

THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT & MARKETING
DEPARTMENTAL RESEARCH SEMINAR

When Upward Voicing Becomes Upward Nagging

By

Prof. Xu Huang

Date: Monday, 30 September 2013

Time: 2:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Venue: M802

All interested are welcome

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Abstract

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Prior conceptual and empirical studies have generally assumed a linear relationship between employees' upward voice and managers' attention towards the voice (e.g, Burris, 2012; Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Joshi, 2010). We contend that such an assumption may not only misguide the voicing strategies for practitioners, but also impede a deeper theoretical understanding of why voice behaviors may sometimes receive managers' positive reactions (Burris, 2012; Whiting, Podsakoff, & Pierce, 2008), negative reactions (Burris, 2012; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001), or no reactions (VanDyne & LePine, 1998). Therefore, we theorize a backfire effect of upward voicing, and propose an invert U-shaped relationship between the frequency of upward voicing and managers' attention to subordinates' voice. Specifically, we argue that the optimal influence of upward voicing on managers' attention to the issues is when the rate of voicing is at its modest level. Too infrequent upward voicing may not be sufficient to activate managerial attention. However, too frequent upward voicing will become upward "nagging", which may induce managers' defensive inattention towards the issues of the voice. We also expected that this back-fire effect would be attenuated by a high quality exchange (LMX) between supervisors and subordinates. We tested these ideas using two independent time-lagged samples (Study 1: 232 supervisor-subordinate dyads; Study 2: 161 supervisor-subordinate dyads). The results have generally supported our key propositions.