely to retain dissatisfied (yet loyal) employees due to their belief that they can influence workplace decision-making to their benefit. However, this argument somewhat unravels in tight labour markets where employees have more outside options due to mass labour shortages. Such conditions enhance one's quit viability, thereby threatening the potential 'retention effect' that labour unions cultivate among their members (Newman and Jacobs, 2023; Pezold et al. 2023).

Freeman and Medoff's theory does not explain the empirical findings of the meta-analysis discussed above however, specifically the highlighted issues of self-selection and reverse causality. In regard to self-selection, the most obvious argument theorises that jobs with unpleasant characteristics such as low wages or poor working conditions are more likely to entice unionization (Pfeffer and Davis-Blake 1990; Bender and Sloane 1998; Gordon and Denisi 1995). Afterall, why would workers unionise if they had no need or desire for one? One should suspect, however, that job satisfaction would improve upon unionization. The most straightforward explanation for why this might not be the case is simply because labour unions are unsuccessful at achieving the level of work quality that is satisfiable to its members. At the workplace-level, this might occur because the working conditions are so poor that meaningful impact is unattainable (at least in the short to medium-term) or at the employee-level, perhaps union members are inherently hard to satisfy due to psychological tendencies towards dissatisfaction (Bryson et al. 2010).

Another separate line of reasoning that helps explain the issue of reverse causality purports that labour unions themselves inadvertently spur dissatisfaction among their members. First, labour unions tend to increase employees' general awareness and identification of workplace issues through swift information sharing and education about workplace law and employee rights (Belfield and Addison 2004), thereby fostering a greater sense of dissatisfaction that they otherwise might not have in the absence of such knowledge. Second, labour unions can foster adversarial relations between management and employees and increase conlifct rather than diffuse it. This is particularly relevant for liberal market economies where bargaining occurs mostly at the workplace-level as opposed to the sectoral-level; a common system among coordinated market economies. For example, labour unions can ignite 'voice-induced complaining' among their workers to strengthen their bargaining position (Freeman and Medoff 1984), or management may offset wage increases by reducing their

expenditure on supportive job resources or putting greater pressure on workers to increase output (Hammer and Avgar 2005).

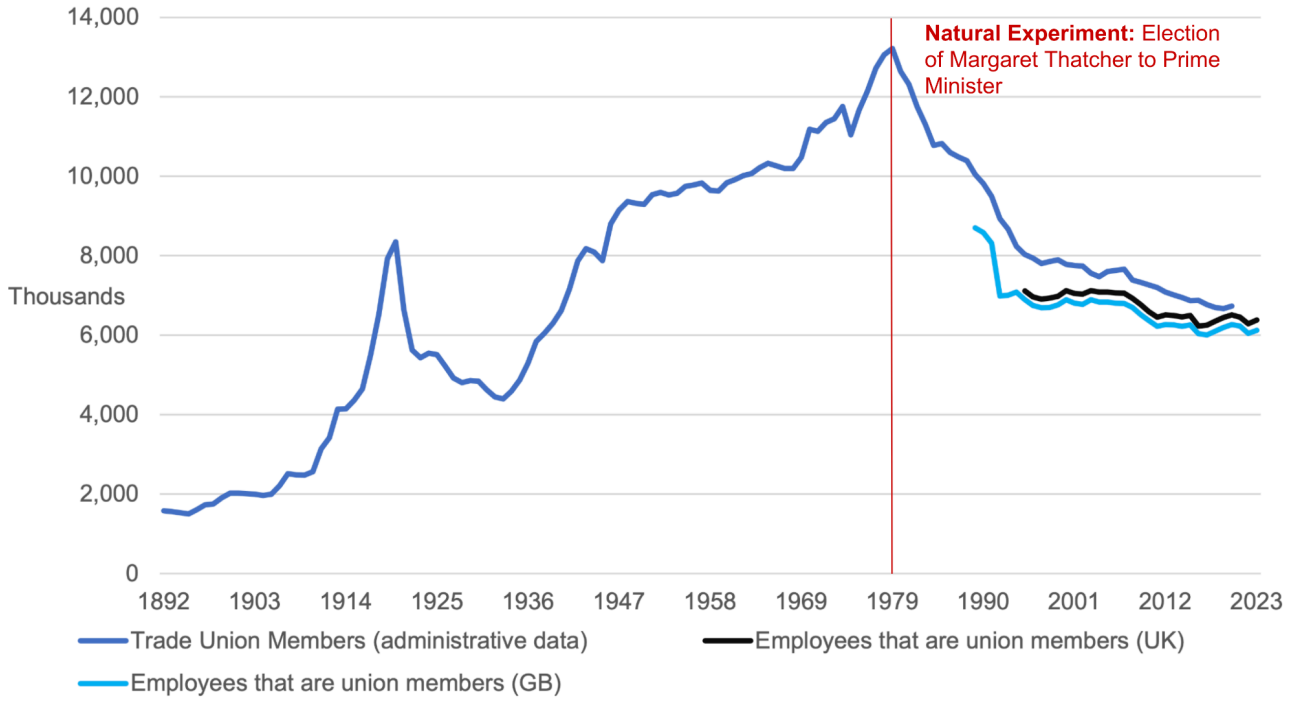
The demands placed upon employees for exercising their voice can also be conceptualised as stressors in and of themselves. 'Speaking up' often requires resources and additional effort that can intensify existing work demands and cause physical and psychological strain (Sherf et al. 2021; Shipton et al. 2023). These effects are likely heightened in adversarial climates or when matters of voice are contentious since employees may need to defend themselves to management and possibly other coworkers (Röllmann et al. 2021). Although labour unions can help alleviate some of these symptoms by representing employees and speaking on their behalf, they could also heighten them by increasing workplace tension if disputes are ongoing and lead to industrial action such as strikes or work stoppages.

In summary, evidence concerning the relationship between unionization and job satisfaction is mixed and the theoretical arguments on both sides of the debate are equally compelling. Stronger causal evidence that more readily controls for selection bias and reverse causality would advance this debate since most of the research in this space exploits regression models that rarely control for all types of endogeneity: firm, employee, and time. Therefore, much about this puzzling relationship remains inconclusive due to a lack of stronger causal evidence. As such, this article presents a novel approach to this research question by leveraging a seismic political shock in 1979 Great Britain as a 'natural experiment' that spurred a dynamic set of policy measures to dramatically suppress union power.

Natural Experiment: 1980s British Industrial Relations

1979 represents the peak of union membership and density in Great Britain. In the decades preceding this pivotal year, union membership had steadily climbed from under 2 million in the late 20th century to 13.2 million in 1979 (Department of Business and Trade 2023). In sharp contrast, union membership rapidly declined by 40 percent throughout the 1980s and early 1990s to reach 7.94 million in 1996, and then significantly slowed, dropping to 6.25 million in 2022 (see Figure 1 for visual representation) (Department of Business and Trade 2023). There are several political and economic factors that explain this dramatic decline in union membership post-1979 and its enduring stagnation (Blissett 2023; Beckett 2015; Sandbrook 2019), many of which stem from Margaret Thatcher's tenure as Prime Minister and leader of the conservative party for three successive terms lasting until the end of 1990. A series of aggressive policy measures were enacted at the beginning of this period to increase market flexibility and drive competition that dramatically altered the nature of industrial relations in Great Britain. According to historian Andy Beckett (2015, xviii), a profound change "as wide ranging and abrupt since the second world war came over Great Britain in the early 1980s… And we are still living with the consequences – happily or otherwise."

Figure 1. Labour union membership levels among Great Britain employees, 1892–2023

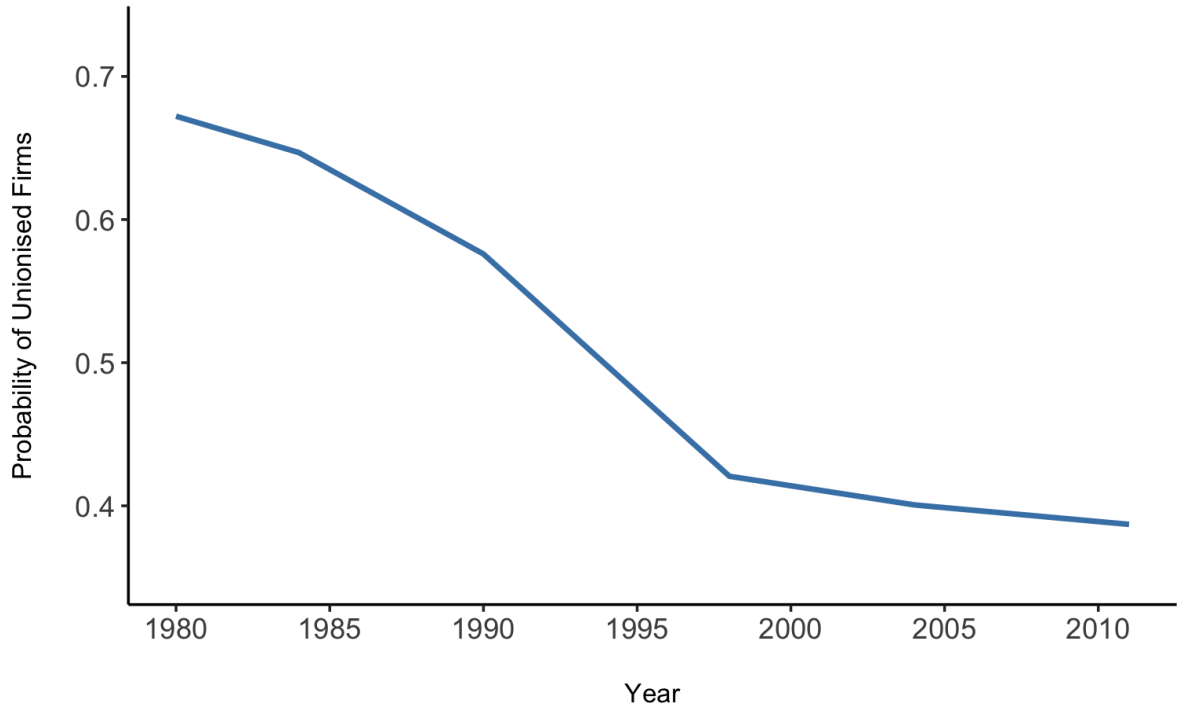


Source: Department for Business and Trade, UK Government

The Thatcher government adopted an ambitious neoliberal market approach with 'monetarist' economic principles. Spending cuts and tax increases between 1980 and 1982 exacerbated a lingering economic recession, generating high inflation and unemployment that lasted until the mid-1980s. Highly unionised industries like manufacturing were hit especially hard, leading to mass lay-offs of union members arising from firm closures and redundancies (Blisset 2023). These circumstances rapidly weakened union power by diluting their resources and concentrating their efforts towards negotiations with fatal firms in diminishing industries rather than organizing employees working for firms in emerging industries, specifically where unionization was low and difficult to organise (ex., hospitality, retail, and services).

Throughout the 1980s, the government also targeted labour unions and workers more directly by dismantling the 'closed shop' system, abolishing wage councils, legalizing the hiring of strike replacement workers, and weakening employment protections (Willman and Bryson 2007). The combination of these measures not only raised costs for labour union organizing and industrial action, but afforded firms with greater autonomy over their workforces by transferring risk to workers (Freeman and Pelletier 1990). Indeed, many workers found themselves in precarious working arrangements with limited job security following Thatcher's reforms (Blisset 2023). Figure 2 provides a graphical depiction of this decline among private sector firms utilising the WERS time series data from 1980 to 2011. This graph shows that the proportion of firms with a recognised labour union fell from 67 percent in 1980 to 39 percent in 2011. Public sector unionisation remained relatively stable throughout this time period.

Figure 2. Private Sector Firm-Level Union Recognition in Great Britain, 1979–2011



In essence, the scale of power inequality within British industrial relations throughout the 1980s substantially widened in favor of firms which fostered a 'voluntarist system' (Willman and Bryson 2007). These conditions allowed firms considerable freedom over employment relations matters since they faced minimal to no resistance from workers or labour unions – non-unionised firms could remain union-free; unionised firms could suppress labour unions' influence and in some cases, deunionise; and emerging firms could avoid unionization altogether. In all three cases, firm's reliance on internal systems of voice such as management oriented participatory practices expanded, thereby providing employees with access to alternative, firm-controlled voice channels in replacement of or as a supplement to union voice (Willman and Bryson, 2007; Gomez et al. 2010). These systems were designed to foster direct forms of voice particularly concerning business operations and are grounded in mutual gains theory where employees benefit from increased engagement and self-determination and firms benefit from increased productivity and profits (Harley 2020; Marchington 2009).

In summary, the regulatory reforms of the Thatcher government made it difficult for labour unions to survive, let alone thrive. Labour unions dedicated their resources towards saving jobs in shrinking industries rather than expanding in growing industries. Firms' substitution away from union voice towards internal channels of voice deterred non-unionised employees from organising and an overall fear of job loss amidst high unemployment levels put further downward pressure on labour unions' negotiating power (Purcell and Georgiadis 2006). In contrast to pre-Thatcher industrial relations, firms gained majority control over employee voice, especially newly established firms who could essentially determine which type of employee voice system to adopt.

DATA AND EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

The election of Margret Thatcher in 1979 represents an exogenous shock to Britain's industrial relations landscape that dramatically enhanced firms' flexibility and market power throughout the following decade, in

large part due to targeted policy measures that suppressed labour union power. These conditions serve as a convenient natural experiment to test the impact of labour unions on job satisfaction. By utilizing post-1979 established firms as an exogenous instrument on labour unions, we can help control for selection bias and reverse causality. As discussed in depth throughout the background section, firms maintained majority control over unionisation during this period. Labour union power essentially diminished as a result of the Thatcher government's aggressive policy measures and employees faced large barriers to unionisation that deterred most of them from even considering organising. Furthermore, firm-controlled voice systems proliferated that served as a partial substitute for union voice. These conditions existed in contrast to firms established in the previous decade, thereby serving as a convenient source of exogenous variance for an instrumental variable analysis.

One potential critique of this instrument is the assumption that firms established before this political transition retained their institutional features, specifically union recognition, despite a rapidly changing regulatory environment. However, a substantial body of empirical literature supports the claim that unionized firms established prior to 1979 were largely unsuccessful at deunionisation in the subsequent decade, reinforcing the validity of this instrumental variable strategy.

Empirical evidence from Freeman and Pelletier (1990), using data on union density and recognition across British workplaces, demonstrates that Thatcher-era labor market reforms did not lead to widespread *de-recognition* among pre-existing unionized firms. Instead, they argue that the major impact of the reforms was to prevent the spread of unionism into new establishments, particularly those in the growing private service sector. The authors conclude that while the anti-union legislation raised the cost of union organizing and curbed union expansion, it did little to reverse recognition in already unionized firms.

Similarly, Millward et al. (2000), drawing on longitudinal data from the WERS data, show that while union membership and density declined across the UK, union recognition persisted among firms that had institutionalized it prior to Thatcher's election. Their findings suggest that the decline in union power during the 1980s was driven more by attrition (i.e., closure of unionized firms) and compositional shifts in the economy than by active reversal of recognition in existing unionized firms. The persistence of recognition arrangements even in a hostile political climate further supports the notion that firm-level union status in pre-1979 firms remained relatively fixed over the period under study.

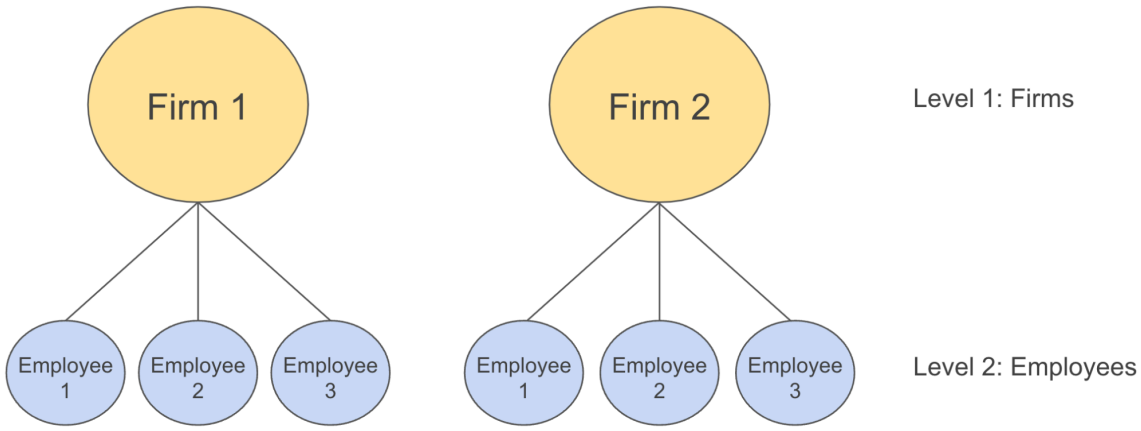
Finally, Blanchflower, Bryson, and Green (2022) provide contemporary empirical support for this interpretation, arguing that the decline in union influence was largely a result of non-union growth in newly established firms and sectors, rather than the unraveling of collective institutions in long-standing unionized workplaces. Their results indicate that Thatcher-era reforms created a two-tiered labor market in which newer firms avoided union recognition altogether, while older unionized firms remained embedded within collective labor relations structures.

Taken together, these studies offer compelling evidence that unionized pre-Thatcher firms were not easily deunionized, even amid sweeping political and legislative shifts. This empirical pattern lends credence to the use of post-1979 firm founding as an exogenous instrument for union recognition. It suggests that variations in union presence across firm cohorts reflect regulatory discontinuities tied to political shifts, rather than endogenous firm-level choices influenced by unobserved confounders.

Data & Sample Population

The British Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) is used to examine the impact of union recognition on job satisfaction. WERS is a nationally representative cross-sectional survey of employment relations within British firms administered at six points in time between 1980 and 2011. For the purpose of this analysis, data was extracted from the 1998, 2004, and 2011 survey waves when consistent measures of job satisfaction were included. For each randomly selected firm, a self-completion questionnaire and interview was completed by the most senior manager responsible for employment relations that collected demographic information about the firm and its workforce. A self-completion questionnaire was also completed by a randomly selected representative sample of employees (up to 25) within each firm that collected data pertaining to their working conditions and subjective experiences at work. The management-level data was linked to the corresponding employee-level data for each firm to measure the effect of interventions at the firm-level on outcomes at the employee-level. Thus, the data used for this analysis takes on a two-level nested structure where firms represent level one and employees represent level two. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the data structure.

Figure 3. WERS Data Structure



The sample population consists of British firms with 10 or more employees across all sectors and industries of the economy except for agriculture and mining. The employees surveyed within the firms are of legal working age and span all occupations. Flavin and Shufeldt call for future studies that investigate whether the effects of labour unions on job satisfaction vary across public and private sector employees. They theorise that labour unions will impact job satisfaction differently across these two sectors for various reasons pertaining to differences in business objectives and the nature of industrial relations, but limited empirical evidence exists (2016). Furthermore, historical research suggests that policy measures enacted by the Thatcher government during this study period likely shaped employees' working experience in different ways since each sector faced their own set of unique pressures. For example, 'new public management' principles led to large private sector contracts for business that was previously performed by public sector organizations (Stewart 2013). As such, the population is split by sector to compare the relationship between union recognition and job satisfaction.

Measures

To measure union recognition (i.e., independent variable), a binary variable was created where a firm is coded as a 1 if they have a recognised union or 0 otherwise. Job satisfaction is a composite measure of three domains: (1) pay, (2) achievement, and (3) influence over job. This measure captures three critical elements of one's working conditions that are strong indicators of job quality and in turn, determinants of employee wellbeing according to previous empirical and theoretical research (Green 2021; Munoz de Bustillo et al. 2011; Visser 2019). For example, the Aspen Institute's definition of 'good jobs' developed by a large group of researchers enlisted by the U.S. Department of Labor includes three key domains that broadly represent each one of these measurements: economic stability which concerns pay; economic mobility which concerns achievement; and equity, respect and voice which concerns influence over one's job. Employees are asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a five-point scale ranging from 'very dissatisfied' to 'very satisfied' and all three measures are aggregated to create a total job satisfaction score out of 15.

Utilising subjective measures of wellbeing like job satisfaction ensures the respondent's feelings about their job are captured rather than objective measures that require external judgements to discern what is good or bad. A large body of research has explored the determinants and consequences of subjective wellbeing in various settings among different populations (Layard and De Neve 2023; De Neve et al. 2013), thereby demonstrating the utility of such measures, especially as it relates to public policy (Hicks et al., 2013; Graham et al. 2013; Krueger and Stone 2014). Ideally, measures of affective and eudaimonic wellbeing would also be included in the analysis, however, the WERS dataset does not contain consistent measures across each of the survey waves. Fortunately, evaluative measures like job satisfaction are argued to be more stable and less susceptible to daily fluctuations that might result from sudden changes in mood (Krueger and Schkade 2008; Watson et al. 1988; Diener et al. 2013).

Overview of Empirical Analysis

The analysis is split into two components: (1) prediction utilizing multilevel modeling; and (2) causal inference utilizing instrumental variable analysis. In the first stage, union recognition is regressed on job satisfaction using pooled data from three survey waves to determine the strength of their association utilizing a multilevel linear regression model. Since unions are formed at the firm-level within the British industrial relations system and the data takes on a two-level nested structure (i.e., employees within firms), a random intercepts multilevel model is utilised that allows for varying intercepts across firms. This approach controls for characteristics among employees that are associated with their belongingness to a particular firm. In this way, the effect of union recognition on job satisfaction is further isolated to produce more robust estimates.

Next, the same model is used to analyze the same association, but exclusively among firms established between 1969 and 1979 (i.e., control group: pre-Thatcher established firms) and then exclusively among firms established between 1980 and 1990 (i.e., treatment group: post-Thatcher established firms). A threshold of 10 years was maintained on either side of 1979 when the exogenous shock occurred to facilitate a cleaner comparison. Expanding the control group to include firms established earlier than 1969 may bias the results since this could lead to an overrepresentation of older firms that contain unobserved characteristics related to

their longevity. Estimates for the multilevel linear regression analysis are produced using the following general equation:

$$(1) \quad y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{ij} + u_j + \upsilon_j + \tau_t + \epsilon_{ij}$$

Where y_{ij} represents the job satisfaction of employee *i* in group *j*; x_{ij} represents union recognition for employee *i* in firm *j*; u_i represents the random intercept for firm *j* (i.e., the deviation of firm j's intercept from the mean intercept of the sample population β_0); υ_i represents firm-fixed effects to capture firm-level characteristics that do not vary over time including sector, industry, and firm-size; α_j represents employee-fixed effects to capture individual characteristics that are relatively stable over time including gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, marital status, and family status; and τ_t represents a time-fixed effect to account for common shocks that may impact both union recognition and job satisfaction pertaining to a specific time period.

In essence, the first part of the analysis provides descriptive evidence for a relationship between union recognition and job satisfaction whereas the second part provides causal evidence for the impact of union recognition on job satisfaction. To do this, an instrumental variable analysis is conducted utilizing post-Thatcher established firms as an instrument to control for employee-level endogeneity based on unobserved confounding variables (i.e., employees' selection into union recognition). The same 10-year threshold for 'firm establishment date' is maintained on either side of 1979 for the same reasons discussed above and coarsened exact matching (CEM) is applied to a set of pre-treatment covariates. CEM facilitates exact comparisons between firms of the same industry and size in this study to produce more robust estimates. These two covariates represent key differentiating features among firms that may explain some of the variance between union recognition and job satisfaction. Matching on more pre-treatment covariates can unnecessarily shrink the sample size since observations with no exact matches (which typically increases as the number of covariates being matched on increases) are pruned in both the treatment and control group (Stefano et al. 2012). Thus, it is advantageous to remain conservative when selecting which pre-treatment covariates to match on.

The IV analysis comprises two stages. In the first stage, the instrument, post-thatcher established firms (D), is regressed on the treatment intervention, union recognition (Z), using the following equation:

$$(2) \quad D = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Z + \upsilon_i + \tau_t + \epsilon_{ij}$$

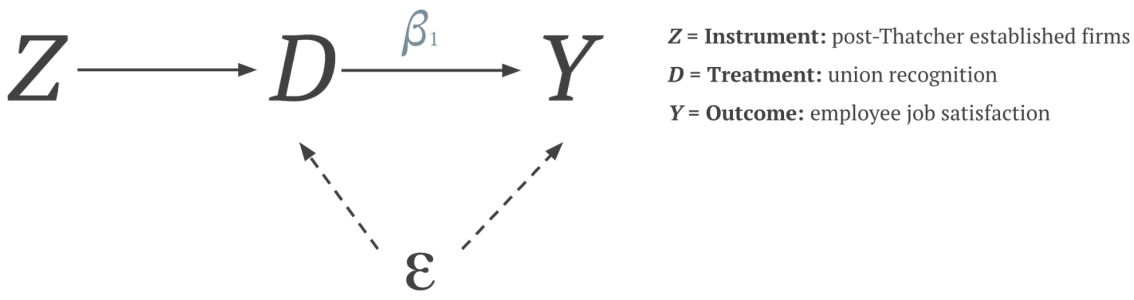
The second stage uses the predicted values of union recognition from the first stage regression to estimate its impact on job satisfaction (Y) using the following equation:

$$(3) \quad Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \widehat{D} + \upsilon_i + \tau_t + \epsilon_{ij}$$

Figure 4 displays a directed acyclic graph of the key relationships within the IV analysis. It also highlights three key assumptions that are tested and described throughout the results section: (1) relevance: the IV is related to

the treatment intervention; (2) exogeneity: the IV leads to differences in treatment; (3) exclusion: the IV affects the outcome only through its influence on the treatment intervention. In summary, this empirical strategy aims to overcome three types of endogeneity outlined in Laroche's meta-analysis that bias results from previous empirical studies (2016): time, firm-level, and employee-level. This is accomplished by utilizing multilevel modeling with fixed-effects, IV analysis, and CEM.

Figure 4. Directed Acyclic Graph for Instrumental Variable Analysis



RESULTS

Prediction: union recognition and job satisfaction

Table 1 reports estimates of the association between union recognition and job satisfaction utilising pooled data from three survey waves of WERS (1998, 2004, and 2011). Results indicate a negative association of 0.28 standard deviations (SD) (CI: -0.34 – -0.22, P<0.001). When employee-level and firm-level fixed-effects are included into the multilevel regression model, the negative association reduces to 0.14 SD but remains statistically significant (CI: -0.21 – -0.07, P<0.001). This negative association between union recognition and job satisfaction aligns with decades of research throughout the 20 and 21st century outlined in the background section.

Association by Sector

When public sector firms are removed from the sample to observe the association between union recognition and job satisfaction exclusively among private sector firms, very similar results are observed: -0.29 SD (CI: -0.36 – -0.22, P<0.001) and -0.12 SD (CI: -0.19 – -0.04, P=0.003) with the inclusion of controls. When private sector firms are removed from the sample to observe the association between union recognition and job satisfaction exclusively among public sector firms, a stronger association is observed: -0.51 SD (CI: -0.70 – -0.33, P<0.001) and -0.27 SD (CI: -0.43 – -0.10, P=0.001) with the inclusion of controls. The stronger negative association observed in the public sector is an interesting and novel finding. Public sector employment typically provides better quality jobs on average (e.g., living wages, job security, and safe working conditions) in large part because labour unions are more prevalent in this sector and have historically played an instrumental role in establishing fair working standards (Braverman 1998; Dray 2011).

Association by Cohort

To explore the association between union recognition and job satisfaction before and after Margaret Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1979, the sample was split into two cohorts based on the year in which each firm was established. Table 1 reports the results for the association exclusively for firms established between 1969 and 1979 (i.e., pre-Thatcher cohort), and then exclusively for firms established between 1980 and 1990 (i.e., post-Thatcher cohort). For the pre-Thatcher cohort, results indicate a negative association of 0.14 SD (CI: -0.29 – 0.02, p=0.078). When employee fixed effects are included the association strengthens to negative 0.21 SD (CI:-0.35 – -0.07, p=0.004) but when firm fixed-effects are included, the association reduces to negative 0.08 SD (CI:-0.25–0.10, p=0.393). Similarly, results indicate a negative association of 0.24 SD (CI:-0.36 – -0.12, p<0.001) for the post-Thatcher cohort. When employee fixed-effects are included the negative association strengthens to 0.31 SD (CI:-0.43 – -0.20, p<0.001) and when firm fixed-effects are included, the negative association reduces to 0.13 SD (CI:-0.28–0.03, p=0.102). These results suggest that firm-level variation explains about 0.12 SD of the association observed between union recognition and job satisfaction in both cohorts, and the association is 0.05 SD stronger in the post-Thatcher cohort. As discussed, union power significantly diminished post-1979 due to policy measures enacted by the Thatcher government. Thus, it is unsurprising that the negative association is stronger in this period since firms' decision-making authority over unionisation and labour unions' ability to serve their members interests was significantly constrained.

Table 1. Multilevel Linear Regression Estimates – Union Recognition on Employee Job Satisfaction

	Employee Job Satisfaction			
All Firms	-0.28*** (0.03)	-0.27*** (0.03)	-0.33*** (0.03)	-0.19*** (0.03)
Observations	66115	66115	65380	65376
Private Sector Firms	-0.29*** (0.04)	-0.26*** (0.04)	-0.27*** (0.03)	-0.17*** (0.04)
Observations	42631	42631	42119	42115
Public Sector Firms	-0.51*** (0.09)	-0.50*** (0.03)	-0.46*** (0.09)	-0.39*** (0.09)
Observations	*23484*	*23484*	*23261*	*23261*
Pre-Thatcher Cohort	-0.14 (0.08)	-0.13 (0.08)	-0.20** (0.07)	-0.09 (0.09)
Observations	10809	10809	10747	10747
Post-Thatcher Cohort	-0.24*** (0.06)	-0.29*** (0.06)	-0.33*** (0.06)	-0.13 (0.08)
Observations	13673	13673	13523	13523
Time		✓	✓	✓

Employee-Level Controls	✓	✓
Firm-Level Controls		✓

Notes: Table reports estimates from multilevel linear regression with random intercepts using WERS data. Union recognition is measured at the firm-level using a binary variable of 0 and 1. Employee job satisfaction is a composite measure of satisfaction with pay, achievement, and influence. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Employee-level controls include gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, marital status, and family status. Firm-level controls include sector, industry, and firm-size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

Association by Sector and Cohort

Among private sector firms, a positive association of 0.04 SD (CI: -0.16 – 0.23, p=0.714) is observed within the pre-Thatcher cohort and negative 0.09 SD (CI: -0.25 – 0.07, p=0.265) within the post-Thatcher cohort; a difference of 0.05 SD. Among public sector firms, a negative association of 0.41 SD (CI: -0.83 – 0.01, p<0.001) is observed within the pre-Thatcher cohort and negative 0.24 SD (CI: -0.73 – 0.25, p=0.332) within the post-Thatcher cohort; a difference of 0.17 SD. These results indicate that the difference in association between pre and post-Thatcher established firms is more pronounced among public sector firms compared to private sector firms. However, the change occurs in opposite directions between sectors. Among the private sector firms, the association strengthens by 0.05 SD, whereas among public sector firms, the association weakens by 0.17 SD.

Instrumental Variable Analysis

First Stage

Table 2 reports the results of 'post-1979 established firms' (instrument) regressed on union recognition (intervention) for all firms, public sector firms only, and private sector firms only to test whether it represents a relevant instrument for estimating the causal impact of union recognition on job satisfaction. According to the vast amount of literature on instrumental variable analysis, a suitable instrument must be associated with the outcome of interest (i.e., statistically significant) and produce a large F-statistic (>104). These requirements are met when the sample population contains all firms as well as private sector firms only, however, they are not met when the instrument is tested exclusively among public sector firms. Thus, the instrumental variable analysis proceeds utilizing private sector firms only where a negative association of 0.13 (CI: -0.14 – -0.11, p<0.001) and F-statistic = 285.5 is observed. When firm employee fixed-effects are included, a negative association of 0.09 SD (CI: -0.10 – -0.07, p<0.001) and F-statistic of 298.5 is observed.

Table 2. First Stage Least Squares – 'Post-1979 Established Firms' on Union Recognition

	Union Recognition			
All Firms	-0.17*** (0.01)	-0.18*** (0.01)	-0.17*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
F-Statistic	717.2	392.5	133.2	1366
Observations	24482	24482	24270	24270

Private Sector	-0.13*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.01)	-0.09*** (0.01)
F-Statistic	285.5	151.1	59.47	298.5
Observations	16394	16394	16236	16236
Public Sector	0.01 *** (0.00)	0.01 *** (0.00)	0.01 * (0.01)	0.02 ** (0.01)
F-Statistic	1.441	30.17	12.49	36
Observations	8088	8088	8034	8034
Time		✓	✓	✓
Employee-Level Controls			✓	✓
Firm-Level Controls				✓

Notes: Table reports estimates from linear regression using WERS data. Union recognition is measured at the firm-level using a binary variable of 0 and 1. 'Post-1979 established firms' is measured at the firm-level using a binary variable of 0 and 1 with a 10 year threshold on either side of 1979. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Employee-level controls include gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, marital status, and family status. Firm-level controls include sector, industry, and firm-size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

Second Stage (2SLS)

Table 3 displays two-stage least-squares (2SLS) estimates; panel (1) without CEM and column 2 with CEM applied. A negative treatment effect of 1.75 SD (CI: -2.37– -1.13, p<0.001) is observed when the instrument is regressed on job satisfaction. When firm and employee fixed-effects are included, the negative treatment effect reduces slightly to 1.44 SD (CI: -2.31– -0.57, p<0.001). To increase the precision of these estimates, CEM is applied to the data to allow for comparisons between firms across cohorts with similar characteristics, specifically firms of the same size and in the same industry. When CEM is applied, a negative treatment effect of 4.3 SD (CI: -7.28 – -1.32, p=0.005) is observed when the instrument is regressed on job satisfaction. When firm and employee fixed-effects are included, a negative treatment effect of 2.82 SD (CI: -5.26 – -0.38, p=0.005) is observed.

Table 3. Second Stage Least Squares

	Employee Job Satisfaction			
No CEM	-1.75 * [-2.37 – -1.13]	-2.33 * [-2.84 – -1.82]	-1.24 * [-1.84 – -0.64]	-1.44 * [-2.31 – -0.57]
Observations	16394	16394	16246	16246
CEM	-4.30 * [-7.28 – -1.32]	-3.63 * [-6.40 – -0.86]	-3.06 * [-5.57 – -0.55]	-2.82 * [-5.26 – -0.38]

Observations	16246	16246	16246	16246
Time		✓	✓	✓
Employee-Level Controls			✓	✓
Firm-Level Controls				✓

Notes: Table reports estimates from 2SLS using WERS data with and without coarsened exact matching (CEM). 'Post-1979 established firms' is measured at the firm-level using a binary variable of 0 and 1 with a 10 year threshold on either side of 1979. Employee job satisfaction is a composite measure of satisfaction with pay, achievement, and influence. Standard errors are reported in parentheses. Employee-level controls include gender, age, ethnicity, occupation, marital status, and family status. Firm-level controls include sector, industry, and firm-size. *, **, *** indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

The validity of the 2SLS results in Table 6 depends on the assumption that the instrument post-Thtacher established firms has no direct effect on job satisfaction other than through union recognition. Recall, job satisfaction is a composite measure of one's level of satisfaction with their pay, voice, and achievement. Although it is highly plausible that a firm's establishment date has little to no bearing on these measures, it is further substantiated by directly controlling for firm-level and employee-level characteristics that might be correlated with both the instrument and job satisfaction. Overall, the magnitude of the estimates change slightly with the inclusion of controls, but not to a significant degree. Most importantly, the estimates remain negative and statistically significant.

Addressing Exogeneity Concerns

One legitimate concern is whether Margaret Thatcher's election in 1979 can be considered a truly exogenous shock akin to a natural disaster. Indeed, elections are not random events; they reflect underlying social, economic, and political conditions that may themselves shape labor relations. If these conditions influenced both the likelihood of union recognition and employee job satisfaction, the exclusion restriction of the instrumental variable could be violated. However, this study mitigates this concern through several conceptual and empirical strategies.

Policy discontinuity

While the election of Margaret Thatcher was politically endogenous, the scale, speed, and specificity of the industrial relations reforms enacted shortly afterward constituted a sharp and discontinuous policy shock. These reforms—abolishing the closed shop, restricting union rights, and liberalizing employment law—transformed the institutional landscape of union organizing, particularly for firms established after 1979, which were no longer bound by the collective norms and regulatory constraints of the earlier period. At the same time, de-unionisation among pre-existing unionized firms remained limited. A substantial body of empirical research (Freeman & Pelletier, 1990; Millward et al., 2000; Willman & Bryson, 2007) shows that formal derecognition was rare and that union recognition largely persisted in firms founded prior to the Thatcher reforms. These findings support the validity of using post-1979 firm founding as an instrument for union recognition, as older firms were shaped by enduring institutional path dependencies, while newer firms were exposed to a fundamentally different regulatory regime.

Exclusion justification

The instrumental variable used in this study, firm establishment post-1979, is not the election per se, but the differential regulatory environment that emerged afterward. This approach does not assume the election was random, but rather that the policy environment faced by post-1979 firms influenced union recognition independently of job satisfaction, conditional on controls for firm size, sector, and industry. Furthermore, the study controls for firm and employee-level covariates that may plausibly affect job satisfaction. By doing so, it narrows the possible pathways through which firm establishment date could directly influence job satisfaction, apart from its effect via union recognition. Moreover, job satisfaction indicators (e.g., pay, influence, and achievement) are unlikely to be directly influenced by firm age absent union mediation.

Temporal and sectoral heterogeneity

The analysis is limited to private sector firms, where Thatcher's reforms had the clearest and most direct impact on union recognition practices. In contrast, public sector firms were shaped by different administrative processes, and results show the instrument is weak in that context—further supporting the interpretation that the policy shock's effects were concentrated in the private domain. If the instrument was also supported in the public domain, this would raise concerns about its validity considering how different the labour relations environments are. To further guard against bias, the study applies coarsened exact matching (CEM) on pre-treatment firm characteristics, ensuring comparisons are drawn between firms of similar size and industry. This reduces the risk that unobserved confounding drives the observed treatment effects.

In summary, while political events are never entirely exogenous, the Thatcher-era reforms created a sharp regulatory discontinuity that shaped unionization opportunities for firms in ways that are plausibly unrelated to unobserved employee attitudes or firm preferences toward job satisfaction. By combining an institutional lens with rigorous empirical controls, this study provides credible causal estimates despite the inherent complexity of using political transitions as instruments.

DISCUSSION

A negative association of 0.14 SD (CI: -0.21 – -0.07, P<0.001) between union recognition and job satisfaction is observed from the multilevel regression analysis. The first stage-least squares regression provided sufficient support for utilising post-Thatcher established firms as an instrument for union recognition among private sector firms but not for public sector firms (i.e., statistically significant and large F-statistic). This is likely because the exogenous shock of Thatcher's election to Prime Minister impacted public sector firms and labour unions differently due to unique features of public sector administration and industrial relations in Great Britain during this time. The size of Britain's public sector dramatically shrunk under new 'new public management' principles adopted by the Thatcher regime rather than expanded. Public sector employment reduced from its record peak of 7.61 million in 1979 (28.1 percent of employment) to 4.99 million in 1998 (18.6 percent of total employment) (Office of National Statistics 2019). In essence, privatization, public spending cuts, and hiring freezes prevented new firms from establishing within the sector and existing firms from sustaining their pre-Thatcher size.

As such, the instrumental variable analysis proceeds with private sector firms only where a negative treatment effect of 2.82 SD (CI: -7.28– -1.32, p=0.005) is observed for union recognition on job satisfaction. This estimate is four times the size as the estimate produced by the mutli-level regression analysis for private sector firms only

(-0.12 SD (CI: -0.19 – -0.04, P=0.003). Put another way, when additional forms of endogeneity are controlled for by applying IV with fixed effects and CEM, a much stronger causal estimate is observed. These findings align with a large body of research in labour economics and industrial relations dating back to the 1970s. According to Laroche's 2016 meta-analysis that included 235 estimates between 1978 and 2015 (Laroche 2016), approximately 68 percent observed a negative association. Of the 235 studies, 19 applied IV methodology to cross-sectional data and 58 percent of them reported a negative treatment effect.

Prior research has hypothesised heterogeneous treatment effects across countries due to broader socio-economic-political factors unique to each country that shape the relationship between unions and job satisfaction (Laroache 2026; Hipp and Givan 2015; Lincoln and Kalleberg 1985). For example, countries with high collective bargaining coverage but low union density such as France might produce different effects compared to countries with low collective bargaining coverage and low union density such as the USA. The former for instance, is more likely to allow for free riders – employees who do not pay union dues but enjoy the benefits of sectoral or workplace union representation. Indeed, Laroche's meta-analysis finds geographic location to be an important moderating factor, especially for the UK variable which stands out as having a negative, statistically significant coefficient (-0.04 SD, $p<0.005$ for studies that utilise cross-sectional UK-data). In other words, studies that rely on UK data report larger negative effects compared to studies that rely on data from other countries.

Bryson et al. utilised the WERS dataset to estimate the impact of union membership on job satisfaction and found no effect after controlling for employee-level self-selection (2004). As such, they conclude that the negative association found in studies that do not control for this form of endogeneity is likely due to intrinsic features of employees who become union members such as a propensity to be dissatisfied due to higher job aspirations. Although they used the same dataset to answer a similar question, this study's empirical approach is distinct and addresses several of their shortcomings. First, the authors use union membership as the intervention variable where this study uses union recognition at the firm-level. In this way, free-riders are captured, a type of employee that is arguably more prevalent in post-Thatcher established firms since the closed-shop system was legally abolished (i.e., forced union-membership upon workplace recognition). Second, Bryson et al. only utilise one wave of the WERS survey data from 1998 where this study pools data across three waves from 1998, 2004, and 2011 and applies time-fixed effects to increase the sample size. Third, the composite measure that they use for job satisfaction includes one additional variable that asks employees to rate how satisfied they are with the respect they receive from their line manager. This study does not incorporate this variable since it was not included in the 2004 and 2011 survey waves. Regardless, while feeling respected by your line manager is important, there is limited evidence to support that this plays a substantial role in one's overall evaluation of their job beyond other critical features that employees' place greater weight on such as pay.

Fourth, Bryson et al., utilise managerial perception of the workplace industrial relations climate as an exogenous instrument for union membership comprised of four measures regarding management's opinion on: employee commitment; manager-employee relations; trade unions' ability to improve performance; and management's general stance towards trade unions. They claim that these measures have no effect on job satisfaction after controlling for union membership and employees' perception of the workplace industrial relations climate. However, these variables can influence job satisfaction in several ways that are difficult to control. For example, managers who value employee commitment are likely to promote this behaviour utilizing mechanisms that do

not involve unions such as high-commitment work teams. This strategy expands employees' realm of influence in workplace decision-making and therefore, would likely impact how employees rate their satisfaction with their level of influence (Harley 2020). This study leverages a seismic political shock that dramatically impacts labour union recognition at the firm-level as an instrument to account for employee-level endogeneity that is arguably more convincing since it occurs outside of the firm.

The strong negative effect of union recognition on job satisfaction observed in this study suggests that union recognition somehow fosters greater job dissatisfaction among employees, opposed to dissatisfied employees seeking union recognition. Several explanations have been put forth in the literature for how this perplexing phenomenon might occur, the most notable one originating from Freeman's argument that labour unions enhance employee voice, which acts as a retention effect among employees who are dissatisfied – why leave your job when you have the capability to potentially resolve your dissatisfaction? A similar line of reasoning suggests that labour unions raise employees' job expectations and awareness of their working conditions; both of which might lead to lower job satisfaction. Labour unions might also create a more adversarial working environment as they work to advance employees' interests, especially if management is uncooperative. In fact, some evidence suggests that managers deliberately intensify word demands to offset increased labour costs resulting from union negotiations (Hammer and Avgar, 2005).

All of these scenarios are plausible and likely co-occurring alongside positive side effects of labour unions that are simply not captured by job satisfaction. For example, epidemiological research shows that unions may improve employee health by enhancing economic stability, education, access to health care, and workplace physical and psychosocial safety (Leigh and Chakalov 2021). Although lower job satisfaction may seem like a bad result on its surface, many of the theories discussed above lead one to believe that it may in fact drive social progress. Indeed, labour unions have played an instrumental role in improving working conditions for employees throughout history, particularly in the mid to late-19th century when workers were subject to high levels of exploitation from management while working in jobs with low pay, limited security, long hours, and unsafe working conditions against a backdrop of large wealth inequality (somewhat similar to today's labour market conditions). Social reformers like Sidney and Beatrice Webb argued in labour relations debates that collective employee voice exercised through labour unionism was the most effective way to promote industrial democracy and resolve mounting labour unrest (1897). Alongside these efforts was the slow emergence of labour law across industrializing economies which solidified collective forms of employee voice as a fundamental human right.

CONCLUSION

Although the prevalence and power of labour unions across Great Britain and other liberal market economies remains low compared to pre-Thatcher industrial relations conditions, they still impact the lives of millions of workers and their families. Furthermore, emerging trends in the United States reveal that public support for labour unions as well as employees' desire for greater voice at work has reached levels not seen since the mid-20th century (Kokhan et al. 2023). In the United Kingdom, union membership actually increased in 2023 by 89,000 to reach 6.4 million which was largely driven by private sector employees (Department for Business and Trade 2023). Thus, advancing our understanding of how labour unions, an underappreciated or perhaps neglected institution for employee voice impact employees' lives is paramount.

Decades of research overwhelmingly reveals a negative association between labour unions and job satisfaction. The paradoxical nature of these enduring results continues to motivate researchers in their efforts to produce stronger causal estimates which remain greatly limited. This study contributes to this literature by leveraging an instrumental variable to estimate the impact of union recognition on job satisfaction among private sector employees in Great Britain. The results indicate a negative treatment effect that aligns with the majority of previous estimates, specifically ones from studies that utilise UK cross-sectional data. Several potential mechanisms for this casual association are discussed, all of which are plausible considering how heterogenous working conditions are across firms.

REFERENCES

Addison, J. T., & Belfield, C. R. (2004). Union voice. *Journal of Labor Research, 25*(4), 563–596. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-004-1012-y

Beckett, A. (2015). *Promised you a miracle: UK 80–82*. Allen Lane.

Befort, S. F., & Budd, J. W. (2009). *Invisible hands, invisible objectives: Bringing workplace law and public policy into focus*. Stanford University Press.

Bender, K. A., & Sloane, P. J. (1998). Job satisfaction, trade unions, and exit–voice revisited. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 51*(2), 222–240. https://doi.org/10.2307/2525215

Bender, K. A., & Sloane, P. J. (1999). Trade union membership, tenure and the level of job insecurity. *Applied Economics, 31*(1), 123–135. https://doi.org/10.1080/000368499324615

Benmelech, E., Bergman, N. K., & Kim, H. (2022). Strong employers and weak employees. *Journal of Human Resources, 57*(S), S200–S250. https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.monopsony.0119-10007R1

Bennett, J. T., & Kaufman, B. E. (2007). *What do unions do? A twenty-year perspective*. Transaction Publishers.

Blanchflower, D. G., Bryson, A., & Green, C. (2022). Trade unions and the well-being of workers. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 60*(4), 826–844. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12627

Blissett, E. (2023). British trade unionism in the 1980s reassessed: Are recurring assumptions about union membership and strikes flawed? *Labor History, 64*(5), 547–574. https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2023.2229252

Braverman, H. (1998). *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*. NYU Press. (Original work published 1974)

Bryson, A., Cappellari, L., & Lucifora, C. (2004). Does union membership really reduce job satisfaction? *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 42*(3), 439–459. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8543.2004.00324.x

Bryson, A., Cappellari, L., & Lucifora, C. (2010). Why so unhappy? The effects of unionization on job satisfaction. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, 72*(3), 357–380. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0084.2010.00587.x

Budd, J. W. (2019). Introduction. In *Employment with a human face: Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice* (pp. 1–10). Cornell University Press.

Case, A., & Deaton, A. (2021). *Deaths of despair and the future of capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

De Neve, J.-E., Diener, E., Tay, L., & Xuereb, C. (2013). The objective benefits of subjective well-being. In *World Happiness Report 2013* (pp. 10–22). Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Department for Business and Trade. (2023). *Trade union membership in the UK, 1995 to 2023: Statistical bulletin*. UK Government. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/665db15a0c8f88e868d334b8/Trade_Union_Membership_UK_1995_to_2023_Statistical_Bulletin.pdf

Diener, E., Inglehart, R., & Tay, L. (2013). Theory and validity of life satisfaction scales. *Social Indicators Research, 112*, 497–527. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0076-y

Dray, P. (2011). *There is power in a union: The epic story of labor in America* (1st Anchor Books ed.). Anchor Books.

Ehrenberg, R. G., & Smith, R. S. (2015). *Modern labor economics: Theory and public policy* (12th ed.). Routledge.

Eurofound. (2024). *Labour disputes across Europe, 2023: Ongoing struggle for higher wages and cost of living rises*. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/resources/article/2024/labour-disputes-across-europe-2023-ongoing-struggle-higher-wages-cost-living

Flavin, P., & Shufeldt, G. (2016). Labour union membership and life satisfaction in the United States. *Labour Studies Journal, 41*(2), 171–184. https://doi.org/10.1177/0160449X16663473

Freeman, R. B., & Medoff, J. L. (1984). *What do unions do?* Basic Books.

Freeman, R. B., & Pelletier, J. (1990). The impact of industrial relations legislation on British union density. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 28*, 141–164.

Fox, K. E., Johnson, S. T., Berkman, L. F., Sianoja, M., Soh, Y., Kubzansky, L. D., & Kelly, E. L. (2022). Organisational- and group-level workplace interventions and their effect on multiple domains of worker well-being: A systematic review. *Work & Stress, 36*(1), 30–59.

Gallup. (2024). *State of the global workplace 2024 report*. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx

Gomez, R., Bryson, A., & Willman, P. (2010). Voice in the wilderness? The shift from union to non-union voice in Britain. In A. Wilkinson, P. J. Gollan, M. Marchington, & D. Lewin (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of participation in organizations* (Vol. 1, pp. 376–395). Oxford University Press.

Gordon, M. E., & Denisi, A. S. (1995). A re-examination of the relationship between union membership and job satisfaction. *ILR Review, 48*(2), 222–236. https://doi.org/10.2307/2524484

Graham, C., Laffan, K., & Pinto, S. (2018). Well-being in metrics and policy. *Science, 362*(6412), 287–288.

Green, F. (2021). Decent work and the quality of work and employment. In U. Jirjahn (Ed.), *Handbook on labor, human resources and population economics* (pp. 1–30). Springer Nature.

Hammer, T. H., & Avgar, A. (2005). The impact of unions on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover. *Journal of Labor Research, 26*, 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12122-005-1024-2

Harley, B. (2020). High-performance work systems and employee voice. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of research on employee voice* (pp. 313–327). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hicks, S., Tinkler, L., & Allin, P. (2013). Measuring subjective well-being and its potential role in policy: Perspectives from the UK Office for National Statistics. *Social Indicators Research, 114*, 73–86.

Hipp, L., & Givan, R. K. (2015). What do unions do? A cross-national reexamination of the relationship between unionization and job satisfaction. *Social Forces, 94*(1), 349–377. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sov051

Hirschman, A. O. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Harvard University Press.

Iacus, S. M., King, G., & Porro, G. (2012). Causal inference without balance checking: Coarsened exact matching. *Political Analysis, 20*(1), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1934591

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2024). *World employment and social outlook trends 2024*. Geneva: ILO. https://doi.org/10.54394/HQAE1085

Kahn-Freund, O. (1972). *Labour and the law*. Stevens & Sons.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2018). Subjective well-being. In *Precarious lives: Job insecurity and well-being in rich democracies* (pp. 187–212). Polity Press.

Kaufman, B. E., & Hotchkiss, J. L. (2003). *The economics of labor markets* (6th ed.). South-Western Publishers.

Kochan, T. A., Fine, J. R., Bronfenbrenner, K., Naidu, S., Barnes, J., Diaz-Linhart, Y., Kallas, J., et al. (2023). An overview of US workers' current organizing efforts and collective actions. *Work and Occupations, 50*(3), 335–350. https://doi.org/10.1177/07308884231168793

Krueger, A. B., & Schkade, D. A. (2008). The reliability of subjective well-being measures. *Journal of Public Economics, 92*, 1833–1845.

Krueger, A. B., & Stone, A. A. (2014). Progress in measuring subjective well-being: Moving toward national indicators and policy evaluations. *Science, 346*(6205), 42–43.

Laroche, P. (2016). A meta-analysis of the union–job satisfaction relationship. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 54*(3), 497–533. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12193

Layard, R., & De Neve, J.-E. (2023). *Wellbeing: Science and policy*. Cambridge University Press.

Lehner, L., Ramskogler, P., & Riedl, A. (2024). Beggaring thy co-worker: Labor market dualization and the wage growth slowdown in Europe. *ILR Review, 77*(5), 659–684. https://doi.org/10.1177/00197939241248162

Leigh, J. P., & Chakalov, B. (2021). Labor unions and health: A literature review of pathways and outcomes in the workplace. *Preventive Medicine Reports, 24*, 101502. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2021.101502

Lincoln, J. R., & Kalleberg, A. L. (1985). Work organization and workforce commitment: A study of plants and employees in the U.S. and Japan. *American Sociological Review, 50*(6), 738–760. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095502

Marchington, M. (2009). Employee voice systems. In P. Boxall, J. Purcell, & P. M. Wright (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of human resource management* (pp. 231–250). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199547029.003.0012

Marx, K. (1906). *Capital: A critique of political economy* (Vol. 1). Modern Library. (Original work published 1867)

McKinsey Health Institute. (2022). *Addressing employee burnout: Are you solving the right problem?* McKinsey & Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/mhi/our-insights/addressing-employee-burnout-are-you-solving-the-right-problem

Millward, N., Bryson, A., & Forth, J. (2000). *All change at work? British employment relations 1980–1998, as portrayed by the Workplace Industrial Relations Survey series*. Routledge.

Muñoz de Bustillo, R., Macías, E. F., Antón, J., & Esteve, F. (2011). E pluribus unum? A critical survey of job quality indicators. *Socio-Economic Review, 9*, 447–475.

Newman, K. S., & Jacobs, E. S. (2023). *Moving the needle: What tight labor markets do for the poor* (1st ed.). University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520976535

Office for National Statistics. (2019). *Long-term trends in UK employment, 1861 to 2018*. Economic Review. https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/april2019/longtermtrendsinukemployment1861to2018

Pezold, C., Jäger, S., & Nüss, P. (2023). Labor market tightness and union activity. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 31988*. https://www.nber.org/papers/w31988

Pfeffer, J., & Davis-Blake, A. (1990). Unions and job satisfaction: An alternative view. *Work and Occupations, 17*(3), 259–283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888490017003001

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC). (2023). *Poor mental health is the main cause of long-term sickness for the workforce*. https://www.pwc.co.uk/press-room/press-releases/poor-mental-health-is-main-cause-of-long-term-sickness-for-the-workforce.html

Purcell, J., & Georgiadis, K. (2006). Why should employers bother with worker voice? In R. Freeman, P. Boxall, & P. Haynes (Eds.), *What workers say: Employee voice in the Anglo-American world* (pp. 1–21). Cornell University Press.

Radcliff, B. (2013). *The political economy of human happiness: How voters' choices determine the quality of life*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139344371

Reeves, A. (2021). The health effects of wage setting institutions: How collective bargaining improves health but not because it reduces inequality. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 43*(4), 1012–1031.

Regier, C. (2023). Labour law, employees' capability for voice, and wellbeing: A framework for evaluation. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2023.2266691

Röllmann, L. F., Weiss, M., & Zacher, H. (2021). Does voice benefit or harm occupational well-being? The role of job insecurity. *British Journal of Management, 32*(3), 708–724. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12471

Sandbrook, D. (2019). *Who dares wins: Britain, 1979–82*. Allen Lane.

Sherf, E. N., Parke, M. R., & Isaakyan, S. (2021). Distinguishing voice and silence at work: Unique relationships with perceived impact, psychological safety, and burnout. *Academy of Management Journal, 64*(1), 114–148. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2018.1428

Shipton, H., Kougiannou, N., Do, H., Minbashian, A., Pautz, N., & King, D. (2023). Organizational voice and employee-focused voice: Two distinct voice forms and their effects on burnout. *Work & Stress*. (Details incomplete—please confirm issue, volume, and page numbers if available.)

Sochas, L., & Reeves, A. (2022). Does collective bargaining reduce health inequalities between labour market insiders and outsiders? *Socio-Economic Review*. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwac020

Statistics Canada. (2024). *Labour Force Survey: January 2024*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410035201

Stewart, G. (2013). *Bang!: A history of Britain in the 1980s*. Atlantic Books.

Visser, M. A. (2019). Restructuring opportunity: Employment change and job quality in the United States during the Great Recession. *Socio-Economic Review, 17*, 545–572.

Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 54*(6), 1063–1070.

Webb, S., & Webb, B. (1897). *Industrial democracy*. Longmans, Green.

Willman, P., & Bryson, A. (2007). *Union organization in Great Britain*. London School of Economics and Political Science, Centre for Economic Performance.

Employee Voice Interventions and Workplace Wellbeing: A Systematic Review of the Evidence

Cherise Reiger, Faraz Shahidi, Aviroop Biswas

ABSTRACT

This systematic review synthesizes evidence from 92 studies to assess the impact of employee voice interventions on subjective wellbeing (SWB). Guided by Amartya Sen's capability approach, the review categorizes interventions into three domains: freedom of speech and self-expression, self-determination, and consultation and codetermination. Across high- and moderate-quality studies, 41% of SWB outcomes showed positive effects, 55% were null, and 4% were negative. Interventions such as participatory work reorganization and schedule discretion were most consistently associated with wellbeing improvements, while others, like participatory ergonomics and rehabilitation, produced mixed or limited outcomes. Findings highlight the importance of implementation quality, managerial responsiveness, and meaningful employee influence. The review also identifies key evidence gaps, including limited attention to eudaimonic wellbeing and interventions that promote freedom of speech and self-expressions, as well as inconsistencies in how employee voice is conceptualized and operationalized. These findings support the design of more effective and equitable workplace interventions by centering voice as both a human capability and a pathway to improved wellbeing.

Note. Cherise Regier is responsible for over 80 percent of this research paper. The other two authors assisted with the double blind review process. This paper follows the PRISMA guidelines and its protocol has been registered via PROSPERO.

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

State of Current Evidence

Protecting employee wellbeing has remained a significant priority for many organizations throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Historically, the primary motivation for this focus was compliance with workplace health and safety regulations and in turn, the avoidance of costly litigation. In recent decades, however, more forward-thinking organizations have broadened their approach, recognizing employee wellbeing as both a matter of social responsibility and a driver of organizational performance (Bellet et al., 2023; Oswald et al., 2015; Erez & Isen, 2002). In 2023, Gallup reported that over 80 percent of U.S. employers offered wellbeing-related benefits, while the Chartered Institute for Personnel Development (CIPD) found that 53 percent of U.K. employers had established a formal wellbeing strategy (Gallup, 2023; CIPD, 2023). Yet despite this widespread

investment into employee wellbeing, questions remain about the actual effectiveness of workplace interventions in delivering meaningful and sustainable outcomes to employee wellbeing itself (Pfeffer, 2018).

The evidence base for workplace wellbeing interventions being beneficial for employees is unclear and sometimes contradictory. Higher quality evaluations such as randomized control trials and longitudinal studies seem to suggest that benefits are modest at best and generalizability is limited due to specific sample populations and tailored intervention designs. A systematic review examining the impacts of workplace interventions on multiple domains of wellbeing revealed heterogeneity in intervention types, outcomes, and effect sizes (Fox et al., 2021). These findings have sparked an ongoing debate about whether workplace wellbeing interventions can actually achieve their desired effect and if so, how? A growing consensus among scholars and practitioners suggests that individual-level interventions, which constitute the core of most "corporate wellness" initiatives, offer minimal benefits to most employees because they target the symptoms of poor wellbeing rather than its root causes (Abelsten, 2019; Fleming, 2024; Song & Baicker, 2019). Specifically, these interventions aim to enhance employees' ability to cope with work-related stressors through individually focused programs like resilience training (i.e., secondary interventions), or to treat employees who have developed a condition from chronic or intense exposure to work-related stressors, such as through employee assistance or rehabilitation programs (i.e., tertiary interventions) (Daniels et al., 2022). Although well intentioned, these approaches typically place the burden of change on the employee, rather than addressing organizational-level factors (Fox et al., 2021).

In contrast, workplace interventions that target upstream determinants of employee wellbeing (i.e., primary interventions) are increasingly argued to be more effective (Day and Nielson, 2017; De Neve and Ward, 2025). These interventions seek to modify the structural conditions or organization of work to reduce or eliminate sources of stress, thereby fostering an environment that supports wellbeing from the outset (Daniels et al., 2022). By focusing on prevention rather than reaction, primary interventions can potentially benefit a wider range of employees, irrespective of their individual coping capacities or wellbeing state. A systematic review of such interventions identified four key types: changes to work schedules and flexibility; modifications to job design and tasks; improvements in relational and team dynamics; and the use of participatory processes (Fox et al., 2021). Notably, the review found that interventions incorporating some degree of employee voice consistently yielded better wellbeing outcomes across all types, suggesting that it may be a critical factor for the success in any workplace wellbeing intervention.

Description of Intervention

Employee voice represents the overarching concept of this review. It concerns the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say in organizational affairs relating to issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners (Wilkinson et al., 2020). This can range from direct, individual expressions of voice in day-to-day activities (e.g., employee posing a suggestion during a team meeting) to indirect, representative expressions of voice in larger organizational matters (e.g., joint consultative committee advocating for a workplace policy). At its core, employee voice is about balancing power between management and employees regarding decisions about how work is organized and conducted to ensure both parties' interests are adequately considered.

A closely related concept frequently used in management scholarship is employee participation, which typically emphasizes the process of voice—highlighting employees as active agents in the planning, coordination, and governance of workplace operations (Wilkinson et al., 2010). Participation is predominantly framed as a strategy for achieving mutual gains, enhancing both organizational performance (e.g., productivity, innovation) and employee outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, engagement). Given its emphasis on structured processes and collaborative mechanisms, it is unsurprising that most workplace intervention studies concerning employee voice are conceptualized through the lens of participation.

In this systematic review, we adopt a broad conceptualization of *employee voice* to illuminate significant gaps in the literature concerning key domains of voice that warrant critical scholarly attention. Specifically, we sought to identify and examine interventions that fall within the following three domains influenced by legal and industrial relations scholars Befort & Budd (2009):

(1) *Freedom of speech and self-expression:* ability to openly share thoughts, opinions, ideas, and concerns in the workplace without fear of retaliation, discrimination, or punishment.

(2) *Self-determination:* the degree of autonomy one possesses in their job, characterized by substantial freedom, independence, and discretion over what, where, when, and how work is carried out.

(3) *Consultation and co-determination:* a range of information exchanges between management and employees that promotes shared decision-making.

Each of these domains represents a potential pathway to employee wellbeing, best understood through the lens of Amartya Sen's *capability approach*. Drawing on Sen's framework, employee voice can be viewed as a human capability—"real freedoms and opportunities to achieve states of being that one has reason to value" (Robeyns, 2017, p. 39). As Robeyns explains, capabilities hold both intrinsic and instrumental value. Accordingly, the capability for voice can enhance employee wellbeing in two primary ways: (1) through the inherent value of possessing such freedoms (e.g., experiencing a sense of agency or autonomy at work), and (2) through the tangible outcomes that arise from exercising these freedoms (e.g., improvement in working conditions).

How the intervention might work

The workplace interventions included in this review exhibit considerable variability, reflecting differences in how employee voice is conceptualized and operationalized. Consistent with the definition of workplace interventions as "planned behavioural, theory-based actions that aim to improve employee health and wellbeing through changing the way work is designed, organized, and managed" (Nielsen & Abildgaard, 2013, p. 278), voice-related interventions differ across several dimensions, including scope, formality, depth, and level of implementation.

For example, with respect to *scope*, one intervention may afford a narrow set of employees limited discretion—such as choosing their shift start and end times—whereas another may offer broader autonomy over when, where, and how work is conducted (e.g., Garde et al., 2012; Hansen 2015; Moen et al., 2011). *Formality* ranges from informal, ad hoc exchanges between supervisors and direct reports to more formalized mechanisms,

such as regularly convened, employee committee meetings (e.g., Kobayashi 2008; Moen et al., 2016). In terms of *depth*, voice may be solicited through low-involvement methods such as surveys or through higher-involvement approaches like focus groups or participatory problem-solving teams (e.g., Anderzen et al., 2005; Nielsen et al., 2021). Finally, interventions differ in their *level of implementation*, operating at the individual, team, or organizational level (e.g., Arapovic-Johanss et al., 2018; Stratton et al., 2019; Workman et al., 2004). Importantly, employee voice interventions are distinct from many other types of workplace interventions in that they often span multiple levels. For instance, an intervention may collect individual-level feedback to inform an organizational policy, or conversely, engage organizational-level processes to support team or individual-level initiatives.

This variability makes it difficult to predict if and to what magnitude a workplace employee voice intervention will impact employee wellbeing. Both empirical and theoretical evidence cited above suggest that employee voice is a critical determinant of employee wellbeing, however, how this is best cultivated in the workplace remains largely unknown. This knowledge gap calls for a synthesis of the current evidence on employee voice interventions and their impact on employee wellbeing. Although there have been numerous reviews on workplace interventions that have touched upon the concept, some very broad in nature and others more specific (Fox et al., 2021; Joyce et al., 2010), none have explicitly concentrated on employee voice.

Why this review is important

The literature on employee voice is vast and multidisciplinary, spanning human resource management, industrial relations, organizational psychology, and public health. However, much of the existing research is conceptually fragmented, with inconsistent definitions, measures, and outcomes. This review helps synthesize this evidence, offering a clearer picture of what constitutes an employee voice intervention, how it is operationalized, and what impacts it has on employee wellbeing. This in turn can assist policymakers, employers, and labor representatives who increasingly seek evidence-based insights to develop workplace interventions that promote wellbeing beyond popularized corporate wellness programs. It also stands to benefit researchers by improving conceptual clarity, highlighting methodological limitations and strengths, and identifying gaps to guide future research, encouraging more novel, higher quality empirical studies.

This review is particularly timely given the growing global demand for employee voice and the International Labour Organisation's decent work agenda which highlights employee voice as a key component of job quality (ILO, 1999; ILO, 2024). Across diverse national contexts, there has been a marked rise in labor unrest and organizing activity—even in countries traditionally characterized by more quiescent industrial relations systems (Cojocariu and Sedláková, 2024; ILO, 2022). These developments are especially pronounced in the United States, where the total number of work stoppages increased by 55 percent, and the number of workers involved grew by 60 percent between 2021 and 2022 (Kallas et al., 2023). Notably, nearly one-third of these strikes were initiated by non-unionized workers, underscoring a broader resurgence of collective action beyond established union structures.

Evidence from a representative 2017 survey of American workers further highlights a significant *voice gap* across a wide range of workplace concerns, including compensation, promotion, job security, and responses to technological change. The study also reveals considerable heterogeneity in both the voice mechanisms available

to workers and their satisfaction with those mechanisms. When assessing whether existing channels of voice are effectively meeting workers' needs, the authors found that none received consistently high satisfaction ratings (Kochann et al., 2019). This points to a growing disconnect between the appetite for voice and the institutional means through which it is currently facilitated.

Objectives

The main objective of this review is to synthesize the evidence on workplace employee voice interventions and their effect on subjective measures of employee wellbeing.

METHODS

Eligibility Criteria

Types of studies

Studies evaluating the subjective wellbeing (SWB) effects of workplace interventions that incorporated employee voice in some way were considered for this review. Three study designs were eligible for inclusion:

- Randomized controlled trial
- Pre-post test with control group
- Pre-post test without a control group

This approach strikes a balance between methodological rigor and practical relevance. Randomized controlled trials offer the highest internal validity but are often infeasible in workplace settings due to ethical and logistical constraints. Pre–post designs with control groups provide a viable quasi-experimental alternative, allowing for stronger causal inference than uncontrolled designs. Pre–post studies without control groups were also included to capture a broader range of applied interventions, acknowledging their limitations in causal interpretation. Studies relying solely on cross-sectional, qualitative, or theoretical approaches were excluded, as they do not allow for temporal assessment of intervention effects. Thus, capturing these three study designs ensures that the review remains focused on synthesizing evidence of impact rather than perception alone.

Participants

Participants of interventions are ‘employees’ defined as individuals legally employed by an organization for income in exchange for effort. This includes full-time, part-time, temporary, and contract employees of legal working status, and excludes self-employed workers, unpaid volunteers, and workers in unregulated sectors.

Interventions

Employee voice is defined as “the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say, formally and/or informally, individually and/or collectively, to influence organizational affairs relating to issues that affect their work, their interests, and the interests of managers and owners” (Wilkinson et al., 2021). As previously discussed, employee voice can be expressed and operationalized in multiple ways. This review considered three

critical dimensions of employee voice including (i.e., freedom of speech and self expression; self-determination; and consultation, codetermination, and social dialogue) regardless of the intervention's specific objectives or design. This inclusive approach captured a wide range of interventions utilising different voice instruments, from surveys to employee committees, and in turn, engaged varying degrees of employee involvement, from input on a single issue to fully autonomous work teams.

Outcome Measures

To be included in this review, studies were required to report at least one measure of subjective wellbeing (SWB) as either a primary or secondary outcome. SWB captures how individuals experience and evaluate their lives, encompassing multiple dimensions such as evaluative wellbeing (e.g., job satisfaction, self-rated health), affective wellbeing (e.g., happiness, work engagement), and eudaimonic wellbeing (e.g., purpose, meaning) (Diener et al., 2003; Ryff, 1989; OECD, 2013). This multidimensional focus allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how employees experience their work, beyond what can be inferred from objective indicators like income or absenteeism (Layard & De Neve, 2023; Green, 2006). Importantly, SWB has been identified as both a core component of human flourishing and a robust predictor of critical organizational outcomes, including performance, turnover, and productivity (Grawitch et al., 2006; Harter et al., 2003; De Neve & Ward, 2025). Moreover, SWB is particularly sensitive to variations in working conditions, making it a valuable proxy for assessing the effectiveness of workplace interventions, especially those aimed at enhancing employee voice and agency (Green, 2006; van der Doef & Maes, 1999). Given its theoretical significance and empirical utility, SWB represents a rigorous and policy-relevant outcome domain for evaluating employee-focused interventions.

Language and publication date

For reasons of feasibility, relevance, and contextual validity, this review was limited to studies published in English between 2000 and 2024. Systematic reviews require pragmatic scope boundaries to ensure methodological rigour and manageability (Moher et al., 2009), and expanding the time frame further—particularly given the broad conceptualization of employee voice adopted in this review—would have produced an unmanageably large corpus of literature, exceeding the research team's capacity for thorough screening and synthesis (Gough et al., 2017). In addition, restricting the review to the past two decades enhances its relevance to current policy and practice. The content, structure, and regulation of work have changed significantly since the early 2000s, shaped by globalization, technological advancement, labour market deregulation, and the rise of nonstandard employment (Kalleberg, 2009; De Stefano, 2016). As such, studies conducted prior to 2000 may be less reflective of the contemporary institutional and organizational environments in which employee voice interventions are implemented. Furthermore, restricting the review to English-language sources is a common strategy in systematic reviews, particularly where the majority of relevant, peer-reviewed scholarship is concentrated in English-language journals, and where translation resources are limited (Jackson & Kuriyama, 2019).

Information Sources

Electronic searches

Since workplace interventions are studied across many academic fields, we conducted systematic searches in the following electronic databases for peer-reviewed journal articles in November 2024:

- Social Science: Web of Science; Scopus; and ProQuest Social Science Premium
- Management Science: Business Source Ultimate
- Public Health: CINAHL, Cochrane Library
- Psychology: PsycINFO

Other searches

The results of the electronic search yielded several systematic reviews of workplace interventions on different topics to which we performed a backward search for each (list provided in the appendix). We also conducted searches in Google Scholar and Web of Science, as well as consulted a number of websites to capture relevant grey literature, working papers or reports documenting intervention evaluations that met our eligibility criteria. This step was conducted between November 2024 and January 2025.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was structured around the PICO framework—Population, Intervention, Comparison, and Outcome—and comprised four distinct lines of search syntax. Specifically, one line of synonyms was developed for each of the following key terms (see appendix A for full search syntax):

Table 1. Search Strategy

PICO	Key term	Number of synonyms	Examples
Population	Employee / Workplace	25	Worker, staff, professional, team, job, occupation, worksite, organization, employer
Intervention	Intervention	65	Program, initiative, regime, system, procedure, tool, process, policy, strategy
Intervention type	Employee voice	69	Employee influence, employee participation, employee involvement, employee committee
Comparison	N/A		
Outcome	SWB	65	Job satisfaction, happiness, mental health, vitality, illbeing, anxiety, burnout

For the *comparison* criterion, we defined it as either (a) a comparable group of employees not exposed to the intervention (i.e., a control group) or (b) the same group of employees assessed prior to the intervention. Given that this criterion relates to research design and cannot always be reliably determined from abstracts or titles, we deferred this assessment to the full-text screening stage to ensure greater rigor. The *intervention* criterion was

divided into two separate lines of search syntax to reflect the multidimensional nature of "workplace employee voice interventions."

For the first two lines (population and intervention), we applied the search to 'All Fields'. For the remaining two lines (comparison and outcome), we limited the search to the 'Abstract' field. This refinement significantly reduced the initial yield from over 100,000 records to fewer than 15,000, by excluding studies that were unlikely to be relevant. As a robustness check, we verified that five pre-identified, highly relevant articles were captured by our search.

We limited the search to English-language peer-reviewed publications, where such filters were available, and restricted the date range from January 1, 2000, to December 31, 2024. Justifications for these parameters are outlined above. Lastly, all retrieved records were imported into Covidence, an online systematic review tool, for study selection, data extraction, and risk of bias assessment.

Selection Process

All three authors participated in both the title and abstract screening and the full-text review. Each record retrieved from the systematic search was independently screened by two authors based on the title and abstract. Screening decisions at this stage were guided by the PICO framework; records were excluded if the population, intervention, or outcomes did not align with the predefined inclusion criteria. In cases where eligibility could not be determined from the title and abstract alone, the full text was reviewed.

Discrepancies between the two reviewers were resolved through discussion. If consensus could not be reached, the third author served as an adjudicator. The same procedure was followed during the full-text review, with additional emphasis placed on evaluating research design. At this stage, studies were excluded if they did not employ one of the following designs: randomized controlled trial (RCT), pre-post with a control group, or pre-post without a control group.

To ensure consistent application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria at both the screening and review stage, each author was assigned the same subset of records to independently screen or review and results were compared to test inter-rater reliability. Although agreement was high, any disagreements were discussed collectively. This process further clarified the eligibility criteria and corresponding guidance materials for its application.

Data Collection Process and Risk of Bias Assessment

The following data items were extracted from each study by one of three authors:

Table 2. Data Extraction List

Category	Data Items
Study characteristics	□ Title □ Journal/source

	□ Publication year □ First author last name
Population	□ Geography □ Setting □ Participants
Intervention	□ Intervention type □ Employee voice instrument(s)
Research design	□ Total sample size □ Number of participants at baseline and follow-up □ Method □ Duration of longest follow-up period
Outcomes and results	□ SWB indicators □ Type of SWB (evaluative, affective, or eudaemonic) □ Inventory □ Primary or secondary outcome □ Direction of wellbeing effect

We also included a final screening question to determine whether the study warranted continued inclusion upon closer examination. This allowed for the removal of studies that, despite meeting initial criteria, were later deemed irrelevant. Six studies were excluded at this stage.

Given the complexity of the interventions and the scarcity of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in this area, we adapted a risk of bias tool from previous systematic reviews of workplace interventions that encountered similar challenges (Fox et al., 2022; Joyce et al., 2010; Bambra, 2008). This modified tool was designed to accommodate pre-post quasi-experimental designs while maintaining a focus on methodological rigor. After careful consideration, we assessed the following nine criteria:

1. Presence of a control group
2. Use of randomization
3. Sample representativeness
4. Baseline response rate >60%
5. Follow-up response rate >80%
6. Use of intention-to-treat analysis
7. Adjustment for known confounders
8. Protection from contamination
9. Appropriateness of statistical tests

A detailed version of the assessment tool, including guidance for scoring and item interpretation, is provided in the Appendix B. Each criterion was scored individually and then aggregated into a total score with a three-point scale: 0 (low quality), 1 (moderate quality), or 2 (high quality). While some evaluation frameworks incorporate broader contextual and process-related factors, our quality assessment prioritized the methodological strength of each study in estimating causal effects (i.e., average treatment effects) with confidence.

To promote consistency in applying the tool, all authors independently rated the same three studies. Discrepancies in scoring were discussed collaboratively, leading to refinements in the guidance for greater clarity. The revised tool was then re-tested using the same process. This process was repeated until inter-rater reliability was near 100 percent (three times in total).

Synthesis Methods

We determined that a meta-analysis was not appropriate for this review due to the substantial heterogeneity across studies, particularly with respect to the types of interventions examined and outcome measures. As Deeks (2009) notes, meta-analysis should be avoided when combining results is unlikely to yield meaningful conclusions—such as when study outcomes are highly variable. For these reasons, we conducted a narrative synthesis and reported findings by intervention type, described key study characteristics, and included information on study quality and direction of wellbeing effect. Although many studies from our final sample are rated as low quality, we include them in our summary table to showcase the state of the evidence pertaining to workplace employee voice interventions in the field.

RESULTS

Study Selection

Appendix C presents a flow diagram outlining the study selection process. The electronic database search identified 25,645 records, with an additional 86 records retrieved through other sources. After removing duplicates, 13,955 records remained for title and abstract screening. Of these, 13,720 were excluded, leaving 235 articles for full-text review. An additional 136 articles were excluded at this stage based on our predefined eligibility criteria, including intervention type, study design, outcomes assessed, and publication date. This resulted in 98 studies eligible for inclusion. Following further assessment during the data extraction phase, 6 studies were excluded, yielding a final sample of 92 studies for this review (notably, this includes 3 intervention studies from one article).

Description of Studies

Types of interventions

Table 3 in Appendix D presents a summary of the 92 studies included in this review and outlines several key characteristics. We identified 13 distinct types of interventions, with participatory problem-solving emerging as the most prevalent approach, appearing in 32 studies (34.8%), followed by participatory ergonomics (n=12, 13%) and schedule discretion (n=9, 9.8%). Although some studies described interventions that incorporated elements from multiple types, each was classified according to the dominant intervention approach reported. For example, participatory work reorganization was often articulated as an objective within broader participatory problem-solving initiatives. Intervention types were further grouped based on their alignment with key employee voice domains. Specifically, two intervention types (n=6, 6.5%) were associated with the domain of *freedom of speech and self-expression*, four intervention types (n=23, 25%) with *self-determination*, and seven intervention types (n=63, 68.5%) with *consultation and codetermination*.

Table 4 presents each intervention type alongside its corresponding definition and frequency of occurrence. As the terminology used across studies was not always consistent with the classification employed in this review, we interpreted the authors' descriptions to categorize interventions appropriately. In developing the definitions, we adopted a broad framing that emphasizes the core principles underlying each intervention type, allowing us to account for heterogeneity observed across studies.

Table 4. Intervention Categories & Types

Intervention Type	Description	Number of Studies
Freedom of Speech & Self-Expression		
Employee Dialogue	Open-ended, reciprocal discussions about workplace and personal issues, with the aim of sharing knowledge, fostering mutual understanding, and enhancing trust.	5
Employee Disclosure	A process through which employees voluntarily share sensitive or critical information typically facilitated by mechanisms that ensure psychological safety.	1
Self-Determination		
Employee Empowerment Training	Structured activities to develop employees' skills and knowledge to foster personal responsibility, enhance communication, and support more active participation in workplace matters.	3
Job Crafting	A bottom-up process where employees proactively modify their tasks, relationships, or perceptions of their jobs to better align with their strengths, values, and interests.	5
Participatory Job Redesign	A collaborative approach to modifying job structures, tasks, and workflows in which employees are directly involved in diagnosing problems, generating redesign options, and implementing changes.	6
Schedule Discretion	The degree to which employees have control over the timing, sequencing and location of their work activities.	9
Consultation & Codetermination		
Autonomous Work Teams	Self-managed or semi-autonomous groups of employees responsible for a set of interrelated tasks. These teams are granted decision-making authority over work processes, task allocation, and problem-solving.	3
Participatory Employee Rehabilitation	An intervention strategy in occupational health where workers actively participate in the planning and implementation of their return-to-work process following illness or injury.	5
Participatory Ergonomics	A collaborative approach in which employees contribute their experiential knowledge to the identification and solution of ergonomic issues in the workplace.	12
Participatory Intervention Design	A process in which employees are engaged in the co-creation of workplace interventions, from problem identification through design and implementation. This approach enhances contextual relevance, ownership, and sustainability of change efforts.	2

Participatory Planning	Involves employees in the formulation of strategic planning and goal-setting, often increasing alignment between organizational objectives and worker needs.	2
Participatory Problem-Solving	Encourages employees to collaboratively identify, analyze, and generate solutions to workplace challenges. Supports continuous improvement and draws from quality circles and lean production models.	32
Participatory Work Reorganization	A comprehensive approach to restructuring work processes, roles, and responsibilities, with active employee involvement. It combines technical and social change processes, aiming to enhance productivity while preserving or improving worker autonomy and well-being.	7

As outlined in the background section, participatory interventions typically emphasize the process of employee voice and are employed to advance both organizational performance and employee well-being. For instance, employees may be actively involved in identifying opportunities for operational efficiency (e.g., streamlining specific tasks) or in proposing improvements to the psychosocial work environment (e.g., enhancing supervisory support). Approximately seven of the intervention types are characterized as participatory in nature, with three primarily targeting individual-level processes (i.e., participatory ergonomics, participatory job redesign, and participatory employee rehabilitation), two targeting group-level processes (i.e., participatory intervention design and participatory problem-solving), and two aimed at organization-level processes (i.e., participatory planning and participatory work reorganization). All together, participatory interventions make up 72 percent of the studies in this review.

To further examine the nature of employee voice and how it was operationalized within each study, we analyzed what specific employee voice instruments were utilized to highlight scope, formality, depth, and level of implementation. Several instruments were identified including, for example, discretion (n=29, 31.5%), surveys (n=15, 16.3%), team meetings (n=30, 32.6%), workshops (n=14, 15%), training programs (n=17, 18.5%), and committees (n=11, 12%). While some interventions relied on a single voice instrument, others adopted a multifaceted approach incorporating multiple. Accordingly, the complexity of the interventions and the role of employee voice varied substantially across studies. Interventions that positioned employee voice as a primary outcome were less common than those that leveraged voice as a means to achieve other objectives (e.g., interventions in the freedom of speech and self-expression category). The former typically emphasized individual-level expressions of voice—such as dialogue, disclosure, and schedule discretion—and aligned with the domains of *communication*, as well as *self-determination*. In contrast, the latter tended to engage group- and organizational-level processes and were more closely associated with the domain of *consultation and codetermination*.

Setting and participants

The studies encompassed a wide range of national contexts, reflecting diverse cultural settings. However, the majority were conducted in Western Europe and North America. More specifically, the Nordic countries (n=23, 25%), the United States (n=17, 18.5%), and the Netherlands (n=15, 16.3%). Underrepresented regions include Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. A broad array of work settings and occupational groups are represented, with healthcare environments—particularly hospitals—being the most frequently studied. Other

industries include education, public administration, manufacturing, social services, finance, retail, shipping, and transportation. The occupational roles examined ranged from call centre agents and construction workers to teachers, police officers, and mail delivery personnel. Notably, studies conducted in the public sector outnumbered those in the private sector. Regarding demographic composition, the majority of studies evaluating the effects of participatory employee rehabilitation interventions focused on populations with an existing condition, such as musculoskeletal disorders or psychological health problems. Otherwise, an existing condition was not an eligibility criteria. Furthermore, the sample populations of studies encompassing male or female dominated professions, such as construction or nursing, typically reflected the gender distribution of those fields.

SWB outcomes

There was considerable heterogeneity in the reporting of SWB outcomes across studies, with many leveraging multiple indicators spanning different SWB domains—namely, evaluative, affective, and (to a lesser extent) eudaimonic. To bring conceptual clarity to this variation, we classified each outcome variable according to its corresponding SWB domain. Affective measures were the most frequently reported (n=124), followed by evaluative (n=56), mixed (n=7), and eudaimonic (n=3) measures. Table 5 presents examples of specific indicators used within each domain.

This classification required careful interpretation of how each study conceptualized and operationalized SWB, with particular attention to the definitions, inventories and scales reported. In some cases, the same indicator was used differently across studies, for instance, morale was classified as an evaluative measure in one context and as an affective measure in another, depending on the framing and measurement approach. Following classification, we assessed the direction of effect on employee well-being using a coding scheme in which '+' denotes a statistically significant positive effect (i.e., favorable impact to SWB), '–' a statistically significant negative effect (i.e., unfavourable impact to SWB), and '0' indicates no statistically significant effect (i.e., no impact to SWB) (refer to Table 3 in Appendix C for direction of effect).

Table 5. Subjective Wellbeing Domains and Indicators

SWB Domain	Occurrence	Indicators
Evaluative	56	Career satisfaction; job satisfaction; mental health; morale; perceived health; quality of life; self-rated health; subjective health symptoms; work ability; work-related basic need satisfaction
Affective	124	Burnout; depersonalization; depression; discomfort with work; distress; morale; exhaustion; fatigue; mental stress; need for recovery; pain; pain anxiety; psychological distress; psychosomatic complaints; stress; vigor; vitality; work engagement
Eudaemonic	3	Meaningful work; spiritual wellbeing
Mixed	7	General health; psychological wellbeing; social wellbeing; subjective health complaints; work ability

Risk of bias

Methodological quality across studies was approximately normally distributed, with 23 studies rated as high quality, 40 as moderate, and 29 as low. The review sample included 33 randomized controlled trials (RCTs), 35 pre–post studies with a control group, and 24 pre–post studies without a control group. The most common sources of bias were short follow-up periods, limited adjustment for confounding variables (e.g., demographic characteristics, job roles, or organizational-level factors), and insufficient methodological detail. Furthermore, limited information was provided about the broader study population from which participants were drawn. These reporting limitations hindered the ability to determine whether study samples were representative, whether control groups were appropriately matched, and whether baseline differences existed between intervention and control groups.

Regarding study duration, 32 studies featured follow-up periods longer than one year, while 7 studies had follow-ups shorter than three months; the remaining 83 studies reported follow-up periods between four and twelve months. Information on sample sizes and response rates at baseline and follow-up was often incomplete or required additional calculation. Sixty-three studies reported a baseline response rate of at least 60 percent, and 49 studies reported a follow-up response rate of at least 80 percent at one or more time points. Only 32 studies adjusted for most known confounders (e.g., Bond et al., 2001; Busch et al., 2017; Cedstrand et al., 2021; Chanchai et al., 2016), and just 25 provided explicit evidence of protection from contamination. A further methodological concern—frequently raised in critiques of workplace intervention research—is the failure to apply intention-to-treat (ITT) principles, which can lead to an overestimation of effect sizes by excluding non-adherent participants from the final analysis (Abraha et al., 2015). To address this, we incorporated ITT as a criterion in our quality appraisal and found that 41 percent of studies, predominantly RCTs, applied ITT principles, enhancing the internal validity and robustness of their findings.

Effects of Interventions

Of the 92 studies included in this review, 23 (25%) were rated as high quality, 40 (43.5%) as moderate quality, and 29 (31.5%) as low quality. For this section we focus our analysis of effects on high and moderate quality studies since our ability to make inferences and recommendations from low quality studies is limited given their methodological shortcomings. Table 5 summarizes the effects across all high and moderate quality studies (only statistically significant effects are reported). The majority of low-quality studies which are not recorded in this table reported null effects (null: n=32; positive: n=18; negative: n=7).

Table 6. Summary of high and moderate quality intervention effects to employee subjective wellbeing

	Number of studies	Number of measures	Positive (favourable)	Null	Negative (unfavourable)
Freedom of speech and self-expression					
Employee dialogue	3	8	3	5	0
Employee disclosure	1	2	1	1	0
	4	**10**	**4** (40%)	6 (60%)	**0** (0%)

Self-determination					
Employee empowerment training	3	5	3	2	0
Job crafting	1	2	2	0	0
Participatory job redesign	4	7	4	3	0
Schedule discretion	7	20	8	11	1
	15	**34**	**17 (50%)**	**16 (47%)**	**1 (3%)**
Consultation and co-determination					
Autonomous work teams	2	2	1	1	0
Participatory employee rehabilitation	5	11	1	9	1
Participatory ergonomics	8	16	4	10	2
Participatory intervention design	1	3	0	3	0
Participatory planning	1	2	0	2	0
Participatory problem solving	21	47	21	25	1
Participatory work reorganization	7	14	9	5	0
	45	**95**	**36 (38%)**	**55 (58%)**	**4 (4%)**
Total	**64**	**139**	**57 (41%)**	**77 (55%)**	**5 (4%)**

Freedom of Speech and Self Expression

Four studies across two intervention categories (i.e., employee dialogue and employee disclosure) of moderate quality fulfilled our inclusion criteria for interventions related to the *freedom of speech and self expression* employee voice domain. Overall, four positive effects and six null effects were reported.

Employee dialogue

We define employee dialogue interventions as open-ended, reciprocal discussions about workplace or personal issues aimed at facilitating knowledge exchange, fostering mutual understanding, and building interpersonal trust. Three studies met our inclusion criteria (Bergman et al., 2014; Hammer et al., 2011; Linzer et al., 2015), examining eight SWB outcomes—six affective and two evaluative. Each study reported one positive effect (work-related exhaustion, physical health, and job satisfaction) (n=3) and at least one null effect (n=5). Two studies, conducted in the healthcare sector, used a team-based format (Bergman et al., 2014; Linzer et al., 2015), involving regular, supervised meetings where clinicians voiced concerns through active listening, shared learning, and reflective practice. Hammer et al. (2011) focused on one-on-one dialogue, emphasizing supervisor responsiveness to work-family issues.

All three interventions engaged employee voice differently, varying in depth, structure, and intent. In Bergman et al. (2014), employee voice was expressive and reflective, with dialogue groups providing a safe space for physicians, especially women, to share experiences and emotions about their work environment without explicit expectations of instrumental outcomes. Hammer et al. (2011) involved indirect employee voice, focusing instead on improving supervisors' responsiveness to work-family concerns; employees were not active participants in the intervention design, but the aim was to create conditions where voice could be more safely exercised. In contrast, Linzer et al. (2015) featured instrumental and participatory voice, where clinicians and staff were central to identifying problems and co-developing work redesign solutions—embedding voice directly into organizational change processes. Thus, while the first two studies emphasized employee expression, only the latter operationalized voice as a driver of structural change.

Employee disclosure

We define *employee disclosure interventions* as processes that facilitate employees' voluntary sharing of sensitive or personally significant information, typically supported by mechanisms that promote psychological safety. One study (Stratton et al., 2019) met this criterion and reported a reduction in depressive symptoms but no effect on stress. The intervention consisted of a digital tool designed to support employees with mental health conditions in making informed decisions about whether, when, and how to disclose their condition at work. It guided users through a structured process of weighing the pros and cons of disclosure, clarifying personal values, and planning potential communication strategies. In this way, the intervention centered on empowering individuals to exercise control over if and how they expressed sensitive information in the workplace rather than altering working conditions or organizational practices. The null effects on stress are not surprising considering that voice of this nature can be stressful in and of itself (Sherf et al., 2021; Shipton et al., 2023).

Self-Determination

Fifteen studies spanning four intervention categories—employee empowerment training, job crafting, participatory job redesign, and schedule discretion—met the inclusion criteria for interventions aligned with the *self-determination* employee voice domain. Of these, three were assessed as high quality and 12 were assessed as moderate quality, which revealed 17 positive effects, 16 null effects, and one negative effect.

Employee Empowerment Training

The first category, *employee empowerment training*, comprises three studies (Bekker et al., 2022; Kaveh et al., 2023; Oude Hengel et al., 2012), all rated as moderate quality. We define this intervention type as structured efforts to develop employees' skills and knowledge to foster personal responsibility, enhance communication, and support more active participation in workplace matters. Across the three studies, five SWB indicators were assessed, with positive effects observed for three, work engagement, perceived stress and spiritual wellbeing, and null effects for two (work engagement and need for recovery). The three interventions reviewed under this category shared a common goal of enhancing employee wellbeing by strengthening personal resources, yet they differed in the form and degree of employee voice they facilitated.

In Bakker (2021), voice was expressed primarily at the individual level through self-reflection and self-directed action. The intervention encouraged participants to identify and apply their personal strengths within their work context, thereby fostering autonomy and psychological ownership, but without creating formal opportunities for

influencing organizational practices or decision-making. Similarly, the Kaveh et al. (2023) study focused on enhancing individual agency through stress-coping skills training grounded in the transactional model of stress. This intervention promoted proactive problem-solving and personal responsibility in managing work-related challenges, emphasizing internal resource development rather than participatory dialogue or collective input. In contrast, Oude Hengel et al. (2012) explicitly aimed to strengthen communication between employees and supervisors at construction worksites, with the goal of increasing voice around work demands and job-related issues. While this intervention incorporated more interpersonal and relational elements of voice than the other two, the scope of employee influence remained limited. Communication was encouraged within existing team structures and oriented toward improving day-to-day functioning, rather than enabling structural or strategic influence over job design or organizational decisions. This was the only intervention of the three that had no effect on SWB.

Taken together, these studies suggest that employee empowerment training interventions commonly promote internalized or interpersonal forms of voice such as self-expression, assertiveness, or peer communication, but seldom extend to formal participatory mechanisms or collective influence. As such, while these interventions may support wellbeing by enhancing personal efficacy and communication skills, their capacity to advance broader influence over work conditions appears limited.

Job Crafting

Job crafting is a widely implemented and extensively studied intervention that we define as a bottom-up process whereby employees proactively alter the tasks, relationships, or perceptions associated with their jobs to better align with their personal strengths, values, and interests (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Despite its prominence in the literature, only one study of moderate quality met our inclusion criteria for this review; the remaining four studies were rated as low quality and therefore were excluded from this discussion.

The moderate quality study, conducted by Van Wingerden et al. (2017) in the Netherlands among teachers, reported positive effects on two SWB indicators: work engagement and work-related basic psychological needs satisfaction. The intervention empowered participants to modify aspects of their work environment in ways that aligned with their personal strengths and needs. It followed a typical job crafting format involving a needs and job analysis, goal setting, action planning, implementation, and reflection. While these findings are encouraging, the single moderate-quality study limits the strength of any conclusions regarding job crafting's impact on wellbeing.

Participatory job redesign

Participatory job redesign shares conceptual overlap with job crafting but differs in that it is a more collaborative, management-facilitated process. We define it as a structured approach to modifying job structures, tasks, and workflows in which employees are actively involved in diagnosing workplace problems, generating redesign options, and implementing changes, typically in partnership with organizational leaders. Four studies met the inclusion criteria for this intervention category (Holam et al., 2010; Workman et al., 2004; Holman et al., 2016; Logan et al., 2005): two rated as high quality and two as moderate. Across these studies, seven SWB indicators were assessed—five affective and two evaluative—with four showing significant positive effects and three showing null effects. More specifically, improvements were observed in job-related affective wellbeing and job satisfaction.

While each intervention adhered to common job redesign principles such as being management-driven and emphasizing collaborative redesign, they varied in their execution. For instance, the studies by Holman et al. (2010, 2016) and Logan et al. (2005) used team-based formats, facilitating redesign through collective dialogue, whereas Workman et al. (2004) implemented a more individualized process through discretion. The degree of employee voice in these interventions ranged from having input, to making choices, to exercising full discretion over proposed changes.

Schedule discretion

Schedule discretion represents the third-largest intervention category in this review, comprising one high quality study (Moen et al., 2016) and six moderate quality studies (Garde et al., 2012; Karhula et al., 2020; Kossek et al., 2019; Moen et al., 2011; Pryce et al., 2006; Hansen et al., 2015). We define this intervention type as the degree to which employees have control over the timing, sequencing and location of their work activities. Across these seven interventions, a total of 20 SWB indicators were measured. Eight demonstrated positive effects (six affective and two evaluative), 11 null effects, and one showed a negative effect. The most consistently positive findings were reported in Garde et al. (2012) and Moen et al. (2016), each demonstrating improvements across all SWB indicators assessed—exhaustion, job satisfaction, perceived stress, psychological distress, need for recovery, and physical health. Both interventions aimed to enhance wellbeing by increasing flexibility and control over work schedules, but they differed meaningfully in their operationalization of employee voice.

In Garde et al. (2012) the intervention was conducted in a Danish hospital and employee voice was exercised individually and within constraints. Healthcare workers could express preferences for specific shifts through a self-rostering system, but scheduling remained bounded by operational requirements and mediated through team coordination. By contrast, Moen et al. (2016) offered a more expansive and collective form of voice. Conducted among knowledge workers in a U.S. IT firm, this intervention involved teams in rethinking work norms and redesigning work practices, supported by managerial training and organizational culture change. Here, employees participated not only in shaping their schedules but also in redefining expectations around work time, autonomy, and performance.

The Hansen et al. (2015) study—also implemented in a Danish hospital and conceptually similar to Garde et al. (2012)—demonstrated a negative effect on job satisfaction, illustrating how implementation challenges can undermine the potential benefits of schedule discretion. Specifically, participants reported perceived inequities in shift allocation, interpersonal tensions from negotiating scheduling preferences, and increased working hours to optimize personal preferences. These unintended consequences led to diminished team cohesion, greater mental strain, and reduced recovery time.

Consultation and Codetermination

45 studies spanning six intervention categories—autonomous work teams; participatory employee rehabilitation, participatory ergonomics; participatory intervention design; participatory planning; participatory problem-solving; and participatory work reorganization—met the inclusion criteria for interventions aligned with the *Consultation and Codetermination* domain. Of these, 25 were assessed as moderate quality and 20 as

high quality, collectively measuring 95 SWB outcomes (59 affective, 58 evaluative, 1 eudaemonic, 3 mix, and 3 not reported) with 36 positive, 55 null, and 4 negative. Due to the high volume of studies in this category, we focus our discussion on intervention types with five or more studies and concentrate exclusively on high-quality studies.

Participatory employee rehabilitation

Participatory employee rehabilitation refers to occupational health interventions that emphasize active worker involvement in the planning and execution of their return-to-work (RTW) process following illness or injury. This approach is rooted in the principle of collaborative decision-making, often involving coordination among the employee, employer, occupational health professionals, and sometimes insurers, with the aim of fostering a more tailored, supportive reintegration experience.

Five studies met our eligibility criteria in this category, three of which were rated as high quality (Geerdink et al., 2024; van Oostrom et al., 2010; Vermeulen, 2011). Across these, five SWB outcomes were assessed—four evaluative (i.e., job satisfaction, perceived recovery, overall wellbeing) and one affective (i.e., emotional distress). Notably, none of the studies reported positive effects on SWB, and one study (Geerdink et al., 2024) observed a negative effect on mental health, suggesting a potential deterioration in wellbeing associated with the intervention.

One important contextual factor across all studies is that participants were individuals with pre-existing health conditions, such as mental stress, musculoskeletal issues, or chronic illness. These underlying health challenges likely shape both the experience and outcome of the RTW process. Returning to work—even under participatory conditions—may exacerbate stress or expose individuals to unresolved workplace demands, potentially dampening the positive impact of empowerment or agency during the RTW phase.

Participatory ergonomics

Five high-quality studies evaluated the impact of participatory ergonomics interventions on employee wellbeing (Brandt et al., 2018; Haukka et al., 2008, 2010; Sormunen et al., 2022; van Vilsteren et al., 2017). Despite the methodological rigor of these studies, the evidence for positive wellbeing outcomes was limited: only one positive effect was observed across 11 SWB indicators, and one study reported two negative effects. These findings suggest that participatory ergonomics interventions, as currently implemented, may have limited efficacy in enhancing employee wellbeing.

Participatory ergonomics interventions typically involve collaboration between workers, ergonomic specialists (e.g., occupational health professionals), and, in some cases, management, to identify and co-develop solutions to work-related ergonomic challenges. These interventions often incorporate an educational component, delivered either through structured group training or individualized sessions, and vary in the degree of employee influence over the design and implementation of ergonomic changes. For example, Sormunen et al. (2022) and Brandt et al. (2018) emphasized higher levels of employee participation in group-based decision-making processes, while van Vilsteren et al. (2017) adopted a more individualized, tailored approach.

Brandt et al. (2018) was the only study that reported a positive SWB effect which related to construction workers' general level of fatigue. Haukka et al. (2010) reported two negative effects relating to kitchen workers'

mental stress and job satisfaction. The nature of the interventions were quite similar, however, the former involved wearable technology that may have revealed further insights unidentifiable through other means. The remaining effects were null.

Across the studies, a recurring explanation for the limited or adverse wellbeing effects was the absence of sustained managerial support and constrained employee agency. In several cases, workers were encouraged to identify ergonomic problems but lacked the authority or organizational support to implement changes. This disconnect—between voice and action—was identified as a key barrier to intervention success. When employee input is solicited without adequate follow-through or autonomy to act, it may lead not only to frustration and disillusionment but also to perceptions of tokenism or procedural injustice, ultimately undermining wellbeing.

Participatory problem-solving

Participatory problem-solving interventions were the most frequently represented intervention type in our review, encompassing 32 studies, of which only six were rated as high quality. Across these, five positive SWB effects were reported in four studies—specifically improvements in work engagement, mental health, general health, discomfort with work, and morale (Glisson et al., 2012; Schwarz et al., 2017; Tsutsumi et al., 2019; van de Poll et al., 2020). All other measured SWB outcomes in this category yielded null results.

A unifying characteristic of these interventions is their emphasis on employee participation in identifying, analyzing, and generating solutions to workplace challenges, typically at the group level, though some also incorporated individual-level components. These interventions are often multifaceted and phased, deploying multiple employee voice mechanisms such as team workshops, feedback sessions, and collaborative planning. This complexity contributes to substantial variation in design and implementation, which poses challenges for synthesis and comparability across studies.

Despite this heterogeneity, a key distinguishing feature of participatory problem-solving interventions is their instrumental orientation—they are explicitly designed to improve tangible aspects of the work environment. Among the high-quality studies, four targeted psychosocial working conditions (Glisson et al., 2012; Tsutsumi et al., 2019; Uchiyama et al., 2013; van de Poll et al., 2020), with three reporting positive wellbeing outcomes. In contrast, one study that combined both physical and psychosocial aims reported no significant effects (Gupta et al., 2018), while another intervention primarily aimed at operational and workflow improvements yielded a positive outcome (Schwarz et al., 2017).

Participatory work reorganization

Eight intervention studies addressing participatory work reorganization met our eligibility criteria, four of which were rated as high quality (Arapovic-Johansson et al., 2018; Bond et al., 2001; Nielsen et al., 2021; Workman et al., 2004). These studies collectively assessed seven SWB outcomes, with three studies reporting positive effects related to reductions in mental ill health, improvements in job satisfaction, and enhanced work engagement.

These interventions are characterized by top-down efforts to comprehensively restructure work processes, roles, and responsibilities, while incorporating active employee involvement in decision-making and planning. Although initiated by management, these programs employed various employee voice mechanisms, including focus groups, interviews, steering committees, and co-design teams, to solicit input and build consensus

throughout the implementation process.

Participatory work reorganization shares similarities with participatory problem-solving interventions in its multifaceted design and iterative structure, but differs in scope: rather than targeting discrete workplace challenges, these interventions typically seek system-level changes to the organization of work itself. Their primary aim is to enhance employee wellbeing by redesigning how work is structured and experienced, with reduced stress and burnout cited as intended outcomes in two studies (Arapovic-Johansson et al., 2018; Bond et al., 2001; Nielsen et al., 2021), and improved job attitudes emphasized in one (Workman et al., 2004).

DISCUSSION

This systematic review synthesized evidence from 92 interventions evaluating the effects of employee voice interventions on SWB, focusing on high- and moderate-quality studies to draw conclusions. Overall, 41 percent of the 139 SWB outcomes measured showed favourable results, 55 had no effect, and four percent showed unfavorable results. These findings provide evidence that workplace employee voice interventions can improve employee wellbeing, however, this result depends on a myriad of factors that are difficult to collate. Nonetheless, our analysis sheds light on the strengths, and limitations of these interventions and provides a series of recommendations for future research.

Summary of main findings

Across the interventions reviewed, we identified meaningful differences in how employee voice was conceptualized and operationalized, and in turn, its scope, formality, and depth in practice. In other words, the instruments used to promote voice and degree of influence employees actually had over organizational decision-making varied significantly. This variance created meaningful differences in the effectiveness of interventions at promoting employee wellbeing.

Overall, the evidence suggests that intervention aligned with the *freedom of speech and self expression domain* (i.e., employee dialogue and disclosure) hold modest potential for improving aspects of employee wellbeing. Across the four studies reviewed, each intervention yielded at least one positive effect on SWB, however, the majority of measured outcomes were null (60%), indicating limited and inconsistent effects overall. Notably, the interventions that showed favourable effects often incorporated structured, psychologically safe environments and emphasized either ongoing team-based communication or supported personal decision-making to disclose sensitive information. This suggests that the quality and context of implementation—such as supervisor involvement, regularity of dialogue, and provision of decision-support tools—may be critical to their effectiveness. However, some notable types of interventions in this category are missing from research that deserve critical attention. For example, whistleblowing mechanisms that provide a safe and anonymous avenue for employees to report unethical, illegal, or unsafe behavior within their organization, and social enterprise systems like Slack or Microsoft Teams that facilitate internal digital communication. Both of these represent contemporary expressions of employee voice that are particularly relevant in today's increasingly remote workplace.

The effects of interventions related to *self determination* on SWB show somewhat consistent positive evidence across all three intervention types (50% of SWB outcomes). For employee empowerment training, while not all studies demonstrated positive effects, the ones that did utilized strategies focused on stress management and proactive communication. Differences in intervention content and context likely contributed to the variability in effects, highlighting the importance of tailoring empowerment approaches to specific occupational settings and employee needs. The presence of multiple moderate- and high-quality studies for participatory job redesign studies showing positive effects for both affective and evaluative wellbeing measures suggests that it may be a promising avenue for enhancing worker wellbeing—particularly when they allow for meaningful employee input. By contrast, while job crafting holds theoretical promise, the limited high-quality evidence within this review constrains our ability to draw firm conclusions about its effectiveness in practice. Overall, schedule discretion interventions demonstrate moderate and context-sensitive potential to enhance employee wellbeing. When effectively implemented, particularly through participatory processes that emphasize fairness and team coordination, these interventions can yield wellbeing improvements. However, the Hansen et al. (2015) findings serve as a cautionary example: increased flexibility, if poorly managed, can generate new burdens and exacerbate workplace tensions.

Across the intervention categories aligned with the *Consultation and Codetermination* domain, the effects on SWB were mostly null (58%), with notable variation by intervention type. Participatory employee rehabilitation interventions, despite emphasizing collaborative return-to-work planning, yielded no positive wellbeing effects and one negative effect, likely reflecting the complex health and psychosocial challenges faced by participants with pre-existing conditions. Similarly, participatory ergonomics interventions demonstrated limited efficacy, with only one positive outcome and two negative effects across five high-quality studies. The constrained ability of employees to influence ergonomic changes, coupled with insufficient managerial support, appeared to undermine the potential wellbeing benefits of these initiatives. In contrast, participatory problem-solving interventions, though heterogeneous in design, were associated with some positive effects, particularly when targeting psychosocial work conditions. However, most outcomes remained null, suggesting that while these interventions hold promise, their effectiveness may depend on specific contextual and implementation factors. Participatory work reorganization interventions showed the most consistent positive impact on SWB in this category. These system-level interventions, which combined top-down restructuring with authentic employee involvement, appear to be more effective than other participatory style interventions, possibly due to their broader scope and greater alignment between employee voice and organizational change.

Critical reflections

While the majority of included interventions were framed as primary (upstream) prevention efforts, few explicitly or effectively addressed the structural root causes of poor wellbeing. Many targeted proximal features of the work environment (e.g., communication processes, job design, or participation in problem-solving), but these were often implemented within narrow, localized domains and without altering the broader organizational power dynamics or employment arrangements. In this sense, many interventions could be seen as "tinkering at the margins" rather than fundamentally reshaping the systems that produce stress, dissatisfaction, or disengagement. A small subset of studies—such as those incorporating changes to scheduling autonomy or participatory work reorganization—moved closer to addressing upstream determinants, but these were

exceptions. This reveals a gap between the preventive intent of the interventions and their transformative potential, and raises important questions about what counts as meaningful organizational change.

Managerial and organizational receptiveness to employee voice emerged as a critical, though often under-theorized, factor shaping intervention success. In many cases, interventions appeared to falter not due to poor design but because employers were unwilling or unable to act on employee input in substantive ways. This observation points to the need for future intervention research to better distinguish between process-related outcomes (e.g., did the intervention create opportunities for voice?) and effect-related outcomes (e.g., did those voices actually influence decisions or working conditions?). Studies rarely assessed the extent of managerial follow-through, nor did they systematically measure buy-in, readiness, or resistance. Integrating these variables into process evaluations would help clarify the mechanisms through which employee voice translates into improved wellbeing—and when it fails to do so.

The majority of studies reviewed were published in public health, occupational health, or organizational psychology journals, with relatively few contributions from industrial relations, management, or labor studies. This disciplinary skew may partly explain the dominant focus on psychological outcomes and micro-level interventions, rather than structural workplace reforms or power dynamics. For audiences situated in industrial relations or organizational change literatures, this gap presents an opportunity to bring labour process analysis, power, and institutional context more fully into the intervention space. Expanding the disciplinary reach of this literature would help ensure that interventions are not only evidence-based but also aligned with the real concerns and constraints faced by workers and their representatives.

Revisiting the typology introduced earlier in the review, several noteworthy patterns emerged. Most interventions were narrow in scope, targeting a specific task, team, or process rather than the broader employment relationship. While some included formal mechanisms (e.g., structured group dialogue, participatory redesign workshops), many relied on informal or ad hoc arrangements, often without clear mechanisms for escalation or institutionalization. In terms of depth, few interventions offered workers sustained influence over decision-making; the majority were consultative rather than collaborative or co-determinative in nature. Finally, the level of implementation was predominantly at the group or individual level, with very few interventions engaging the organizational-level. These patterns highlight the importance of not only creating spaces for voice but ensuring they are structured, empowered, and supported across organizational hierarchies.

Interestingly, the vast majority of interventions did not address the kinds of issues workers themselves identify as most pressing—such as compensation, promotion opportunities, job security, or responses to technological change. This misalignment suggests a disconnect between the priorities of intervention designers and the lived concerns of workers, as documented in surveys like the 2017 Kochan et al. study. The narrow focus of most interventions—on job design, communication, or stress management—may reflect what is organizationally palatable rather than what is worker-relevant. Future research would benefit from explicitly centering worker-defined needs and involving employees not just as participants, but as co-creators of intervention priorities and designs. Doing so could help close the gap between voice opportunities and actual voice influence.

Limitations

This review has several limitations that warrant consideration when interpreting the findings. First, a significant proportion of the included studies (31.5%) were rated as low quality due to common methodological shortcomings, such as the absence of control groups, lack of randomization, unrepresentative or self-selected samples, inadequate adjustment for confounders, insufficient protection against contamination, and high attrition rates. While such limitations are often difficult to avoid in applied workplace settings, they nonetheless undermine internal validity and restrict the strength of causal claims. A promising way forward involves stronger partnerships between researchers and organizational stakeholders to co-design interventions that meet both scientific standards and real-world feasibility constraints.

Second, the considerable heterogeneity in intervention types, implementation fidelity, outcome measures, and follow-up durations presents challenges for direct comparison across studies. This variability also precluded the possibility of conducting a formal meta-analysis. Importantly, the diversity of subjective wellbeing (SWB) indicators—spanning affective, evaluative, and eudaemonic dimensions—further complicated efforts to synthesize effects. Notably, only a small fraction of studies explicitly assessed eudaemonic wellbeing outcomes such as meaning, purpose, and personal growth. This represents a missed opportunity, given growing evidence that eudaemonic indicators provide unique and predictive insights into long-term psychological and occupational functioning beyond what affective or satisfaction-based measures can capture. Future research should prioritize inclusion of such measures to better reflect the multidimensional nature of wellbeing at work.

Third, the evidence base is likely subject to publication bias, with studies reporting null or negative findings potentially underrepresented in the literature. This is a particular concern in intervention research, where organizational and funding pressures may discourage the dissemination of unsuccessful trials. As such, our review may overstate the consistency or magnitude of positive effects, although, majority of the studies included in this review reported null findings. Furthermore, many studies failed to apply intention-to-treat (ITT) principles in their analysis, often excluding non-adherent participants or dropouts, which can lead to inflated estimates of intervention effectiveness. This methodological oversight further limits the generalizability and reliability of reported outcomes.

Fourth, few studies adequately accounted for contextual or organizational-level factors that may condition the success or failure of workplace interventions. Leadership support, workplace culture, organizational readiness, industry norms, and broader labor relations contexts are all likely to moderate outcomes, yet these variables were inconsistently measured or reported across studies. Without greater attention to these factors and transparency in reporting, it remains difficult to identify the conditions under which employee voice interventions are most likely to succeed.

A further limitation within the current evidence base is the lack of conceptual clarity and standardization surrounding employee voice as a construct. Across studies, voice is operationalized in highly varied ways—ranging from mechanisms of formal representation (e.g., works councils, union consultation) to informal dialogue, participatory practices, and digital feedback tools. While this diversity reflects the broad relevance of voice across organizational contexts, the absence of a unifying conceptual framework hampers the ability to systematically assess its effects or compare findings across interventions. At present, employee voice is more often treated as a contextual feature or mechanism than as a measurable construct in its own right. To advance this field, there is a clear need for greater theoretical integration and standardized measurement approaches that

distinguish between dimensions of voice (e.g., promotive vs. prohibitive, formal vs. informal, individual vs. collective) and link them to relevant wellbeing outcomes. Developing validated tools and typologies would not only enhance analytic coherence across studies but also support the design of more targeted interventions that align with specific forms of voice and their intended impacts on employee wellbeing.

Taken together, these limitations highlight the need for future workplace intervention research to adopt more rigorous designs, improve reporting transparency, include more comprehensive measures of wellbeing (particularly eudaemonic aspects), and attend more carefully to contextual moderators of impact.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights that employee voice, when meaningfully supported and substantively enacted, holds considerable potential as a lever for improving workplace wellbeing, but its effectiveness is far from guaranteed. Rather than assuming voice is inherently beneficial, the evidence presented underscores that its impact is highly contingent on how it is structured, the depth of influence afforded to employees, and the institutional and cultural environments in which it operates. Across the studies reviewed, interventions that provided genuine opportunities for employee input, particularly those embedded within participatory organizational processes, were more likely to yield wellbeing gains. However, many initiatives remained consultative in nature, offering limited scope for employees to shape decisions or address the structural sources of workplace strain. This disconnect between voice opportunity and voice efficacy signals the need for a paradigm shift: one that moves beyond tokenistic engagement and positions employees as active contributors to organizational change. Advancing such a shift will require not only better-designed interventions, but also greater organizational receptiveness, stronger institutional supports, and a reimagining of workplace governance that centers employee agency, equity, and wellbeing.

REFERENCES

Abelson, R. (2019, April 18). Employee wellness programs yield little benefit, study shows. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/16/health/employee-wellness-programs.html

Abraha, I., Cherubini, A., Cozzolino, F., De Florio, R., Luchetta, M. L., Rimland, J. M., Folletti, I., Marchesi, M., Germani, A., Orso, M., Eusebi, P., & Montedori, A. (2015). Deviation from intention to treat analysis in randomised trials and treatment effect estimates: Meta-epidemiological study. *BMJ, 350*, h2445.

Anderzén, I., & Arnetz, B. B. (2005). The impact of a prospective survey-based workplace intervention program on employee health, biologic stress markers, and organizational productivity. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, *47*(7), 671–682.

Arapovic-Johansson, B., Wiljer, D., & Saks, A. M. (2018). Participatory workplace intervention for stress prevention in primary health care: A randomized controlled trial. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, *27*(5), 658–671.

Bakker, A. B., & van Wingerden, J. (2021).Do Personal Resources and Strengths Use Increase Work Engagement? The Effects of a Training Intervention. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 26*(1), 20-30.

Befort, S., & Budd, J. (2009). *Invisible hands, invisible objectives: Bringing workplace law and public policy into focus*. Stanford University Press.

Bellet, C. S., De Neve, J., & Ward, G. (2023). Does employee happiness have an impact on productivity? *Management Science*, *70*(3), 1656–1679.

Bergman, D., Liljefors, I., Palm, K., & Albin, T. J. (2015). The effects of dialogue groups on physicians' work environment: A matter of gender? *Work, 52*(2), 407–417.

Birelma, A., Friedman, E., Kallas, J., & Kylasam Iyer, D. (2024). *International Strike Report 2022*. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, School of Labor and Employment Relations.

Bond, F. W., & Bunce, D. (2001). Job control mediates change in a work reorganization intervention for stress reduction. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 6*(4), 290–302.

Bourbonnais, R., Brisson, C., Vinet, A., Vézina, M., Lower, A., & Blanchette, C. (2006). Effectiveness of a participative intervention on psychosocial work factors to prevent mental health problems in a hospital setting. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 63(5), 335–342.

Bourbonnais, R., Brisson, C., Vinet, A., Vézina, M., Lower, A., & Gaudet, M. (2011). Long-term effects of an intervention on psychosocial work factors among healthcare professionals in a hospital setting. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine,* 68(7), 479–486.

Brandt, M., Madeleine, P., Samani, A., Ajslev, J. Z. N., Jakobsen, M. D., Sundstrup, E., & Andersen, L. L. (2018). Effects of a participatory ergonomics intervention with wearable technical measurements of physical workload in the construction industry: Cluster randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Medical Internet Research, 20*(12), e10201.

Busch, C., Koch, T., Clasen, J., Winkler, E., & Vowinkel, J. (2017). Evaluation of an organizational health intervention for low-skilled workers and immigrants. *Human Relations, 70*(8), 994–1016.

Campos, M. L., Bolgeri, P., & Bascur, A. (2024). The effect of a collective competence intervention on collective efficacy, psychological wellbeing, and social wellbeing: A quasi-experimental study of a sample of healthcare workers during the COVID-19 crisis. *Frontiers in Psychology, 15*, Article 1291894.

Cedstrand, E., Nyberg, A., Sanchez-Bengtsson, S., Alderling, M., Augustsson, H., Bodin, T., Alvesson, H. M., & Johansson, G. (2021). A participatory intervention to improve the psychosocial work environment and mental health in human service organisations: A mixed methods evaluation study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(7), 3592.

Cervai, S., & Polo, F. (2018). The impact of a participatory ergonomics intervention: The value of involvement. *Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science, 19*(1), 55–73.

Chanchai, W., Howteerakul, N., Suwannapong, N., & Siri, S. (2016). The impact of an ergonomics intervention on psychosocial factors and musculoskeletal symptoms among Thai hospital orderlies. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 13(4), 464.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. (2022). Health and wellbeing at work 2022. Retrieved from: https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/comms/news/ahealth-wellbeing-work-report-2022_tcm18-108440.pdf

Cifre, E., Salanova, M., & Rodríguez-Sánchez, A. M. (2011). Dancing between theory and practice: Enhancing work engagement through work stress intervention. *Human Factors and Ergonomics in Manufacturing & Service Industries*, 21(3), 269–286.

Cojocariu, V., & Sedláková, M. (2024, July 29). Labour disputes across Europe in 2023: Ongoing struggle for higher wages as cost of living rises. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

Dahl-Jørgensen, C., & Saksvik, P. Ø. (2005). The impact of two organizational interventions on the health of service sector workers. *International Journal of Health Services*, 35(3), 529–549.

Daniels, K., Gedikli, C., Watson, D., Semkina, A., & Vaughn, O. (2021). Achieving sustainable well-being: The role of work and organizations. Palgrave Macmillan.

Day, A., & Nielsen, K. (2017). What does our organization do to help our well-being? Creating healthy workplaces and workers. In N. Chmiel, F. Fraccaroli, & M. Sverke (Eds.), *An introduction to work and organizational psychology: An international perspective* (3rd ed., pp. 295–314). John Wiley & Sons.

DeJoy, D. M., Wilson, M. G., Vandenberg, R. J., McGrath, A. L., & Griffin-Blake, C. S. (2010). Assessing the impact of healthy work organization interventions. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83(1), 139–165.

De Neve, J.-E., & Ward, G. (2025). *Why workplace wellbeing matters: The science behind employee happiness and organizational performance*. Harvard Business Review Press.

De Lombaert, T., Braekers, K., De Koster, R., & Ramaekers, K. (2024). Is it good to have a choice? The value of participatory order assignments in warehousing. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*.

De Stefano, V. (2016). The rise of the "just-in-time workforce": On-demand work, crowdwork, and labor protection in the "gig-economy". *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal, 37*(3), 471–504.

de Wijn, A. N., & van der Doef, M. P. (2022). Reducing psychosocial risk factors and improving employee well-being in emergency departments: A realist evaluation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 792772

Deeks, J. J., Higgins, J. P. T., & Altman, D. G. (2009). Chapter 9. Analysing data and undertaking meta-analyses. In J. P. T. Higgins & S. Green (Eds.), Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions Version 5.0.2 [updated September 2009]. The Cochrane Collaboration. http://www.cochrane-handbook.org

Degen, L., Göbel, J., Minder, K., Seifried-Dübon, T., Werners, B., Grot, M., Rind, E., Pieper, C., Eilerts, A.-L., Schröder, V., Siegel, A., Hüsing, A., Jöckel, K.-H., Rieger, M. A., IMPROVEjob Research Cooperation, & Weltermann, B. M. (2022). Leadership program with skills training for general practitioners was highly accepted without improving job satisfaction: The cluster randomized IMPROVEjob study. *BMC Primary Care, 23*(1), 106.

Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Lucas, R. E. (2003). Personality, culture, and subjective well-being: An international perspective. In C. L. M. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 223–243). American Psychological Association.

Dollard, M. F., & Gordon, J. A. (2014). Evaluation of a participatory risk management work stress intervention. *International Journal of Stress Management, 21*(1), 27–42.

Dubbelt, L., Demerouti, E., & Rispens, S. (2019). The value of job crafting for work engagement, task performance, and career satisfaction: Longitudinal and quasi-experimental evidence. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 28*(3), 300-314.

Dunleavy, K., Kane, A., Coffman, A., Reidy, J., & Bishop, M. D. (2022). Outcomes of participatory ergonomics and self-management in commercial clam farmers with chronic low back pain: A feasibility study. *Journal of Agromedicine, 27*(2), 217–231.

Ejlertsson, L., Heijbel, B., Brorsson, A., Troein, M., & Andersson, I. H. (2021). Customized interventions improved employees' experience of recovery during the workday. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation, 70*(2), 509–519.

Elo, A. L., Ervasti, J., Kuosma, E., & Mattila, P. (2008). Evaluation of an organizational stress management program in a municipal public works organization. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 13*(1), 10–23.

Erez, A., & Isen, A. M. (2002). The influence of positive affect on the components of expectancy motivation. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(6), 1055–1067.

Fairbrother, G., Jones, A., & Rivas, K. (2010). Changing model of nursing care from individual patient allocation to team nursing in the acute inpatient environment. *Contemporary Nurse*, *35*(2), 202–220.

Fleming, W. J. (2024). Employee well‐being outcomes from individual‐level mental health interventions: Cross‐sectional evidence from the United Kingdom. *Industrial Relations Journal, 55*(2), 162–182.

Fox, K. E., Johnson, S. T., Berkman, L. F., Sianoja, M., Soh, Y., Kubzansky, L. D., & Kelly, E. L. (2021). Organisational- and group-level workplace interventions and their effect on multiple domains of worker well-being: A systematic review. *Work & Stress*, *36*(1), 30–59.

Framke, E., Sørensen, O. H., Pedersen, J., & Rugulies, R. (2016). Effect of a participatory organizational-level occupational health intervention on job satisfaction, exhaustion and sleep disturbances: Results of a cluster randomized controlled trial. *BMC Public Health, 16*, 1210.

Gallup. (2024). State of the global workplace 2024 report. Retrieved from: https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx

Garde, A. H., Albertsen, K., Nabe-Nielsen, K., Carneiro, I. G., Skotte, J., Hansen, S. M., Lund, H., Hvid, H., & Hansen, Å. M. (2012). Implementation of self-rostering (the PRIO project): Effects on working hours, recovery, and health. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 38*(4), 314–326.

Geerdink, E. O., Huysmans, M. A., van Kempen, H., van Weeghel, J., Motazedi, E., & Anema, J. R. (2024). Individual placement and support and participatory workplace intervention on the work participation of people with disabilities: A randomised controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*.

Glisson, C., Hemmelgarn, A., Green, P., Dukes, D., Atkinson, S., & Williams, N. J. (2012). Randomized trial of the Availability, Responsiveness, and Continuity (ARC) organizational intervention with community-based mental health programs and clinicians serving youth. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 51*(8), 780–787.

Grawitch, M. J., Gottschalk, M., & Munz, D. C. (2006). The path to a healthy workplace: A critical review linking healthy workplace practices, employee well-being, and organizational improvements. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, 58*(3), 129–147.

Green, F. (2006). Employee job satisfaction and well-being: The role of work conditions. In *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Well-Being* (pp. 51–75). Oxford University Press.

Gough, D., Oliver, S., & Thomas, J. (2017). *An introduction to systematic reviews* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Gupta, N., Sandbæk, A., Kristensen, T. S., & Holtermann, A. (2018). Effectiveness of a participatory physical and psychosocial intervention to balance the demands and resources of industrial workers: A cluster-randomized controlled trial. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 44*(1), 58–68.

Hall, L. M., Doran, D., Sidani, S., & Pink, G. H. (2008). Outcomes of interventions to improve hospital nursing work environments. *The Journal of Nursing Administration, 38*(1), 40–46.

Hammer, L. B., Kossek, E. E., Anger, W. K., Bodner, T., & Zimmerman, K. L. (2011). Clarifying work–family intervention processes: The roles of work–family conflict and family-supportive supervisor behaviors. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 96*(1), 134–150.

Hansen, Å. M., Lund, T., Labriola, M., & Kristiansen, J. (2015). Self-rostering and psychosocial work factors – A mixed methods intervention study. *Applied Ergonomics, 47*, 1–7.

Harari, D., & Casarotto, R. A. (2021). Effectiveness of a multifaceted intervention to manage musculoskeletal disorders in workers of a medium-sized company. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics, 27*(1), 1–10.

Harter, J. K., Schmidt, F. L., & Keyes, C. L. M. (2003). Well-being in the workplace and its relationship to business outcomes: A review of the Gallup studies. In C. L. M. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 205–224). American Psychological Association.

Hätinen, M., Kinnunen, U., Pekkonen, M., & Kalimo, R. (2007). Comparing two burnout interventions: Perceived job control mediates decreases in burnout. *International Journal of Stress Management, 14*(3), 227–248.

Haukka, E., Leino-Arjas, P., Viikari-Juntura, E., Takala, E. P., Malmivaara, A., Hopsu, L., Mutanen, P., Ketola, R., Virtanen, T., Pehkonen, I., Holtari-Leino, M., Nykänen, J., Stenholm, S., Nykyri, E., & Riihimäki, H. (2008). A randomised controlled trial on whether a participatory ergonomics intervention could prevent musculoskeletal disorders. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 65*(12), 849–856.

Haukka, E., Pehkonen, I., Leino-Arjas, P., Viikari-Juntura, E., Takala, E. P., Malmivaara, A., Hopsu, L., Mutanen, P., Ketola, R., Virtanen, T., Holtari-Leino, M., Nykänen, J., Stenholm, S., Ojajärvi, A., & Riihimäki, H. (2010). Effect of a participatory ergonomics intervention on psychosocial factors at work in a randomised controlled trial. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 67*(3), 170–177.

Holman, D., Axtell, C., & Chen, P. Y. (2016). Can job redesign interventions influence a broad range of employee outcomes by changing multiple job characteristics? A quasi-experimental study. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 21*(3), 284–295.

Holman, D. J., Axtell, C. M., Sprigg, C. A., Totterdell, P., & Wall, T. D. (2010). The mediating role of job characteristics in job redesign interventions: A serendipitous quasi-experiment. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 31*(1), 84–105.

Hosseinabadi, R., Karampourian, A., Beiranvand, S., & Pournia, Y. (2013). The effect of quality circles on job satisfaction and quality of work-life of staff in emergency medical services. *International Emergency Nursing, 21*(4), 264–270.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2022). Social dialogue report 2022: Collective bargaining for an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient recovery. Geneva: ILO. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_845505/lang--en/index.htm

International Labour Organization (ILO). (1999). Decent work. Report of the Director-General to the 87th Session of the International Labour Conference. Geneva: ILO.

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2024). Report of the General Discussion Committee on Decent Work and the Care Economy (ILC.112/Record No. 8B(Rev.1)). Geneva: ILO. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/rep-i.htm

Jackson, J. L., & Kuriyama, A. (2019). How often do systematic reviews exclude articles not published in English? *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 34*(8), 1388–1389. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-019-05009-2

Jimmieson, N. L., Tucker, M. K., & Walsh, A. J. (2017). The role of participation in change interventions: A test of three models. *Human Relations, 70*(9), 1079–1103.

Joyce, K., Pabayo, R., Critchley, J. A., & Bambra, C. (2010). Flexible working conditions and their effects on employee health and wellbeing. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews,* 2010(2), CD008009.

Kallas, J., Ritchie, K., & Friedman, E. (2023). *Labor Action Tracker: Annual Report 2022.* Cornell University, ILR School, The Workers Institute.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2009). Precarious work, insecure workers: Employment relations in transition. *American Sociological Review, 74*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400101

Karhula, K., Turunen, J., Ropponen, A., Koskinen, A., Hakola, T., Puttonen, S., Oksanen, T., Pentti, J., Vahtera, J., & Härmä, M. (2020). The effects of using participatory working time scheduling software on working hour characteristics and wellbeing: A quasi-experimental study of irregular shift work. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 112*, 103673.

Kaveh, M. H., Mehrazin, F., Cousins, R., & Mokarami, H. (2023). Effectiveness of a transactional model-based education programme for enhancing stress-coping skills in industrial workers: A randomized controlled trial. *Scientific Reports, 13*(1), 13584.

Ketola, R., Toivonen, R., Häkkänen, M., Luukkonen, R., Takala, E. P., & Viikari-Juntura, E. (2002). Effects of ergonomic intervention in work with video display units. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 28*(1), 18–24.

Kim, S.-A., Suh, C., Park, M.-H., Kim, K., Lee, C.-K., Son, B.-C., Kim, J.-H., Lee, J.-T., Woo, K.-H., Kang, K., & Jung, H. (2014). Effectiveness of a comprehensive stress management program to reduce work-related stress in a medium-sized enterprise. *Annals of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 26*(1), 4.

Knight, C., Patterson, M., Dawson, J., & Brown, J. (2017). Building and sustaining work engagement: A participatory action intervention to increase work engagement in nursing staff. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 26*(5), 634–649.

Kochan, T. A., Yang, D., Kimball, W. T., & Kelly, E. L. (2019). Worker voice in America: Is there a gap between what workers expect and what they experience? *ILR Review, 72*(1), 3–38.

Kobayashi, Y., Kaneyoshi, A., Yokota, A., & Kawakami, N. (2008). Effects of a worker participatory program for improving work environments on job stressors and mental health among workers: A controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational Health, 50*(6), 455–470.

Kossek, E. E., Thompson, R. J., Lawson, K. M., Bodner, T., Perrigino, M. B., Hammer, L. B., Buxton, O. M., Almeida, D. M., Moen, P., Hurtado, D. A., Wipfli, B., Berkman, L. F., Bray, J. W., & Chen, P. Y. (2019). Caring for the elderly at work and home: Can a randomized organizational intervention improve psychological health? *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 24*(1), 36–54.

Kotejoshyer, R., Gilmer, D. O., Namazi, S., Farr, D., Henning, R. A., & Cherniack, M. (2021). Impact of a Total Worker Health® mentoring program in a correctional workforce. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18*(16), 8483.

Lammerts, L., Schaafsma, F. G., Bonefaas-Groenewoud, K., van Mechelen, W., & Anema, J. R. (2016). Effectiveness of a return-to-work program for workers without an employment contract, sick-listed due to common mental disorders. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 42*(6), 469–480.

Layard, R., & De Neve, J.-E. (2023). Wellbeing: Science and policy. Cambridge University Press.

Lavoie-Tremblay, M., Fernet, C., Lavigne, G. L., & Austin, S. (2016). Transformational and abusive leadership practices: Impacts on novice nurses, quality of care and intention to leave. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72*(3), 582–592.

Le Blanc, P. M., Hox, J. J., Schaufeli, W. B., Taris, T. W., & Peeters, M. C. W. (2007). Take care! The evaluation of a team-based burnout intervention program for oncology care providers. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 92*(1), 213–227.

Liberati, A. (2009). The PRISMA statement for reporting Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses of studies that evaluate health care interventions: Explanation and elaboration. Annals of Internal Medicine, 151(4), W.

Linzer, M., Poplau, S., Grossman, E., Varkey, A., Yale, S., Williams, E., Hicks, L., Brown, R., Wallock, J., Kohnhorst, D., & Barbouche, M. (2015). A cluster randomized trial of interventions to improve work conditions and clinician burnout in primary care: Results from the Healthy Work Place (HWP) study. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 30*(8), 1105–1111.

Logan, M. S., & Ganster, D. C. (2005). An experimental evaluation of a control intervention to alleviate job-related stress. *Journal of Management, 31*(1), 90–107.

Mattila, E., Elo, A. L., Kuosma, E., & Kalliomäki-Levanto, T. (2006). Effect of a participative work conference on psychosocial work environment and well-being. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 15*(3), 259–278.

Mikkelsen, A., Saksvik, P. Ø., & Landsbergis, P. (2000). The impact of a participatory organizational intervention on job stress in community health care institutions. *Work & Stress, 14*(2), 156–170.

Moen, P., Kelly, E. L., Fan, W., Lee, S. R., Almeida, D., Kossek, E. E., & Buxton, O. M. (2016). Does a flexibility/support organizational initiative improve high-tech employees' well-being? Evidence from the Work, Family, and Health Network.

American Sociological Review, 81(1), 134–164.

Moen, P., Kelly, E. L., Tranby, E., & Huang, R. (2011). Changing work, changing health: Can real work-time flexibility promote health behaviors and well-being? *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 52*(4), 404–429.

Moghadam, M. H., Nabavi, F. H., Miri, H. H., Moghadam, A. R. S., & Mirhosseini, S. (2024). Participatory management effects on nurses' organizational support and moral distress. *Nursing Ethics, 31*(2–3), 202–212.

Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., Altman, D. G., & The PRISMA Group. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *PLoS Medicine, 6*(7), e1000097. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000097

Montano, D. (2016). Supervisor behaviour and its associations with employees' health in Europe. International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 89(2), 289–298.

Montano, D., Hoven, H., & Siegrist, J. (2014). Effects of organisational-level interventions at work on employees' health: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health, 14*, 135.

Montano, D., Hoven, H., & Siegrist, J. (2014). Effects of organisational-level interventions at work on employees' health: A systematic review. BMC Public Health, 14(1), 135.

Montano, D., & Paloma, S. (2009). Organizational stress management interventions: A systematic review. International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, 22(3), 225–232.

Morken, T., Moen, B. E., & Riise, T. (2002). Effects of a training program to improve musculoskeletal health among industrial workers—Effects of supervisors' role in the intervention. *Applied Ergonomics, 33*(2), 149–156.

Nabe-Nielsen, K., Garde, A. H., Aust, B., & Diderichsen, F. (2011). The effect of work-time influence on health and well-being: A quasi-experimental intervention study among eldercare workers. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 84*(6), 639–648.

Nielsen, K., Antino, M., Rodríguez-Muñoz, A., & Sanz-Vergel, A. (2021). Is it me or us? The impact of individual and collective participation on work engagement and burnout in a cluster-randomized organisational intervention. *Work & Stress, 35*(4), 374–397.

Nielsen, K., & Randall, R. (2009). Managers' active support when implementing teams: The impact on employee well-being. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being, 1*(3), 374–390.

Nielsen, K., Stage, M., Abildgaard, J. S., & Brauer, C. V. (2013). Participatory intervention from an organizational perspective: Employees as active agents in creating a healthy work environment. In G. F. Bauer & G. J. Jenny (Eds.), *Salutogenic organizations and change: The concepts behind organizational health intervention research* (pp. 327–350). Springer Science+Business Media.

Nijp, H. H., Beckers, D. G. J., Geurts, S. A. E., Tucker, P., & Kompier, M. A. J. (2016). Effects of new ways of working on work hours and work location, health and job-related outcomes. *Chronobiology International, 33*(6), 604–618.

Nylén, E. C., Lindfors, P., Ishäll, L., Göransson, S., Aronsson, G., Kylin, C., & Sverke, M. (2017). A pilot study of a worksite-based participatory intervention program: Its acceptability and short-term effects on work climate and attitudes in human service employees. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation, 56*(4), 625–636.

Odle-Dusseau, H. N., Hammer, L. B., Crain, T. L., & Bodner, T. E. (2016). The influence of family-supportive supervisor training on employee job performance and attitudes: An organizational work–family intervention. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 21*(3), 296–308.

OECD. (2013). *OECD guidelines on measuring subjective well-being*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264191655-en

Oswald, A. J., Proto, E., & Sgroi, D. (2015). Happiness and productivity. *Journal of Labor Economics, 33*(4), 789–822.

Oude Hengel, K. M., Blatter, B. M., Joling, C. I., van der Beek, A. J., & Bongers, P. M. (2012). Effectiveness of an intervention at construction worksites on work engagement, social support, physical workload, and need for recovery: Results from a cluster randomized controlled trial. *BMC Public Health, 12*(1), 1008.

Park, J., & Lee, N. (2004). Effectiveness of a healthy work organization intervention: Ethnic group differences. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 46*(6), 623–634.

Pasini, M., Brondino, M., Trombin, R., & Filippi, Z. (2021). A participatory interior design approach for a restorative work environment: A research-intervention. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 643525.

Pfeffer, J. (2018). The overlooked essentials of employee well-being. *McKinsey Quarterly*. Retrieved from: https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-overlooked-essentials-of-employee-well-being

Pryce, J., Albertsen, K., & Nielsen, K. (2006). Evaluation of an open-rota system in a Danish psychiatric hospital: A mechanism for improving job satisfaction and work-life balance. *Journal of Nursing Management, 14*(4), 282–288.

Rasmussen, C. D. N., Sørensen, O. H., van der Beek, A. J., & Holtermann, A. (2020). The effect of training for a participatory ergonomic intervention on physical exertion and musculoskeletal pain among childcare workers (the TOY project): A wait-list cluster-randomized controlled trial. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health, 46*(4), 429–436.

Ravalier, J. M., Wainwright, E., Smyth, N., Clabburn, O., Wegrzynek, P., & Loon, M. (2020). Co-creating and evaluating an app-based well-being intervention: The HOW (Healthier Outcomes at Work) social work project. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(23), 8490.

Richardson, K. M., & Rothstein, H. R. (2008). Effects of occupational stress management intervention programs: A meta-analysis. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 13(1), 69–93.

Rivilis, I., Cole, D. C., Frazer, M. B., Kerr, M. S., Wells, R. P., & Ibrahim, S. (2006). Evaluation of a participatory ergonomic intervention aimed at improving musculoskeletal health. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine, 49*(10), 801–810.

Robeyns, I. (2017). Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined. Open Book Publishers. https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0130

Roozeboom, M. C. B., Schelvis, R. M. C., Houtman, I. L. D., Wiezer, N. M., & Bongers, P. M. (2020). Decreasing employees' work stress by a participatory, organizational-level work stress prevention approach: A multiple-case study in primary education. *BMC Public Health, 20*(1), 676.

Rostami, M., Choobineh, A., Shakerian, M., Faraji, M., & Modarresifar, H. (2022). Assessing the effectiveness of an ergonomics intervention program with a participatory approach: Ergonomics settlement in an Iranian steel industry. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health, 95*(5), 953–964.

Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*(6), 1069–1081. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069

Schelvis, R. M. C., Wiezer, N. M., van der Beek, A. J., Twisk, J. W. R., Bohlmeijer, E. T., & Oude Hengel, K. M. (2017). The effect of an organizational level participatory intervention in secondary vocational education on work-related health outcomes: Results of a controlled trial. *BMC Public Health, 17*, 141.

Schneider, A., Wehler, M., & Weigl, M. (2019). Effects of work conditions on provider mental well-being and quality of care: A mixed-methods intervention study in the emergency department. *BMC Emergency Medicine, 19*, 9.

Schwarz, U. V., Nielsen, K. M., Stenfors-Hayes, T., & Hasson, H. (2017). Using kaizen to improve employee well-being: Results from two organizational intervention studies. *Human Relations, 70*(8), 966–993.

Seppälä, P., Ansio, H., Houni, P., & Hakanen, J. J. (2020). A two-wave quasi-experimental intervention study of a participatory visual art intervention: Unexpected effects on job resources and work engagement. *Arts & Health, 12*(1), 38–52.

Sherf, E. N., Parke, M. R., & Isaakyan, S. (2021). Distinguishing voice and silence at work: Unique relationships with perceived impact, psychological safety, and burnout. Academy of Management Journal, 64(1), 114–148.

Shipton, H., Kougiannou, N., Do, H., Minbashian, A., Pautz, N., & King, D. (2023). Organizational voice and employee-focused voice: Two distinct voice forms and their effects on burnout and innovative behavior. Human Resource Management Journal, 1–20.

Silva, P., Mota, J., & Moreira, A. C. (2023). Budget participation and employee performance in real estate companies: The mediating role of budget goal commitment, trust, and job satisfaction. *Baltic Journal of Management, 18*(2), 226–241.

Song, Z., & Baicker, K. (2019). Effect of a workplace wellness program on employee health and economic outcomes. JAMA, 321(15), 1491.

Sørensen, O. H., & Holman, D. (2014). A participative intervention to improve employee well-being in knowledge work jobs: A mixed-methods evaluation study. *Work & Stress, 28*(1), 67–86.

Sørensen, O. H., & Holman, D. (2014). A participative intervention to improve employee well-being in knowledge work jobs: A mixed-methods evaluation study. *Work & Stress, 28*(1), 67–86.

Sormunen, E., Mäenpää-Moilanen, E., Ylisassi, H., Turunen, J., Remes, J., Karppinen, J., & Martimo, K.-P. (2022). Participatory ergonomics intervention to prevent work disability among workers with low back pain: A randomized clinical trial in workplace setting. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 32*(4), 731–742.

Stratton, E., Choi, I., Calvo, R., Hickie, I., Henderson, C., Harvey, S. B., & Glozier, N. (2019). Web-based decision aid tool for disclosure of a mental health condition in the workplace: A randomised controlled trial. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 76*(9), 595–602.

Strolin-Goltzman, J., Lawrence, C., Auerbach, C., Caringi, J., Claiborne, N., Lawson, H., McCarthy, M., McGowan, B., Sherman, R., & Shim, M. (2009). Design teams: A promising organizational intervention for improving turnover rates in the child welfare workforce. *Child Welfare, 88*(5), 149–168.

Tafvelin, S., von Thiele Schwarz, U., Nielsen, K., & Hasson, H. (2019). Employees' and line managers' active involvement in participatory organizational interventions: Examining direct, reversed, and reciprocal effects on well-being. *Stress and Health, 35*(1), 69–80.

Tondokoro, T., Nakata, A., Otsuka, Y., Yanagihara, N., Anan, A., Kodama, H., & Satoh, N. (2022). Giving social support at work may reduce inflammation on employees themselves: A participatory workplace intervention study among Japanese hospital nurses. *Industrial Health, 60*(3), 266–275.

Tondokoro, T., Nakata, A., Otsuka, Y., Yanagihara, N., Anan, A., Kodama, H., & Satoh, N. (2021). Effects of a participatory workplace improvement program on stress-related biomarkers and self-reported stress among university hospital nurses: A preliminary study. *Industrial Health, 59*(2), 128–141.

Tsutsumi, A., Nagami, M., Yoshikawa, T., Kogi, K., & Kawakami, N. (2009). Participatory intervention for workplace improvements on mental health and job performance among blue-collar workers: A cluster randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 51*(5), 554–563.

Uchiyama, A., Odagiri, Y., Ohya, Y., Takamiya, T., Inoue, S., & Shimomitsu, T. (2013). Effect on mental health of a participatory intervention to improve psychosocial work environment: A cluster randomized controlled trial among nurses. *Journal of Occupational Health, 55*(3), 173–183.

van den Heuvel, M., Demerouti, E., & Peeters, M. C. W. (2015). The job crafting intervention: Effects on job resources, self-efficacy, and affective well-being. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 88*(3), 511–532.

van der Doef, M., & Maes, S. (1999). The job demand–control (-support) model and psychological well-being: A review of 20 years of empirical research. *Work & Stress, 13*(2), 87–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/026783799296084

van de Poll, M. K., Nybergh, L., Lornudd, C., Hagberg, J., Bodin, L., Kwak, L., Jensen, I., Lohela-Karlsson, M., Torgén, M., & Bergström, G. (2020). Preventing sickness absence among employees with common mental disorders or stress-related symptoms at work: A cluster randomised controlled trial of a problem-solving-based intervention conducted by the Occupational Health Services. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 77*(7), 454–461.

van Oostrom, S. H., van Mechelen, W., Terluin, B., de Vet, H. C. W., Knol, D. L., & Anema, J. R. (2010). A workplace intervention for sick-listed employees with distress: Results of a randomised controlled trial. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 67*(9), 596–602.

van Vilsteren, M., Boot, C. R. L., Twisk, J. W. R., Steenbeek, R., Voskuyl, A. E., van Schaardenburg, D., & Anema, J. R. (2017). One year effects of a workplace integrated care intervention for workers with rheumatoid arthritis: Results of a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 27*(1), 128–136.

van Wingerden, J., Bakker, A. B., & Derks, D. (2017). Fostering employee well-being via a job crafting intervention. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 100*, 164–174.

Varkey, P., Karlapudi, S. P., & Hensrud, D. A. (2008). The impact of a quality improvement program on employee satisfaction in an academic microsystem. *American Journal of Medical Quality, 23*(3), 215–221.

Vermeulen, S. J., Anema, J. R., Schellart, A. J. M., Knol, D. L., van Mechelen, W., & van der Beek, A. J. (2011). A participatory return-to-work intervention for temporary agency workers and unemployed workers sick-listed due to musculoskeletal disorders: Results of a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation, 21*(3), 313–324.

Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T., Donaghey, J., & Freeman, R. B. (2020). Employee voice: Bridging new terrains and disciplinary boundaries. In A. Wilkinson, J. Donaghey, T. Dundon, & R. Freeman (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Employee Voice* (pp. 2–18). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wilkinson, A., Gollan, P. J., Marchington, M., & Lewin, D. (2010). Conceptualizing employee participation in organizations. In A. Wilkinson, P. J. Gollan, M. Marchington, & D. Lewin (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of participation in organizations* (pp. 3–24). Oxford University Press.

Workman, J. P., & Bommer, W. H. (2004). Redesigning computer call center work: A longitudinal field experiment. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 25*(3), 317–337.

APPENDIX A: SEARCH SYNTAX

POPULATION – All Fields

employee* OR worker* OR staff OR personnel OR team* OR workforce OR labour OR labour OR "human capital" OR job* OR occupation* OR profession* OR vocation* OR employment OR workplace* OR worksite* OR organisation* OR organization* OR firm* OR employer* OR "work* environment" OR business* OR company OR companies OR trade* OR manpower

OUTCOME – All Fields

wellbeing OR well-being OR happy OR happiness OR "job satisfaction" OR "life satisfaction" OR "positive health" OR flourish* OR thrive OR thriving OR "quality of life" OR "employee welfare" OR "worker welfare" OR "employee* health" OR "work* health" OR "occupational health" OR "mental health" OR "psychological health" OR "emotional health" OR "psychosocial health" OR "psychosocial outcome*" OR "employee wellness" OR "work* wellness" OR fulfilment OR fulfillment OR "employee N/2 purpose" OR purposeful OR vitality OR prosper* OR "illbeing" OR ill-being OR "ill being" OR "ill health" OR "poor health" OR illness OR sick* OR disease* OR stress* OR distress OR harm* OR strain OR burnout OR fatigue* OR anxiety OR depress* OR exhaust* OR recovery OR energy OR attitude* OR feeling*

EMPLOYEE VOICE – Abstract

"employee N/3 voice*" OR "work* N/3 voice*" OR "union voice" OR "direct voice" OR "indirect voice" OR "representative voice" OR "collective voice" OR "individual voice" OR "employee* N/3 influence" OR "worker* N/3 influence" OR "employee* N/3 say" OR "worker* N/3 say" OR "employee* N/3 input" OR "worker* N/3 input" OR "employee* N/3 vote" OR "worker* N/3 vote" OR "employee* N/3 feedback" OR "worker* N/3 feedback" OR "employee* N/3 suggestion*" OR "worker* N/3 suggestion*" OR "employee* N/3 opinion" OR "worker* N/3 opinion" OR "employee* N/3 complain*" OR "worker* N/3 complain*" OR "employee* N/3 concern*" OR "worker* N/3 concern*" OR "employee* N/3 grievance*" OR "work* N/5 grievance*" OR "employee* N/3 question*" OR "worker* N/3 question*" OR "employee* N/3 speak* up" OR "worker* N/3 speak*up" OR "employee* N/3 express*" OR "worker* N/3 express*" OR "employee* decision making" OR "employee* decision-making" OR "worker* decision making" OR "worker* decision-making" OR "employee* N/3 involv*" OR "work* N/3 involv*" OR "employee* N/3 participat*" OR "worker* N/3 participat*" OR participatory OR participative OR "employee* N/3 represent*" OR "worker* N/3 represent*" OR "employee* N/3 engagement" OR "work* N/3 engagement" OR "employee* N/3 consult*" OR "work* N/3 consult*" OR "employee* N/3 negotiat*" OR "work* N/3 negotiat*" OR "employee* N/3 bargain*" OR "work* N/3 bargain*" OR "whistle blow*" OR "workplace democra*" OR "industrial democra*"

INTERVENTION – Abstract

intervention* OR program* OR initiative* OR scheme* OR practice* OR practise* OR regime* OR procedure* OR system* OR institution* OR tool* OR instrument* OR process* OR channel* OR policy OR policies OR strategy OR strategies OR approach* OR arrangement* OR adjustment* OR accommodation* OR transformation* OR “joint decision*making” OR “upward problem*solving” OR “upward communication*” OR codetermin* OR “co-determin*” OR coproduc* OR “co-produc*” OR “work* N/3 conflict resolution” OR “work*N/3 mediat*” OR “work*N/3 arbitrat*” OR ombudsman* OR “employee* N/3 committee*” OR “joint consultat* committee*” OR “health N/3 committee*” OR “works council*” OR “trade union*” OR “worker* union*” OR “employee resource group*” OR “employee check in*” OR “employee check-in*” OR “employee meeting*” OR “team meeting*” OR “staff meeting*” OR “town hall*” OR “employee focus group*” OR “work* focus group*” OR “job craft*” OR “work* redesign” OR “work* reorganisation” OR “work*reorganization” OR “dialogue group*” OR “quality circle*” OR “employee N/3 voice*” OR “work* N/3 voice*”

APPENDIX B: RISK OF BIAS ASSESSMENT

1. Is there a control group?

0 – No
1 – Yes

2. Were participants randomly assigned to treatment and control groups?

Select 'no' if you answered 'no' to question 1. Randomization can occur at the individual, group, work unit, organization, or country-level. Partial randomization occurs when the exogenous source of randomization is questionable (e.g., Quasi-experiment that utilizes a 'natural' phenomenon to exploit variation in treatment assignment).

0 - No randomization
0.5 – Partial randomization
1 – Randomization

3. Is the sample population representative of the study population?

Select 'no' if the sample or study population is unclear (i.e., not adequately described including failure to report on important demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education etc.). Consider how heterogenous the intended study population is. Select 'no' if you suspect selection bias is present and the authors have not adjusted for it (e.g., participants volunteered to take part in the study).

0 – No
1 – Yes

4. Is the baseline response rate greater than 60%?

60% of the intended sample population.

0 – No
1 – Yes

5. Is the follow-up response rate at any time period greater than 80%?

80% of the actual sample population (i.e., those who completed baseline survey).

0 – No
1 – Yes

6. Is an intention-to-treat analysis used?

Select 'no' if you answered 'no' to question 1 (i.e., no control group) or 4 (i.e., follow-up response rate <80%) unless the study explicitly states that they used an intent to treat analysis.

0 – No
1 – Yes

7. Is there adjustment for known confounders?

If authors do not provide justification for their decision not to adjust for confounders, even if it is a well-designed study, then select 'no'. Consider the following variables within the study's research context:

Individual	Job	Organization
○ Age ○ Gender ○ Race/ethnicity ○ Education ○ Family status ○ Health/disability status (pre-intervention)	○ Occupation / skill-level ○ Tenure / work experience ○ Employment contract (temp or indeterminate) ○ Working hours (full or part-time) ○ Work location (remote of in-person)	○ Workplace size ○ Union recognition ○ Industry ○ Region ○

0 – Few to none
0.5 – Some
1 – Majority

8. Is there evidence of protection from contamination

Select 'no' if you answered 'no' to question 1 (i.e., no control group). Contamination occurs when the control group is exposed to treatment. Examples of protection from contamination include physically separating groups, blinding, monitoring, etc. Even when contamination seems improbable, if the authors do not report their justification for not taking explicit measures to avoid contamination, select 'no'.

0 – No
1 – Yes

9. Were appropriate statistical tests used to answer the research question(s)?

Select 'no' if there is anything about the methodology that warrants concern that has not been fully addressed by the other questions (e.g., a stronger method could have been used considering their research question(s) and data). If you select 'no', please provide a brief explanation.Note: failure to control for covariates alone does not justify a 'no' for this question since this question is explicitly asked.

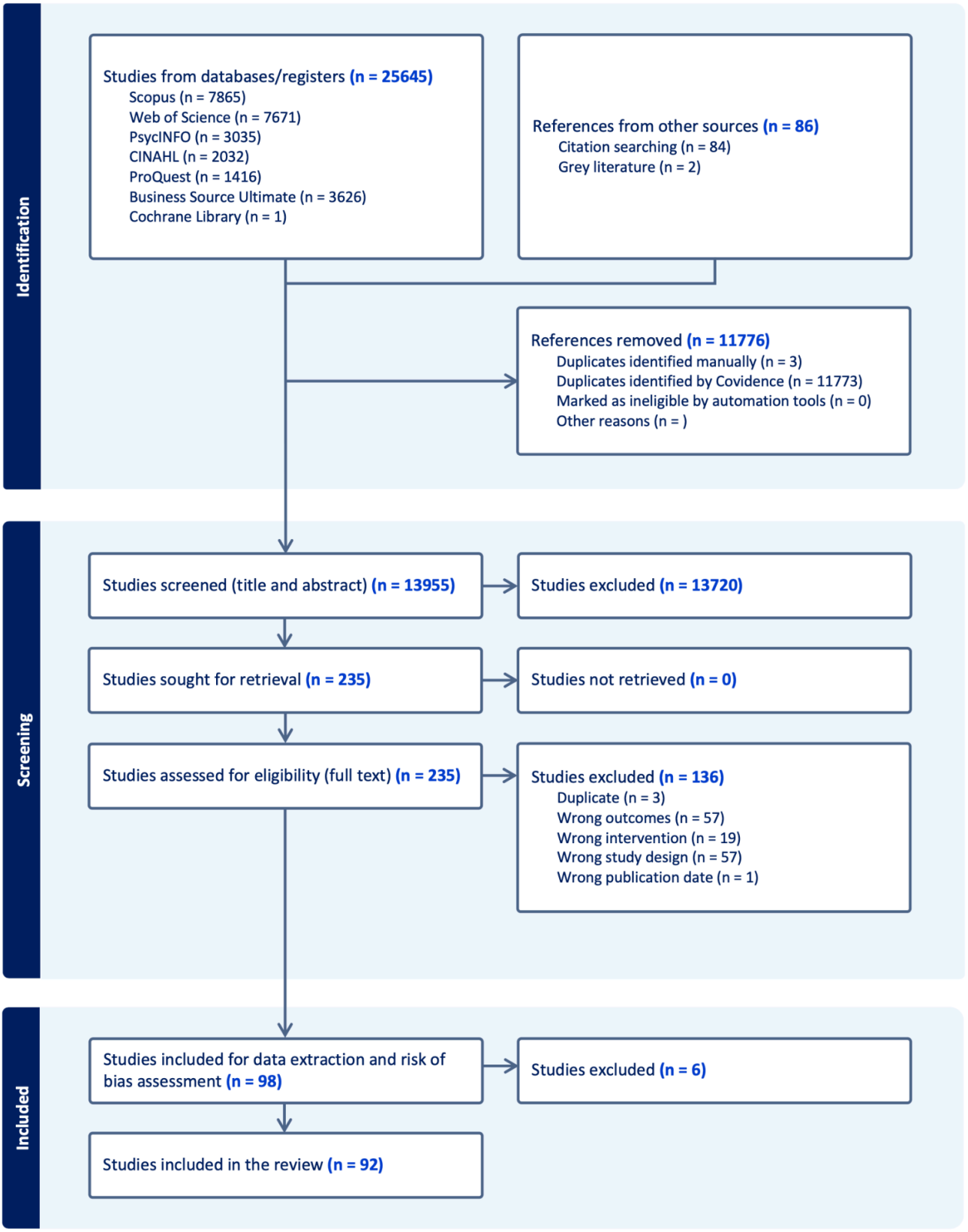
0 – No
1 – Yes

10. Global rating

Total score out of 9.

0 – 3 Low
4 – 6 Moderate
7 – 9 High

APPENDIX C: PRISMA FLOW DIAGRAM OF ARTICLE SELECTION



Conclusion

Cherie Regier

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses a central question in contemporary labor law and organizational practice: *To what extent do employee voice interventions improve employee wellbeing in practice*? Situated against the backdrop of declining worker power across affluent democracies, it reconceptualizes employee voice through Amartya Sen's capability approach—as a foundational freedom that enables individuals to shape their work and broader lives in meaningful ways. Drawing on empirical analyses of trade unions, labour law, and workplace-level interventions, this thesis demonstrates that while employee voice holds considerable potential to enhance wellbeing, its impact is highly contingent on contextual, institutional, and procedural factors.

Employee voice interventions are most effective when they are substantive, structured, and consequential—offering workers not merely the opportunity to be heard, but meaningful influence over decisions. Yet their effectiveness is often constrained by managerial culture, sectoral dynamics, regulatory support, and historical legacies. Methodologically, this thesis contributes to the field by applying advanced causal inference methodologies. Theoretically, it bridges literature from human development, industrial relations, and wellbeing to offer a multidimensional, context-sensitive account of employee voice interventions. Ultimately, this research contributes to the urgent call of renewing worker power through inclusive, evidence-based approaches to labor policy and organizational practice grounded in human-centered principles.

RESEARCH AIMS & STRUCTURE

A key motivation for this thesis is the profound and sustained decline in worker power across affluent democracies, a trend well-documented in both comparative political economy and industrial relations literature (Western & Rosenfeld, 2011; Baccaro & Howell, 2017; Farber et al., 2021; Iversen & Soskice, 2019). These conditions have eroded employees' capacity to shape their working lives and safeguard their wellbeing in the face of intensifying economic insecurity, technological disruption, and organizational restructuring (Standing, 2011; Weil, 2014; Kalleberg, 2011; Gallie, 2013). Against this backdrop, I turn to a critical and timely question: *To what extent do employee voice interventions, a key component of worker power, enhance employee wellbeing in practice?* Providing answers to this question might help us better understand how to reignite workers power and better support employee wellbeing in the 21st century.

While the normative appeal of employee voice is well-established, often framed in terms of human dignity, democratic participation, and fair treatment, its theoretical foundations as a determinant of wellbeing were underdeveloped. In particular, there was limited conceptual clarity regarding which forms of voice affect wellbeing, through what mechanisms, and under which conditions such effects are most likely to materialize.

My thesis sought to move beyond normative assertions and provide an empirically grounded and contextually nuanced understanding of how, when, and for whom employee voice interventions contribute to wellbeing.

Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach, I advance a novel conceptual framework that positions voice not merely as a procedural input or managerial device, but as a foundational capability—an essential freedom to achieve valuable functionings. This framework situates employee voice within its broader economic, legal, and socio-political context, challenging narrow interpretations of voice that fail to capture work as a fully human activity that is heavily shaped by institutionalized power structures.

Empirically, my thesis evaluates three key institutional channels through which employee voice is promoted: trade unions, labour law, and workplace-based interventions. Through three standalone but thematically integrated empirical papers, I apply robust quantitative methodologies—including difference-in-difference estimation, instrumental variable analysis, and systematic review—to examine whether, and under what conditions, these institutional arrangements enhance employee wellbeing. Each empirical chapter offers A distinct and complementary insight that together, highlights the complex and context-sensitive nature of employee voice interventions.

Although such interventions hold clear theoretical promise, their effects on wellbeing are neither uniform nor guaranteed. Their utility depends on several interrelated factors: who enacts them (government, employers, or unions), what form of employee voice they seek to promote (e.g., freedom of speech, self-determination, consultation, codetermination, social dialogue, or collective bargaining), and the industrial relations context in which they are embedded. Crucially, meaningful impact depends not only on the formal provision of voice, but on its active enablement to ignite genuine influence. In many cases, this requires a rebalancing of power over some component of the employment relationship. In short, employee voice must be both afforded and activated to support employee wellbeing in practice.

THEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

Across all four papers, a clear message emerges: employee voice can enhance wellbeing, but is more likely to under specific institutional, organizational, and procedural conditions. The promise of voice lies not in its mere presence but in the quality, depth, and context of its operationalization. The following themes and patterns help unify the evidence presented throughout each chapter.

1. Employee voice tends to be most effective when it is substantive, structured, and consequential. These conditions are often enabled or reinforced by supportive government policies and institutions that rebalance power in the employment relationship.

A consistent finding across all four studies is that employee voice interventions are more likely to enhance wellbeing when they afford employees genuine influence over work-related decisions, rather than operating in symbolic or tokenistic ways. This is supported by broader organizational scholarship, which shows that high-quality, consequential voice is positively associated with psychological safety, autonomy, and job satisfaction (Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2011). Evidence from both the right-to-disconnect evaluation and the systematic review further reinforces this conclusion: interventions that enabled meaningful influence over

broader organizational issues were more likely to improve subjective wellbeing, particularly in evaluative and affective domains such as happiness, stress reduction, and overall job satisfaction (Nielsen et al., 2010; van der Noordt et al., 2014). However, few studies captured eudaimonic dimensions of wellbeing, such as meaning, purpose, or psychological flourishing, limiting our understanding of the deeper, longer-term effects of employee voice interventions. This gap highlights the need for more comprehensive and multidimensional measurement approaches in future research on employee voice and wellbeing.

Conversely, employee voice interventions that are superficial, poorly implemented, or lacking managerial follow-through consistently fail to deliver meaningful wellbeing benefits. This aligns with empirical research demonstrating that when employee input is solicited but not acted upon, it fosters frustration, cynicism, and disengagement (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009; Wilkinson et al., 2004). Mechanisms such as anonymous surveys, passive feedback tools, or one-off consultations, particularly when introduced without structural support or visible managerial commitment, tend to have limited impact on employee wellbeing. In such cases, voice is perceived as symbolic rather than substantive, diminishing trust and undermining motivation. As Wilkinson, Barry, and Morrison (2020) and Budd and Zagelmeyer (2010) argue, voice must be more than an invitation to speak; it must be structured, consequential, and embedded within systems of responsiveness and accountability to have sustained and positive effects on wellbeing.

Substantive: Voice Beyond Expression to Influence

Voice that enables employees to raise concerns, offer input, or express dissent is a necessary starting point—but it is not sufficient to enhance wellbeing. For voice to be impactful, it must go beyond expression to entail real influence over decision-making. This distinction between symbolic and substantive voice is well-established in the literature, with research showing that employee wellbeing improves most reliably when voice is linked to tangible outcomes, autonomy, and shared control over work processes (Budd, 2004; Detert & Burris, 2007; Morrison, 2011).

Findings from the systematic review support this claim. Interventions grounded in self-determination, co-creation, and shared governance, especially those offering multiple structured channels for employee input—were more consistently associated with positive wellbeing outcomes. For instance, participatory job redesign and work reorganization initiatives that enabled employees to influence the structure and content of their roles yielded greater improvements in job satisfaction, stress reduction, and engagement than interventions relying on more passive, consultative mechanisms.

Structured: Voice Embedded in Organizational Systems

Employee voice is more likely to yield wellbeing benefits when institutionalized through regular, predictable, and supported processes, rather than left to informal channels or the discretion of individual managers. Structured mechanisms such as employee committees, joint consultative forums, or codified feedback loops offer legitimacy, continuity, and psychological safety, enabling employees to participate without fear of retaliation or futility (Wilkinson et al., 2004; Bryson et al., 2006). These mechanisms embed voice into the fabric of organizational decision-making and reduce the risk of selective responsiveness, a common pitfall in ad hoc or manager-dependent systems (Marchington & Suter, 2013).

Findings from the right-to-disconnect evaluation reinforce this point. While legislation provided a formal right to disengage from work communications, its effectiveness depended on how voice was structured and enacted at the firm level. Where internal mechanisms allowed employees to shape implementation through negotiation, consultation, or shared decision-making, wellbeing effects were more pronounced. In contrast, qualitative evidence suggests that workplaces lacking internal structures for voice tended to treat the policy as a compliance exercise, limiting its practical impact (Eurofound, 2021).

Although informal voice, such as direct conversations with supervisors or peer-based dialogue, can foster wellbeing, its effectiveness appears amplified when supported by formal structures. As Budd, Gollan, and Wilkinson (2010) note, sustainable voice requires both institutional support and cultural reinforcement. Without these supports, informal voice remains vulnerable to managerial turnover, power asymmetries, and inconsistent follow-through. In short, structured voice mechanisms transform voice from a discretionary gesture into a dependable capability, enhancing both its credibility and its contribution to employee wellbeing.

Consequential: Voice That Leads to Change

Employee voice that is not followed by managerial response or organizational change risks generating frustration, cynicism, or disengagement. This is a consistent finding throughout my empirical chapters—interventions were more likely to be effective when employees observed tangible changes resulting from their input (e.g., changes to schedules, policies, workflows, or interpersonal dynamics). Where voice was acknowledged but ignored, wellbeing effects were more often neutral or negative. This finding aligns with research on "pseudo-participation," where organizations seek legitimacy by appearing participatory while maintaining tight control over outcomes (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

These results also echo Wilkinson and Fay's (2011) argument that voice must be consequential, not merely symbolic, to deliver meaningful value. When employees see that their contributions lead to visible change, voice becomes a source of empowerment and psychological safety. Conversely, when voice is invited but ignored, it fosters cynicism and stress (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009). In short, substantive voice—voice linked to influence—is likely a necessary condition for sustained wellbeing gains.

Integration with Power Structures

Ultimately, employee voice becomes truly consequential when it is backed by power, whether through legal rights, collective representation, or high-trust organizational cultures. Interventions that provide opportunities for voice but lack mechanisms to shift the underlying balance of power in the employment relationship are unlikely to deliver sustained wellbeing improvements. Rather, voice gains traction and legitimacy when embedded within institutional structures that grant employees real influence over outcomes, such as collective bargaining frameworks, works councils, or statutory entitlements (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Hyman, 2007; Budd, 2004).

Across this thesis, findings consistently reveal that the success of employee voice interventions hinges not only on how they are designed, but on whether they enable employees to exert real influence—to shape working conditions, resist detrimental practices, or co-determine policy. This was particularly evident in the right-to-disconnect evaluation and in the historical case study of labour unions in Great Britain, where wellbeing effects were more negative when voice mechanisms failed to alter managerial accountability, often due to

broader regulatory conditions. In these cases, employees lacked the institutional and collective power needed to influence implementation meaningfully.

This perspective reinforces a core claim central to both capability theory and pluralist industrial relations: voice must be both afforded and activated. Without the power to influence decisions, voice risks becoming a procedural formality, easily ignored or circumvented. As Wilkinson and Fay (2011) argue, voice must be accompanied by procedural justice and structural support to produce meaningful outcomes. In short, it is the integration of voice with power structures that transforms employee voice into a capability—and, ultimately, into a freedom that supports employee wellbeing.

2. Contextual factors moderate the impact of employee voice interventions on employee wellbeing

The effectiveness of employee voice interventions is not universal; rather, it is highly contingent on contextual factors that shape how voice is afforded, enacted, and responded to. Across this thesis, several particularly salient conditioning factors emerged, including the industrial relations context, organizational structure and managerial culture, sectoral and market dynamics, and historical and political legacies. These factors moderate whether employee voice interventions enhance employees' capability for voice and, in turn, lead to wellbeing gains.

Industrial Relations Context

Findings from the right-to-disconnect study illustrate that individual rights-based legislation is only as effective as the institutional infrastructure that supports its implementation. In contexts where legislation exists but lacks enforcement mechanisms, or where compliance is left to employer discretion, wellbeing gains are often minimal. This resonates with prior research showing that employee rights must be embedded within a supportive ecosystem of collective institutions and regulatory oversight to have practical impact (Baccaro & Howell, 2017; Heery, 2016). In contrast, when legal mandates are complemented by union involvement, robust enforcement mechanisms, and participatory workplace structures, voice is more likely to translate into concrete improvements in working conditions and employee wellbeing (Frege & Kelly, 2004; Kaufman, 2010).

This insight is particularly pertinent in liberal market economies, where voluntarist industrial relations regimes prevail and the operationalization of legal entitlements is frequently left to individual employers (Hall & Soskice, 2001; Thelen, 2014). Without institutional mechanisms to ensure follow-through—such as works councils, collective agreements, or statutory consultation requirements—employee voice risks becoming a formal right without practical realization. As Wilkinson et al. (2020) note, the mere presence of voice is insufficient; it must be activated through institutional arrangements that guarantee responsiveness and consequence.

Organizational Structure and Managerial Culture

The organizational context, particularly managerial receptivity, structural support, and psychological safety, plays a pivotal role in shaping the effectiveness of employee voice interventions. Findings from the systematic review underscore that voice mechanisms embedded within collaborative, team-based, and high-involvement environments tend to yield more consistent and positive effects on employee wellbeing. Such environments are

often characterized by participatory leadership, mutual trust, and feedback cultures where employees feel safe to speak up and believe that their input will lead to action (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 1999).

In contrast, hierarchical, control-oriented organizations—where communication is unidirectional and managerial discretion is unchecked—tend to suppress or negate the potential benefits of voice. In these settings, employees may fear retaliation, question the authenticity of participation efforts, or disengage after repeated experiences of being ignored (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Even well-designed voice initiatives may backfire if managers fail to listen, respond constructively, or communicate outcomes, leading to disillusionment and erosion of organizational trust (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009).

This aligns with a growing body of research emphasizing that managerial openness and implementation fidelity are critical mediators of voice effectiveness (Hassan, Wright, & Yukl, 2014; Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). As noted previously, employee voice that is invited but not acted upon can lead to greater harm than no voice at all—reinforcing cynicism, diminishing psychological safety, and undermining the perceived legitimacy of participation processes.

Sectoral Differences and Market Pressures

The trade union evaluation paper offers a particularly clear illustration of how sectoral conditions shape the outcomes of employee voice interventions. In the private sector under post-Thatcher reforms, union voice was associated with lower job satisfaction—not necessarily due to the presence of voice itself, but because voice was weakened by declining bargaining power and an increasingly deregulated and flexible labour market. These findings align with broader research showing that in liberalized economies, market competition, cost-cutting imperatives, and managerial resistance often reduce the space for collective voice and erode its efficacy (Baccaro & Howell, 2017; Howell, 2005).

By contrast, the public and nonprofit sectors often provide a more cooperative environment for voice. These sectors are more likely to embed values such as procedural fairness, job security, and mission alignment, supporting more constructive and less adversarial forms of employee participation (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Bach & Bordogna, 2013). Research shows that institutionalized mechanisms for employee voice, such as consultative committees or public-sector bargaining frameworks, are more common in these settings and are associated with higher employee trust and satisfaction (Bryson, Forth, & George, 2012).

These sectoral variations reinforce a central argument in industrial relations theory: voice is not context-free. Its effectiveness is shaped by broader economic regimes and sector-specific logics (Kochan, 1980; Thelen, 2014). In sectors where efficiency pressures dominate and employee influence is marginalized, employee voice interventions may lack credibility and impact. In contrast, sectors fostering institutionalized dialogue and long-term employment relationships are more likely to realize the wellbeing benefits of employee voice.

Historical and Political Conditions

The timing and historical context in which employee voice interventions are introduced also significantly influence their effectiveness. The trade union paper revealed that interventions launched during periods of institutional decline, labour fragmentation, or widespread distrust in social institutions can carry historical

baggage that limits their perceived legitimacy or efficacy. In such environments, employee voice may be viewed with skepticism, either as a symbolic formality without substantive impact, or as a strategic management tool to mitigate conflict rather than to promote influence (Hyman, 2001; Streeck, 2004). This skepticism is particularly pronounced in neoliberal contexts, where decades of deregulation and union decline have reshaped expectations about employees' role in organizational decision-making.

Conversely, employee voice interventions that emerge as part of broader democratizing or solidarity-based reforms, such as national-level social dialogue frameworks, codetermination laws, or the revitalization of sectoral bargaining, tend to have greater legitimacy and impact. When situated within a wider ecosystem of institutionalized power-sharing, these interventions are more likely to be perceived as credible, enforceable, and aligned with worker interests (Thelen, 2014; Baccaro & Howell, 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013). For example, the enduring success of codetermination in Germany reflects not just firm-level structures but a historical legacy of labour–capital cooperation, supported by strong social norms and legal guarantees (Frege, 2005; Hall & Thelen, 2009).

These insights reinforce a core argument in comparative political economy: employee voice mechanisms are path-dependent and institutionally embedded. Their legitimacy and real-world effectiveness depend on the historical trajectory of state–labour–capital relations, as well as the political will and institutional frameworks that sustain them. Without this foundation, even well-designed interventions risk being hollowed out by institutional drift or managerial capture.

3. Employee voice interventions produce unequal outcomes

Employee voice interventions do not benefit all workers equally. A consistent pattern emerges: the benefits of voice accrue disproportionately to those who already possess some degree of power, security, or institutional support, while workers in more precarious, marginalized, or rigidly managed contexts are more likely to experience limited or even adverse effects. This aligns with longstanding research in employment relations, which shows that employee voice is more impactful for those with higher occupational status, greater job control, and perceived organizational support (Freeman & Medoff, 1984; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Morrison, 2014). By contrast, precariously employed, low-status, or non-unionized workers often face barriers to participation or fear retaliation, particularly in settings with weak psychological safety or adversarial management cultures (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Ashford et al., 2009).

My theoretical framework, rooted in Sen's capability approach, emphasizes that employee voice is not merely about access but about the real freedom to exercise it meaningfully. Workers who already have decision latitude, supportive supervisors, or union representation are better positioned to convert voice opportunities into tangible wellbeing outcomes. In these cases, voice functions as a capability amplifier: it reinforces existing autonomy, enhances perceptions of fairness, and supports the pursuit of valued functionings such as balance, dignity, and recognition. By contrast, employees with limited baseline capabilities, such as low bargaining power, insecure contracts, or unsupportive cultures, often lack the resources or institutional backing needed to exercise voice effectively. For them, employee voice interventions may remain formally available but practically inaccessible, or even increase stress if expectations for participation are raised without the power to act, a dynamic akin to responsibilization without authority (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Donaghey et al., 2011).

Findings from the right-to-disconnect evaluation highlight that teleworkers without sufficient voice capability are more likely to experience work intensification, digital overconnectivity, and deteriorations in psychological and physical health. Other research suggests that this is particularly true for workers in roles where employer surveillance or algorithmic performance monitoring replaces relational trust, and where collective or legal protections are weak (Moore et al., 2018; Wood, Lehdonvirta, & Graham, 2018). Similarly, the systematic review revealed that participatory interventions tend to benefit professional and managerial workers in collaborative environments, while frontline and shift-based employees often lack access to such mechanisms or encounter tokenistic forms of participation with limited influence.

Broader literature affirms that intersectional inequalities related to gender, race, migration status, and contract type further shape employees' ability to benefit from voice interventions (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Colgan & Ledwith, 2000). For example, women, racialized workers, and migrants may be less likely to be perceived as legitimate contributors, or may experience stress or backlash when their voice challenges dominant workplace norms or hierarchies (Mor Barak, 2015; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). The expression of voice can also entail risk for these groups if underlying discrimination is present. As noted previously, employees who speak up in contexts of low managerial receptiveness may experience emotional strain, leading to disillusionment or increased stress (Detert & Treviño, 2010).

4. A negative relationship between employee voice interventions and wellbeing is not necessarily indicative of intervention failure

While the impetus for my overarching research question concerned the wellbeing benefits of employee voice interventions, particularly in relation to subjective accounts, my findings alongside a broader body of empirical literature reveal a more complex relationship. For instance, in my study of trade unions in post-Thatcher Great Britain, union recognition was associated with a decline in job satisfaction among private sector employees. At first glance, this may appear to undermine the case for collective voice. However, as Freeman and Medoff (1984) and subsequent scholars have argued, such outcomes may instead reflect greater retention of dissatisfied employees who believe they can effect change through union representation, rather than exiting the organization. In this sense, dissatisfaction can coexist with hope for improvement—a dynamic not captured in current wellbeing indicators.

Moreover, the emergence of dissatisfaction may reflect a transitional phase during periods of heightened employee awareness, expectation, or mobilization. When employees are newly afforded opportunities to exercise their voice but do so within environments marked by managerial resistance or weak implementation structures, latent grievances, power asymmetries, and unmet needs may surface. In such contexts, expressions of discontent are not necessarily indicative of intervention failure but may constitute a necessary precondition for deeper organizational change (Donaghey et al., 2011; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). This process aligns with the notion of “constructive dissent,” where raising concerns initiates learning, adaptation, and reform, even if subjective wellbeing initially dips (Detert & Edmondson, 2011).

Importantly, emerging research suggests that exercising voice itself can be a source of stress. Employees may experience anxiety, fear of reprisal, or emotional strain as a consequence of speaking up, particularly when voice

challenges dominant organizational norms or entrenched hierarchies (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009; Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, & Edmondson, 2009). Thus, the wellbeing benefits of employee voice interventions may not be immediate but may instead unfold gradually as organizations adapt, build trust, and implement meaningful change (Wilkinson et al., 2020). This temporal dimension underscores the need to interpret short-term dissatisfaction not as intervention failure, but as part of a longer trajectory toward employee empowerment and improved organizational climates. Future research should consider incorporating longer-term follow-up periods, complemented by qualitative insights, to better capture this complex dynamic.

From a capability perspective, employee voice interventions should not be judged solely by their immediate instrumental outcomes, such as increases in job satisfaction or reductions in stress, but also by the freedom they enable. That is, the core value of employee voice lies not merely in whether it improves short-term wellbeing, but in whether it grants employees real opportunities to shape their work lives in ways they value. Critique, dissent, and dissatisfaction are legitimate and potentially productive uses of voice within this framework. Negative associations between voice and wellbeing, therefore, should not always be interpreted as problems to be solved, but rather as signals of a system in transition—revealing previously hidden frustrations and power imbalances that must be surfaced before meaningful change can occur.

Accordingly, negative or null associations between employee voice interventions and wellbeing should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence against the value of employee voice or as indicators of intervention failure. Rather, such results may mark early signs of progress, where employees begin to challenge the status quo and reclaim influence over their working conditions (Spicer & Böhm, 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2020). From this perspective, employee voice is not merely a feedback mechanism or a tool for producing consensus, but a political act that may disrupt surface harmony in the pursuit of justice, equality, and human dignity.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical

My thesis advances a multidisciplinary theoretical understanding of employee voice interventions as determinants of wellbeing in three key ways. First, I reframe employee voice as a foundational human capability—a real freedom to shape one's working life in ways that promote valuable functionings. Drawing on Amartya Sen's capability approach, I position voice as both intrinsically valuable (linked to autonomy, dignity, and self-expression) and instrumentally important (enabling employees to reduce exposure to stressors, shape job conditions, and pursue valued goals). This framing departs from dominant organizational perspectives that view voice primarily through a functionalist or performance-enhancing lens, offering instead a human-centered perspective that foregrounds agency, fairness, and wellbeing.

Second, I challenge the assumption that employee voice is universally beneficial by demonstrating that its effects on wellbeing are highly context-dependent. Employee voice interventions are most effective when they are substantive, structured, and consequential, and when situated within supportive institutional environments. Drawing from empirical analyses across labour law, trade unions, and workplace initiatives, the thesis develops a contingency-based theoretical model in which the form of voice, the actor promoting it, and the broader industrial relations context condition its effectiveness. This approach reintroduces considerations of power,

structure, and institutional variation into voice theory, enriching it with insights from political economy and labour studies.

Finally, I offer a multidisciplinary synthesis that bridges previously disconnected literatures on employee voice, subjective wellbeing, and institutional theory. In doing so, I reframe work not merely as an economic transaction, but as a site of human development capable of enhancing or diminishing wellbeing. By evaluating employee voice interventions through the dual lens of institutional embeddedness and wellbeing outcomes, my research contributes a novel evaluative framework attuned to power dynamics, institutional design, and human flourishing. This synthesis opens new theoretical pathways for understanding the employment relationship in ways that address both normative aspirations and empirical realities.

Methodological

My thesis makes several important methodological contributions by combining conceptual innovation with rigorous empirical analysis. It addresses a critical gap in the employee voice literature by applying quasi-experimental methods, including difference-in-differences estimation and instrumental variable analysis, to identify the causal effects of employee voice interventions on employee wellbeing. These techniques are applied to large-scale, longitudinal datasets, strengthening the internal validity of the findings and moving the field beyond descriptive or correlational accounts.

In the right-to-disconnect paper, a key methodological contribution lies in the application of the Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) difference-in-differences estimator, which offers a more flexible and credible approach to causal inference in settings with staggered treatment adoption. Unlike traditional two-way fixed effects models, which can yield biased estimates when treatment effects vary over time or across groups, this estimator calculates group-time average treatment effects, allowing for both temporal variation and treatment effect heterogeneity. This innovation was particularly well-suited to the evaluation of right-to-disconnect legislation, given that countries implemented the policy at different times, in different forms, and within distinct industrial relations regimes. By accommodating these contextual differences, the estimator enabled a more nuanced and valid assessment of the legislation's impact on employee wellbeing.

The labour union evaluation study further advances methodological development by leveraging a natural experiment to estimate the causal relationship between union recognition and employee wellbeing—a relationship typically obscured by selection bias in observational research. Given that randomized controlled trials are infeasible in this context, this design represents a significant advance. In addition, the study employs a multi-level data structure, linking firm-level interventions to employee-level outcomes, allowing for the analysis of how meso-institutional features (i.e., union recognition) interact with individual experiences of subjective wellbeing.

Through a systematic review, the thesis also brings conceptual and empirical coherence to a diverse and fragmented body of research on employee voice interventions. By organizing findings according to voice domain, intervention type, subjective wellbeing dimension, study quality, and key population characteristics, and by specifying critical methodological features, this review offers a structured and transparent synthesis that advances both scholarly and practical understanding. It identifies which types of interventions are most likely to

improve employee wellbeing—and for whom—while also highlighting persistent evidence gaps, such as the underrepresentation of certain worker groups and dimensions of wellbeing. In doing so, the review provides a robust foundation for future research and offers valuable guidance for the design and implementation of more effective and equitable workplace interventions.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations throughout my thesis that should be acknowledged. First, despite efforts to strengthen causal inference through quasi-experimental techniques, the use of observational and secondary data imposes constraints on variable selection, measurement precision, and identification. Furthermore, while a key motivation for this study was to use subjective wellbeing measures to capture employees' own assessment of their lives, such measures can be influenced by social norms, cultural expectations, and individual adaptation, all of which can complicate cross-cultural or demographic comparisons (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2020; Schwarz & Strack, 1999; Tversky & Griffin, 1991). Nonetheless, evidence regarding how social interventions impact one's subjective experiences are lacking compared to objective accounts. Combining both literatures can produce powerful insights.

Second, while the systematic review employed a rigorous methodology, including a structured typology and study quality assessment, it remains constrained by substantial variation in study designs, outcome definitions, and reporting standards across the included literature. The absence of consistent and comparable well being measures—both within and across wellbeing domains—complicates comparisons and limits meta-analytic synthesis. Furthermore, few studies report disaggregated effects by gender, race, contract type, or other intersectional factors, limiting our understanding of heterogeneous impacts across diverse worker groups. Notably, this reflects a broader limitation observed in many systematic reviews of workplace interventions, where inadequate attention to equity-related outcomes and inconsistent measurement frameworks constrain generalizability and practical guidance (Montano, Hoven, & Siegrist, 2014; Fox et al., 2021). These issues underscore the need for greater standardization in outcome measurement and more inclusive reporting practices in future research.

Third, none of the studies in this thesis employ mixed-methods or ethnographic approaches, which limits insight into how employees experience voice on the ground and why certain interventions succeed or fail in practice. While this thesis contributes important evidence on what works, for whom, and under what conditions, it offers fewer insights into the micro-processes through which voice is enacted, resisted, negotiated, or institutionalized within specific organizational settings. This represents an opportunity for future research, as mixed-methods utilising qualitative approaches such as ethnography, interviews, and participant observation are particularly well-suited to uncovering the relational, contextual, and experiential dimensions of employee voice (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Cunliffe, 2010). A growing body of organizational behaviour and industrial relations research emphasizes the importance of these methods for understanding not only whether interventions "work," but how they unfold in practice, how they are shaped by power dynamics, and how they are perceived by employees themselves (Dundon & Gollan, 2007; Van Maanen, 2011).

Fourth, since this research is situated within high-income economies, the generalizability of its findings to emerging or lower-income countries is limited. The institutional arrangements that shape employee voice vary

considerably in these contexts, and therefore, the impact of employee voice interventions on wellbeing likely will too. As such, conclusions drawn from studies in Global North contexts may not transfer seamlessly to settings where informal employment is more prevalent, regulatory enforcement is weaker, or power asymmetries are more pronounced. This limitation reflects a broader concern within organizational and labour research, where Global South perspectives remain underrepresented, despite growing recognition of the need for comparative and context-sensitive inquiry (Budhwar & Debrah, 2001; Cooke, Wood, Wang, & Veen, 2019). Future research should prioritize cross-national and cross-sectoral studies that attend to local institutional logics and worker realities to better assess the applicability and equity of employee voice interventions globally.

Finally, while this thesis focused on three primary institutional channels of employee voice (trade unions, labour law, and workplace-based interventions), it is important to acknowledge that other forms of voice institutions exist, particularly outside traditional frameworks of industrial relations that are grass-roots in nature. One notable example is the rise of worker centers, especially in the United States, which have emerged as key sites of support, advocacy, and mobilization for marginalized and precarious workers, including immigrants, informal sector workers, and those excluded from union representation (Fine, 2006; Milkman, 2013). These organizations often blend community organizing, legal advocacy, and policy campaigning, offering a hybrid model of voice that challenges both market and state failures to protect vulnerable workers.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings of my thesis have clear and timely implications for policy, particularly in the context of global efforts to deliver decent employment, strengthen worker agency, and build resilient labour market institutions in an era of accelerating change. As the International Labour Organization (ILO(notes: today's evolving world of work, marked by technological disruption, climate change, demographic shifts, and rising precarity, demands labour policy that moves beyond static regulatory frameworks and toward dynamic, inclusive approaches that prioritize worker voice and wellbeing as policy outcomes (ILO, 2022).

Policymakers should explicitly recognize employee voice, particularly forms that are substantive, structured, and consequential, as a core dimension of decent work and a foundational contributor to both intrinsic and instrumental wellbeing. Employee voice should not be treated merely as a procedural formality but as a capability-enhancing right that supports democratic participation, workplace justice, and human flourishing. Integrating voice into national labour strategies, wellbeing frameworks, and social dialogue mechanisms can help rebalance the asymmetries of power that undermine both worker outcomes and institutional legitimacy.

While voluntary workplace-level employee voice interventions are important, evidence suggests that institutional backing through labour law is critical to making voice meaningful and effective. Policies should ensure that voice mechanisms are not only afforded in principle but also enabled in practice, and this requires adequate enforcement structures, oversight, and evaluation. This is particularly evident with 'soft' labour laws like the R2D that rely on firm-level cooperation for implementation. In other words, policies should address the sources of declining worker power, rather than their symptoms.

Special policy attention should be paid to extending meaningful voice to precarious, informal, and marginalized workers, for whom traditional voice structures may be inaccessible. This aligns with the ILO's call to strengthen

voice in both formal and informal economies and to develop inclusive labour market institutions that reflect the realities of all workers, not just those in standard employment (2020). Achieving this in practice necessitates a fundamental rethinking of the role, scope, and potential of employee voice institutions in the 21st century.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

By integrating theoretical development with rigorous empirical inquiry, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship seeking to reimagine the role of work in fostering human development. It offers actionable insights for policymakers, labor advocates, and organizations striving to design employee voice interventions that not only respond to workers concerns but also enhance their wellbeing in a sustainable and inclusive manner. Taken together, the evidence from my thesis suggests that employee voice interventions can enhance wellbeing, but only when they are designed and implemented in ways that grant employees real influence over their work. Context matters: legal protections, organizational support, management receptivity, and worker autonomy all play pivotal roles in converting voice opportunities into wellbeing outcomes. Rebuilding worker power in the 21st century, therefore, demands more than piecemeal policy reforms or isolated workplace initiatives; it necessitates transforming the institutional structures that determine how power is distributed, negotiated, and enacted in contemporary work environments.

REFERENCES

Ashford, S. J., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Christianson, M. K. (2009). Speaking up and speaking out: The leadership dynamics of voice in organizations. In J. Greenberg & M. S. Edwards (Eds.), *Voice and silence in organizations* (pp. 175–202). Emerald Group Publishing.

Baccaro, L., & Howell, C. (2017). *Trajectories of neoliberal transformation: European industrial relations since the 1970s*. Cambridge University Press.

Bach, S., & Bordogna, L. (2013). Reframing public service employment relations: The impact of economic crisis and the new EU economic governance. *European Journal of Industrial Relations, 19*(4), 279–294. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680113505032

Bryson, A., Charlwood, A., & Forth, J. (2006). Worker voice, managerial response and labour productivity: An empirical investigation. *Industrial Relations Journal, 37*(5), 438–455. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2338.2006.00414.x

Bryson, A., Forth, J., & George, A. (2012). Explaining cross-national variation in workplace employee representation. *European Journal of Industrial Relations, 18*(4), 285–303. https://doi.org/10.1177/0959680112461284

Budhwar, P. S., & Debrah, Y. A. (2001). Rethinking comparative and cross-national human resource management research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 12*(3), 497–515. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190121678

Budd, J. W. (2004). *Employment with a human face: Balancing efficiency, equity, and voice*. Cornell University Press.

Budd, J. W., Gollan, P. J., & Wilkinson, A. (2010). New approaches to employee voice and participation in organizations. *Human Relations, 63*(3), 303–310. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709348934

Budd, J. W., & Zagelmeyer, S. (2010). Public policy and employee participation. *Socio-Economic Review, 8*(2), 283–308. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwp030

Clarke, M., Lewchuk, W., de Wolff, A., & King, A. (2007). 'This just isn't sustainable': Precarious employment, stress and workers' health. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry, 30*(4–5), 311–326.

Colgan, F., & Ledwith, S. (2000). Diversity, identities and strategies of women trade union activists. *Gender, Work & Organization, 7*(4), 242–257.

Cooke, F. L., Wood, G., Wang, M., & Veen, A. (2019). How far has international HRM travelled? A systematic review of literature on multinational corporations (2000–2014). *Human Resource Management Review, 29*(1), 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.06.001

Cunliffe, A. L. (2010). Crafting qualitative research: Morgan and Smircich 30 years on. *Organizational Research Methods, 13*(4), 647–673. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428110373658

Detert, J. R., & Burris, E. R. (2007). Leadership behavior and employee voice: Is the door really open? *Academy of Management Journal, 50*(4), 869–884. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.26279183

Detert, J. R., & Edmondson, A. C. (2011). Implicit voice theories: Taken-for-granted rules of self-censorship at work. *Academy of Management Journal, 54*(3), 461–488. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.61967925

Detert, J. R., & Treviño, L. K. (2010). Speaking up to higher-ups: How supervisors and skip-level leaders influence employee voice. *Organization Science, 21*(1), 249–270.

Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Lucas, R. E. (2003). Personality, culture, and subjective well-being: Emotional and cognitive evaluations of life. *Annual Review of Psychology, 54*(1), 403–425. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145056

Donaghey, J., Cullinane, N., Dundon, T., & Wilkinson, A. (2011). Reconceptualising employee silence: Problems and prognosis. *Work, Employment and Society, 25*(1), 51–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017010381912

Dundon, T., & Gollan, P. J. (2007). Reconceptualizing voice in the workplace: The emergence of combined and hybrid frameworks. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 18*(7), 1189–1199. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190701392034

Edmondson, A. C., & McManus, S. E. (2007). Methodological fit in management field research. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(4), 1155–1179. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.26586086

Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*(2), 350–383. https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999

Farber, H. S., Herbst, D., Kuziemko, I., & Naidu, S. (2021). Unions and inequality over the twentieth century: New evidence from survey data. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 136*(3), 1325–1385. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjab012

Fine, J. (2006). *Worker centers: Organizing communities at the edge of the dream*. Cornell University Press.

Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2007). *Contestable authority: The politics of corporate control in the new economy*. Oxford University Press.

Fox, K. E., Johnson, S. T., Berkman, L. F., Sianoja, M., Soh, Y., Kubzansky, L. D., & Kelly, E. L. (2021). Organisational- and group-level workplace interventions and their effect on multiple domains of worker well-being: A systematic review. *Work & Stress, 36*(1), 30–59.

Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition, and participation. In N. Fraser & A. Honneth, *Redistribution or recognition?* Verso.

Freeman, R. B., & Medoff, J. L. (1984). *What do unions do?* Basic Books.

Frege, C., & Kelly, J. (2004). *Varieties of unionism: Strategies for union revitalization in a globalizing economy*. Oxford University Press.

Gallie, D. (2013). *Economic crisis, quality of work, and social integration: The European experience*. Oxford University Press.

Hall, P. A., & Soskice, D. (2001). *Varieties of capitalism: The institutional foundations of comparative advantage*. Oxford University Press.

Hassan, S., Wright, B. E., & Yukl, G. (2014). Does ethical leadership matter in government? Effects on organizational commitment, absenteeism, and willingness to report ethical problems. *Public Administration Review, 74*(3), 333–343. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12216

Heery, E. (2016). *Framing work: Unitary, pluralist and critical perspectives in the twenty-first century*. Oxford University Press.

Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. D. (2020). *World Happiness Report 2020*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Howell, C. (2005). *Trade unions and the state: The construction of industrial relations institutions in Britain, 1890–2000*. Princeton University Press.

Hyman, R. (2007). How can trade unions act strategically? *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research, 13*(2), 193–210. https://doi.org/10.1177/102425890701300204

International Labour Organization. (2022). *World Employment and Social Outlook: The role of labour institutions in fostering a human-centred recovery*. https://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/weso/2022/lang--en/index.htm

Iversen, T., & Soskice, D. (2019). *Democracy and prosperity: Reinventing capitalism through a turbulent century*. Princeton University Press.

Kaiser, C. R., & Miller, C. T. (2001). Stop complaining! The social costs of making attributions to discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*(2), 254–263.

Kalev, A., Dobbin, F., & Kelly, E. (2006). Best practices or best guesses? Assessing the efficacy of corporate affirmative action and diversity policies. *American Sociological Review, 71*(4), 589–617.

Kalleberg, A. L. (2011). *Good jobs, bad jobs: The rise of polarized and precarious employment systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s*. Russell Sage Foundation.

Kish-Gephart, J. J., Detert, J. R., Treviño, L. K., & Edmondson, A. C. (2009). Silenced by fear: The nature, sources, and consequences of fear at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior, 29*, 163–193. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2009.07.002

Kochan, T. A. (1980). *Collective bargaining and industrial relations: From theory to policy and practice*. Irwin.

Marchington, M., & Suter, E. (2013). Where informality really matters: Patterns of employee involvement and participation across the UK. *Human Resource Management Journal, 23*(3), 255–271. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-8583.2012.00207.x

Milkman, R. (2013). Back to the future? US labour in the new gilded age. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 51*(4), 645–665. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12042

Milliken, F. J., Morrison, E. W., & Hewlin, P. F. (2003). An exploratory study of employee silence: Issues that employees don't communicate upward and why. *Journal of Management Studies, 40*(6), 1453–1476. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00387

Montano, D., Hoven, H., & Siegrist, J. (2014). Effects of organisational-level interventions at work on employees' health: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health, 14*, 135. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-135

Moore, P. V., Upchurch, M., & Whittaker, X. (2018). *Humans and machines at work: Monitoring, surveillance and automation in contemporary capitalism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Mor Barak, M. E. (2015). Inclusion is the key to diversity management, but what is inclusion? *Human Service Organizations, 39*(2), 83–88.

Morrison, E. W. (2014). Employee voice and silence. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*(1), 173–197.

Morrison, E. W., & Milliken, F. J. (2000). Organizational silence: A barrier to change and development in a pluralistic world. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(4), 706–725. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.3707697

Nielsen, K., Randall, R., Holten, A. L., & González, E. R. (2010). Conducting organizational-level occupational health interventions: What works? *Work & Stress, 24*(3), 234–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2010.515393

Robeyns, I. (2017). *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined*. Open Book Publishers.

Schwarz, N., & Strack, F. (1999). Reports of subjective well-being: Judgmental processes and their methodological implications. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 61–84). Russell Sage Foundation.

Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Thelen, K. (2014). *Varieties of liberalization and the new politics of social solidarity*. Cambridge University Press.

Tversky, A., & Griffin, D. (1991). Endowment and contrast in judgments of well-being. In F. Strack, M. Argyle, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Subjective well-being: An interdisciplinary perspective* (pp. 101–118). Pergamon Press.

Van der Noordt, M., IJzelenberg, H., Droomers, M., & Proper, K. I. (2014). Health effects of employment: A systematic review of prospective studies. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 71*(10), 730–736. https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2013-101891

Van Maanen, J. (2011). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Weil, D. (2014). *The fissured workplace: Why work became so bad for so many and what can be done to improve it*. Harvard University Press.

Western, B., & Rosenfeld, J. (2011). Unions, norms, and the rise in U.S. wage inequality. *American Sociological Review, 76*(4), 513–537. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411414817

Wilkinson, A., Barry, M., & Morrison, E. W. (2020). Toward an integration of research on employee voice. *Human Resource Management Review, 30*(1), 100677. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.12.001

Wilkinson, A., Dundon, T., Marchington, M., & Ackers, P. (2004). Changing patterns of employee voice: Case studies from the UK and Republic of Ireland. *Journal of Industrial Relations, 46*(3), 298–322. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-1856.2004.00020.x

Wilkinson, A., & Fay, C. (2011). New times for employee voice? *Human Resource Management, 50*(1), 65–74. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20400

Wood, A. J., Lehdonvirta, V., & Graham, M. (2018). Workers of the internet unite? Online freelancer organisation among remote gig economy workers in six Asian and African countries. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 33*(2), 95–112.