UNSATISFACTORY WORKING CONDITIONS AND VOICE: AN ANALYSIS INVOLVING EMPLOYEES IN SWEDEN

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ABSTRACT

From the classic distinction by Albert Hirschman between exit, voice, and loyalty, we can infer that employees who are dissatisfied with their working conditions have two "active" options: they can either leave their employer or raise their voices against conditions they consider to be bad. In this article—based on a 2006 survey among employees in Sweden—I ask to what extent dissatisfied workers raise their voices and, if they do so, which ways do they choose. Another task is to explore how willingness to leave the job, loyalty, and other factors influence what people do. Also, I discuss whether various forms of voice can be characterized as collective or as individual. The available data show that employees in Sweden most often speak to managers about workplace failings. Other common steps entail talking to workmates and raising issues at staff meetings, while only 10% call in union representatives. Most people do more than one thing, and complaints are thus likely to be spread among the workers. Many factors are important in employees' decisions as to which kinds of action they choose. Those who want to switch to another workplace have a greater propensity to bring up problems with workmates and to contact union representatives, whereas strong loyalty or organizational commitment is associated with a lesser propensity to take these actions. On the other hand, loyalty has no significant effects on people's inclination to speak to managers or to discuss issues at staff meetings. In these cases, another factor becomes the most crucial: fear of criticizing unsatisfactory working conditions. Employees who are afraid of expressing their disapproval are less inclined to talk to managers and to bring up complaints at staff meetings.

This article deals with what employees do when they have complaints about the state of affairs at the workplace. People who are dissatisfied with their situation have a number of different options: they can leave their employer, they can raise their voices against inadequate conditions, or they can be passive. Although both leaving the job and passivity will be touched upon in the article, its principal focus is on voice. I examine to what extent and how people act to obtain improvements. Do they, for example, speak with managers, bring up issues at staff meetings, or contact union representatives? Do they choose individual rather than collective forms of action? An attempt is also made to explore the determinants behind the different ways of expressing discontent. The empirical basis for the investigation is a survey of a random sample of employees, carried out in Sweden in 2006.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A main point of departure for the present study is the classic distinction by Albert Hirschman (1970) between exit, voice, and loyalty. This distinction stems from an analysis of "the firm producing saleable outputs for customers," but it may also be "applicable to organizations (such as voluntary associations, trade unions, or political parties) that provide services to their members without direct monetary counterpart" (Hirschman, 1970: 3). The precondition for the whole discussion is dissatisfaction. When customers are discontented with a firm's products, they may stop buying these products, and when members of an organization are disappointed, they may leave (exit) the organization. An alternative way of handling the situation is using voice, that is, making complaints to the firm or the organization. Besides exit and voice, Hirschman introduces a third concept: loyalty. The last-mentioned concept is not so well defined, but it is said to refer to a "special attachment to an organization"—which apparently implies "a less rational" but not "wholly irrational" relationship (Hirschman, 1970: 38, 77). It seems evident that loyalty makes exit less likely to occur, but the effects on voice are less clear. "As a rule," however, loyalty "activates voice," and the reason is that individuals who are attached to an organization also want it to do things properly and to do away with failings in the organization (Hirschman, 1970: 78). Conversely, due to this "special attachment," people may avoid criticizing the organization, if they believe that criticism does more harm than good.

Hirschman is interested in what makes people choose exit or choose voice and how the two are interrelated. Focusing on work organizations, there are certain things to notice. The exit option is indeed important for discontented individuals, but it is of limited value if they have few alternative job openings or other sources of income. Still, when exit is reasonably realistic, employees may use the threat of it as a lever to improve conditions. Above all, in small organizations it can be rather devastating for the employer if some individuals

quit, especially if they belong to a category of personnel with key job-specific skills. It is usually a much greater step for an employee to exit from a job than it is for a customer to stop buying products from a firm. Leaving a job often entails a big change in a person's life, and it is rather likely to be a definitive event. Once an individual has left the organization, it may be difficult or impossible for him or her to come back. This speaks for voice as a first option, at least if people see some possibility of accomplishing improvements. Even if voice is not an immediately successful strategy, there may still be a chance of future change for the better—and this needs to be weighed against the exit alternative.

Another issue to be considered is whether voice is an individual or a collective matter. Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard (1961) has provided an excellent analysis of the preconditions for the formation of a workers' collective. His study concentrates on the industrial proletariat, but similar developments may also occur among subordinate white-collar employees. Lysgaard focuses on the social elements and processes behind the transformation of individual workers into a more or less integrated social agent. In relation to an "insatiable" technical-economic system—that is, the firm—such a unit represents workers' entrenchment and defense mechanism.

The emergence of a workers' collective has to do with a number of circumstances and processes. Having fundamentally the same position in a hierarchical work organization appears to create identification, as it is easy to identify with people with whom one shares the basic conditions of life or work. This is not to deny that workers can be divided in several other ways (e.g., in terms of religion or ethnicity). Identification in turn promotes interaction, but—according to Lysgaard—the latter activity requires some degree of physical proximity between individuals. The development of the means of communication in recent decades has, of course, greatly changed the preconditions for interaction since Lysgaard wrote his book, but the basic reasoning may still be valid. Finally, being in the same situation and more or less constantly interacting with one another, workers are likely to develop similar interpretations and feelings regarding the problems they face and what can be done to solve them. On the basis of a common interpretation of the situation, they may begin to act collectively. Once established, the collective is held together by several social and psychological mechanisms. A whole ideology may emerge, providing a framework for the way individual workers define their situation.

Lysgaard does not take much notice of the union as a formal organization but emphasizes that it is different from a workers' collective. The two categories are analytically distinct, and the principal focus of Lysgaard's study is the processes behind the formation of the informal kind of unit. We should not take it for granted that collective action means union activity, although it is generally accurate to assume that "unions matter" (Yates, 1998). Often, in order for a workers' collective to become a stable social force that can stand up against a demanding employer, it needs some formal organization. A union is then the

most realistic option, as it offers the structure and stability required to counteract the power of the employer.

A situation in which individual workers interact directly—and without involving others—with management is characterized by Lysgaard as the technical-economic system's "ideal situation." The implication is that in terms of the issues dealt with, the individual workers are not backed up by the power of the collective. Grievances become a matter between management and the individual, and no one else has any say with respect to how they are handled. In contrast, when issues are channeled via the collective, following Lysgaard, we have the "ideal situation" for the workers' collective. The way problems are treated is then a concern for the collective, and it basically becomes impossible for individuals to work out their own settlements with employers or vice versa.

Many sociologists argue that contemporary advanced societies have gone through, or are going through, a process of individualization (e.g., Bauman, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). If this is correct, we should expect the technical-economic system—in Lysgaard's terminology—to achieve its "ideal situation" rather frequently. Moreover, today, the class dimension is often treated as irrelevant. It has, for example, been claimed that the working class no longer differs from the middle class, as it has adopted the middle class's individualistic values (Pakulski & Waters, 1996). We should not deny that the individualization thesis has some substance to it, but we must definitely be somewhat cautious with regard to our conclusions in this regard (Furåker, 2005). Many authors provide very little empirical evidence to substantiate their conclusions. Without going deeper into this issue here, I wish to emphasize that the question of whether, or to what extent, employment relations have become individualized is still in need of investigation.

This does not mean that no data exist in support of the individualization thesis. One important piece of information concerns the development of union density in various countries. In recent decades, there has undoubtedly been a significant decline in unionization levels across most of the Western world (Phelan, 2007; Visser, 2006). The implication is that increasingly large proportions of employees do not have access to the kind of collective power that trade unions can represent. Instead they are left with having to make individual agreements with employers. Yet, there are still strong unions, not least in Sweden (for more details on Swedish unions and unionization patterns see, e.g., Kjellberg, 1998, 2009).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA, AND VARIABLES

This article studies the extent to which dissatisfied workers make their voices heard, and, if they do, in which forms they do it and how common various forms are. The article also aims to explore the question of whether willingness to switch to another workplace, loyalty to the employing organization, and other factors affect the way in which employees convey their discontent. Exit from the

workplace is normally an individual action, but what about voice? Treading in the footsteps of Lysgaard, a crucial question is to what extent voice is a collective action or simply an individual protest. The dataset to be used here provides information as to whether employees have brought up their complaints with managers, at staff meetings, with workmates, with union representatives, at union meetings, by writing petitions, by making lists of signatures and so forth, or by taking other kinds of action.

Empirically, the present article is based on a survey carried out by Statistics Sweden in the fall of 2006. A random sample was drawn from among participants in the regular labour force survey (LFS). Given this arrangement, it was possible to include LFS information in our dataset. The individuals selected were asked if they would be willing to fill out a questionnaire dealing with their work and labour market situation. A total of 2,584 individuals answered yes and thus received the survey. In all, 1,851 individuals, or 72% of those who had agreed to participate, actually filled out and returned the questionnaire to Statistics Sweden. It must be added, however, that 1,001 individuals did not agree to participate in the first place. Our controls with regard to the makeup of respondents do not indicate any very significant biases.

The main dependent variables are built on answers to the question of what respondents have done—during the last two years—in relation to inadequate working conditions. People were asked whether they had brought up issues (a) with managers; (b) at staff meetings; (c) with workmates; (d) with union representatives; (e) at union meetings; (f) by writing petitions, making lists of signatures, and the like; and (g) in other ways. Two other options were also offered: it was possible to reply that one had been passive and to reply that one had nothing to complain about. Respondents could mark all relevant alternatives and were not asked to rank them.

No data are available on exits in our survey—that would require a completely different research design—but there is an item on people's willingness to leave their employing organization. More specifically, respondents were asked whether or not they wanted to switch to another workplace/employer. They could then answer this question with "yes," "perhaps," or "no," and these answers have been used in the subsequent analyses. We can thus study whether, or to what extent, willingness to exit for another workplace/employer is linked to voice.

Furthermore, the survey provides data on organizational commitment, here taken to be synonymous with loyalty in Hirschman's terminology (see also Sverke & Hellgren, 2001). Organizational commitment is rather commonly measured as an index based on a series of questions (see Gallie et al., 1998). Three of these questions are included in our survey: the first question asks whether people are proud of the organization in which they work; the second enquires whether they would be willing to work extraordinarily hard to help the employer succeed; and the third asks whether they would prefer to stay with this employer rather than take a much better-paid job somewhere else. As the third item is clearly

correlated with willingness to leave the workplace/employer, only the two first items have been used here for the index. Thus, loyalty or organizational commitment is here based on two questions: whether people are proud of their employing organization and whether they would be willing to put extra effort into making it successful.

As our dataset contains some information on employees' fear of criticizing deficient working conditions, this dimension is also taken into account in the analysis. The key question is, then, whether individuals who hesitate to communicate criticism refrain from making use of different voice options. Respondents were asked whether they "often," "sometimes," "seldom," or "never" felt afraid to express their grievances; in addition to these four options, they could answer that they saw no failings to complain about.

In the search for determinants behind the choice of voice options, a large number of "objective" independent variables were run. On and off, the following nine appear in the tables below: sex, age, socioeconomic category, industry, sector, type of employment contract, usual weekly working hours, size of workplace, and union membership. To some degree, these independent variables were run for the purpose of control, but several of them are indeed relevant to the theoretical issues treated here.

If the advocates of the individualization thesis are correct, there should be no differences at all across socioeconomic categories. On the other hand, if Lysgaard's analysis is still relevant, we should expect manual workers to be more ready to use collective strategies and less inclined to use individual forms of action. Our data are not really sufficient to test this hypothesis, but they may provide some hints as to an answer. The role of unions will also be dealt with. Unions in Sweden are to a large extent class based. As a general rule, the three large organizations—the LO, TCO, and SACO—recruit manual workers, lower/middle-level white collar workers, and higher-level white collar workers respectively. Due to some minor differences in the quality of the survey data, I prefer the use of socioeconomic category instead of union affiliation, but the two variables are by and large interchangeable.

Another issue is whether people are unionized or not: being a union member may imply being supported by a strong organization. This may in turn affect people's propensity to do something about inadequate working conditions; it should at least be easier to contact union representatives. However, as pointed out above, the unionization rate is very high in Sweden, which means that union membership is not a very useful category for discriminating between workers. It is true that membership rates have declined during recent years (85% of all employees were unionized in 1993 compared to 77% in 2006) (Kjellberg, 2009), but the latter percentage is still at the top of the international scale. Nonmembers are often young people on temporary contracts and/or in part-time jobs. Actually, age, type of employment contract, and working hours may be more important than membership, and they are also included in the data analyses. The underlying

assumption is that employees who are less integrated into the workplace will be less inclined to use some of the voice options; above all, they can be expected to take up issues at staff meetings less often than others, and to involve union representatives less often.

RESULTS

In an examination of the survey data, the first step is to give a general overview of what respondents have done in relation to inadequate working conditions. Just under 13% did not see anything to complain about in the workplace and about the same proportion said they have been passive (data not shown). Rather few of those answering "no failings" reported being passive, so these two items evidently measure separable constructs. A large majority of people have things to complain about and we shall now concentrate on the action they have taken in regard to these. Table 1 provides information on the four most common ways of expressing discontent.

As shown in the first column of figures in Table 1, the alternative "spoken to manager" represents the highest proportion of responses; a clear majority of respondents have spoken to a manager. Somewhat fewer individuals have discussed the problem with workmates, and still fewer—but nevertheless clearly more than a third—have raised their voices at staff meetings. One out of 10 has brought up grievances with a union representative. In other words, it is relatively rare to call in the union. The remaining alternatives (see above) were marked by very few employees and will therefore not be treated further here.

The rest of Table 1 presents data on whether respondents have chosen other options as well, and the table should thus be read horizontally. Looking at the first row under the heading "Percentages of Employees Who Have Also Used the Other Main Options," we find that 59.2% of those who have spoken to management have also spoken to workmates, half have brought up issues at staff meetings, and 14.7% have contacted union representatives. As people could give multiple answers, the percentages here add up to more than 100%. The second, third, and fourth rows under this heading should be read in the same way. Hence, 75.9% of those who have spoken to workmates have also spoken to management, 56% have brought up issues at staff meetings, and 16% have contacted union representatives. Evidently, when they have complaints, people most frequently combine several kinds of action. Among those employees who have spoken to management, only 13% have done nothing else. These individuals can be said to represent what Lysgaard characterized as the technical-economic system's ideal situation. Complaints are to a large extent shared with others, which is a necessary but not sufficient step for collective action to come about. There is no information in the dataset directly corresponding to the ideal situation of the workers' collective, but we should observe that very few of those who have contacted union representatives have done nothing else.

Table 1. Worker Reactions to Inadequate Working Conditions

The Four Most Common Ways of Expressing Discontent	Percentage of Employees Who Have Used the Option Specified to the Left (Number given in parentheses)	Percentages of Employees Who Have Also Used the Other Main Options			
		Spoken to Manager	Spoken to Workmates	Brought Up Issue at Staff Meeting	Contacted Union Representative
Spoken to Manager	56.7 (1,050)	—	59.2	50.0	14.7
Spoken to Workmates	44.2 (819)	75.9	—	56.0	16.0
Brought Up Issue at Staff Meeting	36.9 (683)	77.0	67.2	—	16.0
Contacted Union Representative	10.0 (186)	82.8	70.4	58.6	—
Total	100 (1,851)	1,050	819	683	186

In order to study how various factors affect each of the options in Table 1, several binary logistic regressions were run. The dependent variables were then divided into two categories. Table 2 focuses on the steps taken within the formal structure of the employing organization. The first dependent variable captures whether employees have spoken to managers and the second whether they have brought up issues at staff meetings. Table 3 gives us the outcome on the remaining two main kinds of action. These are linked to workmates and unions respectively, the first representing an informal way of complaining and the second standing for a formal move outside the employing organization.

Table 2 presents the outcomes of the regressions on the first two dependent variables. The first of these concerns whether employees have put across their complaints to management. Without going into details on the variables controlled for but not shown in the table—industry, sector size of workplace, and usual weekly working hours—it may be pointed out that employees in health/social care as well as in education are particularly apt to speak to managers.

Among the results presented in Table 2, we see that the differences on sex and age cannot be verified statistically, although they are rather large. In contrast, socioeconomic category can clearly be seen to be a significant factor: in comparison with manual workers, the two categories of white-collar workers are both more inclined to speak to managers. It is also worth noting the outcome on type of employment contract: to have a temporary job means being less eager than others to speak with managers. This is probably a sign of a lower degree of workplace attachment and integration among temporary employees.

The independent variables discussed so far deal with objective circumstances, whereas the two variables at the end of the table refer to individuals' attitudes or feelings. People who are willing to switch to another workplace/employer do not differ clearly from those unwilling to do so, whereas those have answered "perhaps" are more inclined to talk to managers. A possible interpretation is that the latter hesitate about what to do and therefore try this voice option. Loyalty or commitment did not turn out to be significant, and it is accordingly excluded from this regression (and, by the way, from the next regression in Table 2 as well). Conversely, being afraid of criticizing unsatisfactory working conditions seems to be an important factor: respondents who have reported feeling troubled tend to be less likely to bring up complaints with management, although the coefficient for those who answered "yes, often" is not statistically confirmed (but it is very close to being so). Unsurprisingly, we find an extremely low odds ratio for those who have seen no faults in the workplace. It should be added that as many as about one-third of the respondents said that they often or sometimes felt afraid of openly articulating their disapproval.

On the variable regarding employees' tendency to bring up complaints at staff meetings (the column furthest to the right in Table 2), socioeconomic category is not included in the regression, as it could not be demonstrated to have any significant effects. The same holds for willingness to change to another

Table 2. Effects of Various Factors on Whether Workers Have
Spoken with Managers about Workplace Failings or
Brought Up Issue at Staff Meetings

Independent Variables	Spoken to Manager	Brought Up Issue at Staff Meeting
Sex		
Male	1.19	1.10
Female (ref.)	1	1
Age		
16–24	0.75	0.57
25–34	0.91	0.99
35–54 (ref.)	1	1
55–64	0.78	0.91
Socioeconomic category		
Manual worker (ref.)	1	
Lower/middle-level white-collar worker	1.80***	
Higher white-collar worker	1.75**	
Type of employment contract		
Permanent (ref.)	1	1
Temporary	0.59**	0.51**
Willingness to quit workplace/employer		
Yes	1.18	
Perhaps	1.40**	
No (ref.)	1	
Afraid of criticizing failings		
Yes, often	0.61	0.47**
Yes, sometimes	0.62**	0.65**
Sees no failings	0.01***	0.05***
No, seldom	0.85	0.86
No, never (ref.)	1	1
Nagelkerke R^2	0.22	0.18
Constant	3.28***	1.59
N	1,702	1,735

Note: *** = $p<.001$; ** = $p<0.01$; * = $p<0.05$. Includes controls for industry, sector, size of workplace, and usual weekly working hours; using binary logistic regressions and odds ratios.

Table 3. Factors Affecting Whether Workers Have Spoken with
Workmates or Contacted Union Representatives about Workplace Failings

Independent Variables	Spoken to Workmates	Contacted Union Representative
Sex		
Male	0.87	0.62*
Female (ref.)	1	1
Age		
16–24	0.93	0.41
25–34	1.00	0.69
35–54 (ref.)	1	1
55–64	0.89	1.19
Union membership		
Yes		3.49**
No (ref.)		1
Willingness to quit workplace/employer		
Yes	1.73***	2.65***
Perhaps	1.49**	1.66*
No (ref.)	1	1
Loyalty/organizational commitment		
High	0.59***	0.42**
Medium high	0.76	0.46**
Medium low	0.83	0.52**
Low (ref.)	1	1
Nagelkerke R^2	0.07	0.13
Constant	1.13	0.06***
N	1,751	1,750

Note: *** = $p<.001$; ** = $p<0.01$; * = $p<0.05$. Includes controls for industry, sector, size of workplace, and usual weekly working hours; using binary logistic regressions and odds ratios.

workplace/employer: people who want to quit—and people who perhaps want to quit—are no more likely than others to ventilate their grievances at staff meetings. Again, however, industry, sector, size of workplace, and usual weekly working hours are controlled for. I will not provide a detailed discussion of the results on these variables, but a few things may be mentioned. There are certain significant differences between industries, once more with the highest coefficients for health/social care and education. The underlying explanation is

probably that staff meetings are more or less frequent in various industries. Size of workplace is another factor that may be related to the frequency of staff meetings.

Neither the results on sex nor the results on age are statistically significant in this case, but the very low coefficient for the youngest employees is not far from it, and it should be noted that the youngest age category is relatively small. Actually, with regard to inclination to bring up complaints at staff meetings, only two statistically significant variables are visible in Table 2. First, we see a clear effect for kind of employment contract: temporary employees are less keen on speaking up at such meetings. Second, being afraid of criticizing failings is also a principal variable: individuals who are anxious in this respect are less inclined to use staff meetings to raise complaints.

Table 3 shows factors impacting on employees' propensity to speak with workmates and to contact union representatives about workplace failings, two types of action that are outside the formal structure of the employing organization. The variables are partly the same as in Table 2, but only partly. Socioeconomic category, sector, size of workplace, and fear of criticizing deficient working conditions are excluded, and the reason is of course that these variables do not matter very much. Fear of expressing discontent about workplace failings has been replaced by loyalty or organizational commitment. Industry, type of employment contract, and usual weekly working hours are controlled for, but the results are not displayed. Finally, in the analysis on employees' contacts with union representatives, union membership is included.

Starting with the dependent variable on whether employees have spoken to workmates about unsatisfactory working conditions, it should be mentioned that there are some significant industry differences (not shown). To proceed to the independent variables appearing in the table, we again find no clear sex or age differences. Willingness to switch to another workplace/employer is, on the other hand, an essential factor. Those who want to exit are more inclined to talk to workmates than those who answered "no" to this question, with respondents who checked "perhaps" in an in-between position. Moreover, loyalty or organizational commitment now turns out to have significant effects. Being highly loyal or committed is associated with a tendency to avoid speaking with workmates about workplace failings. The reason for this may be that the most committed employees consider it disloyal to speak about these failings to co-workers. There is also another possibility, namely, that these employees are simply less dissatisfied with working conditions.

On the last dependent variable—measuring employees' contacts with union representatives regarding inadequate working conditions—we meet a partly different picture. For the first time we run into a clear sex difference: male employees are less apt than female employees to contact union representatives. It can also be observed that the odds ratio for the youngest age category is very low but not statistically verified. Union membership has not been found to be a factor of

great consequence for any of the previous dependent variables, but now—of course—we find a strong effect.

The two final independent variables are also important. First, being interested in switching to another workplace/employer seems to increase the propensity to get in touch with union representatives. Second, loyalty or organizational commitment is a crucial factor as well: being highly committed tends to make people contact the union less frequently.

DISCUSSION

This article has demonstrated what employees in Sweden do when they consider their working conditions unsatisfactory. Clearly, the most common action is to speak to managers (57% have done so), followed by speaking to workmates (44%), bringing up issues at staff meetings (37%), and contacting union representatives (10%). These results are perhaps not much of a surprise. It is of course convenient to take up problems with people who have the power to do something about them. At the same time, a clear majority of those who have spoken with managers have also spoken with workmates. About half of them have brought up issues at staff meetings and some have contacted union representatives. No more than 13% have done nothing except contacting management. In other words, complaints are rather likely to be spread among the collective of workers. However, this is not the same as—and it does not have to lead to—taking collective action. Unfortunately we have insufficient information to explore that issue further, but at least we know that people do not very often call in the union. An explanation might be that such an act entails a consensus-breaking element, that is, a step implying that issues cannot be resolved without the intervention of a third party.

Nevertheless, unions may play a significant role as a background force. Sometimes a more or less hidden threat of action may be sufficient to make managers improve working conditions. For a long time, trade unions in Sweden have been strong both nationally and in workplaces. Other data in our survey indicate that a large majority of employees consider unions important for obtaining good deals with employers (Bengtsson & Berglund, forthcoming; Furåker & Berglund, 2003).

Socioeconomic category plays a significant role with regard to one of the dependent variables in my analysis: speaking with managers. It is more common for white-collar workers than for blue-collar workers to do this. The same pattern is revealed with respect to those who have done nothing but speak to managers. These results can be interpreted as an expression of more individualistic leanings among white-collar workers. In consequence, the assumption in some of the sociological literature that class does not matter any more (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Pakulski & Waters, 1996) appears to be too hastily

arrived at. On the other hand, socioeconomic category is not very important as regards the other dependent variables under examination.

According to Hirschman, discontented individuals have two main options: to leave the organization or raise their voices against its shortcomings. In this study, we have no information on exits from the workplace but only information on willingness to exit. Unsurprisingly, willingness to leave for another workplace/ employer is strongly associated with discontent, and it is also associated with a greater tendency to speak with workmates and to contact union representatives. On the option of speaking to managers, there are some interesting results. Respondents who are clearly positive about switching to another workplace/employer do not differ significantly from those answering in the negative, whereas people answering "perhaps" are more inclined to speak to managers. It thus seems that a degree of uncertainty can trigger this kind of action.

Hirschman's analysis entails the assumption that loyalty can be an intervening factor, making people either bring up complaints or avoid being critical, depending on how they look at the consequences for the organization. I have used a simple index on organizational commitment as an indicator of loyalty, exploring its role in relation to the voice options in focus. Strong loyalty or organizational commitment appears to decrease people's inclination to speak to workmates about workplace failings and to take up problems with union representatives. It is thus the propensity to avoid criticism that seems to be crucial, and I cannot discover any sign pointing in the opposite direction, that is, that loyal employees will be especially eager to voice their complaints. There are no significant effects of loyalty/organizational commitment on respondents' readiness to speak to managers or to bring up issues at staff meetings.

In the latter two cases, another factor turns out to be important instead: fear of criticizing unsatisfactory working conditions. People who worry about demonstrating their disapproval are less ready to raise complaints with managers and at staff meetings. However, we should note that fear of criticizing inadequate working conditions does not have any clear impact on respondents' tendency to talk with workmates—probably there are often at least some people or some person with whom individuals can speak familiarly—or to contact union representatives.

CONCLUSIONS

What practical conclusions can be drawn from this study? To some extent, the results point in different directions. One the one hand, most employees in Sweden do take some kind of action when facing inadequate conditions at the workplace. The most common thing is to speak with managers, and as a rule this is combined with other measures. On the other hand, about one-third of the respondents say they are often or sometimes afraid of criticizing workplace failings. Are these divergent patterns indicative of positive workplace conditions

or not? It is hard to give an unambiguous answer to this question. Obviously most people go ahead and take action in connection with grievances, but the numbers reporting fear of raising their voices is noteworthy in a country with such a high degree of unionization as Sweden.

Employees' worries about criticizing unsatisfactory working conditions must be considered an important issue in a democratic and freedom-of-speech perspective. The whole issue poses a critical challenge to the unions. Sweden has a law on codetermination, aimed at employee participation in employer decision making. This law was enacted in 1976, and since then it has been modified a number of times. The right to participate in decision making is mainly confined to employee representatives, that is, to the established unions. Employers are obliged to inform the unions and to initiate negotiations with them before deciding on any major change. One problem is, of course, that the processes of codetermination may not involve rank-and-file workers very much. Another question is whether or how codetermination has changed over the years, especially in workplaces where the unions have been weakened. For these and various other reasons, it seems to be about time to take a look at the way the law works today.

We have also seen that temporary workers are less inclined to speak to managers and to bring up issues at staff meetings. This finding is not surprising, because these workers are often new arrivals. For some, the job is just a short-term undertaking, and they will soon leave it for another job or other activities. Consequently, there is no reason for them to worry greatly about inadequate working conditions. Those who stay on need some time to become socially integrated. How long this integration process will be has to do with the attention paid to it by managers, other employees, and unions. All these actors have good reasons to contribute to making the process as short as possible—with the help of introductory programs and the like. The proportion of temporary employees has increased in Sweden during the last two decades—particularly among the youngest workers—and their situation needs to be examined more closely. One should perhaps not express preconceived opinions about such an examination, but the outcome would presumably encourage unions and some political parties to call for improvements in the law on fixed-term contracts.

A little more than one-third of employees brought up complaints at staff meetings. There is a great deal of variation across industries, which is most likely partly due to the frequency of such meetings. It may be more or less easy to get employees together on a regular basis, but it is vital for them to have this opportunity of discussing problems and conveying complaints. Accordingly, a demand should be made for regular staff meetings to be organized in all workplaces where this is possible and convenient. The frequency with which gatherings can take place must of course be decided in each workplace, but it is crucial that the intervals in between meetings should not be too long. A prerequisite for such meetings to function properly is a social climate that allows

people to voice their complaints. Clearly, unions may have a significant role in relation to the organization of staff meetings.

Speaking with workmates is undeniably a significant voice option. Actually, it is the second most common way of expressing criticism. This is the informal option, and it is important that all employees in a workplace feel that they can bring up various issues with colleagues. A positive social atmosphere cannot be ordered either from above or from below, but managers, the already employed, and unions can do a great deal to avoid some workers becoming isolated and excluded from normal social interaction in the workplace.

Finally, contacting union representatives is normally not the first step taken when working conditions are inadequate; if it is the first step taken, management may consider it a hostile action. Therefore it is not surprising that this measure is the least common of the top four ways of expressing discontent. It is also a fact that stronger loyalty or organizational commitment means a lower inclination to contact union representatives. Still, this voice option is indeed essential for workers, as they are often unable to do much as individual actors. In the struggle for improvements, support from an organized, collective force can be decisive. We might even say that without backing from such a force, individual workers are time and again completely lost.

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