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Alisher Tohirovich Dedahanov Do Hyung Lee Jaehoon Rhee Junghyun Yoon

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Entrepreneur's paternalistic leadership style and creativity

The mediating role of employee voice

Alisher Tohirovich Dedahanov

School of Business, Yeungnam University, Gyeongsan, Republic of Korea

Do Hyung Lee

*School of General Education, Yeungnam University,
Gyeongsan, Republic of Korea*

Jaehoon Rhee

*Yeungnam University Entrepreneurship Center,
Gyeongsan, Republic of Korea, and*

Junghyun Yoon

*POSTECH Entrepreneurship Center,
Pohang University of Science and Technology, Pohang, Republic of Korea*

Abstract

Purpose – Despite the number of studies on employee voice much remains unknown regarding the mediating role of employee voice in the link between entrepreneur's paternalistic leadership style and creativity. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of authoritarian, benevolent and moral leadership on creativity via employee voice.

Design/methodology/approach – The study utilized structured equation modeling to evaluate the data from 387 highly skilled employees in Republic of Korea.

Findings – The findings suggested that authoritarian leadership style reduces employee voice which in turn impacts on creativity and moral leadership facilitates creativity via employee voice.

Originality/value – The study is the first to discover the mediating role of employee voice on the association between authoritarian, moral leadership and creativity.

Keywords Creativity, Employee voice, Authoritarian leadership, Benevolent leadership, Moral leadership

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Voice is defined as the “discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, concerns, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve organizational or unit functioning” (Morrison, 2011, p. 375). Individuals through voice contribute to the decision-making process with their ideas and opinions (Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Moreover, voice helps the organization make improvements and correct existing problems (Hirschman, 1970), and it is also important for creativity (Deci and Ryan, 1987) and continuous innovation (Howard, 1995). Because employee voice benefits the organization by enhancing innovation and creativity, we believe that investigating the factors that are related to voice remains an important issue in business organizations.



As leaders, entrepreneurs make a critical contribution to facilitating employee voice. In particular, their paternalistic leadership style, such as authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership and moral leadership, is significantly associated with employee voice (Zhang *et al.*, 2015; Chan, 2014). Employees assess the behaviors of their superiors with regard to voice and act accordingly. According to the perspectives of social exchange theory, individuals in an exchange relationship voluntarily provide favors to other parties who provide benefits to them (Blau, 1964). Therefore, we believe that, when entrepreneurs behave in a commending fashion and force employees to obey their instructions completely, individuals become reluctant to favor their organization with recommendations that will affect the organization. By contrast, when entrepreneurs express their concerns for the everyday lives of their employees and show self-discipline and a lack of selfishness by treating employees fairly, employees tend to reciprocate their superiors' favor by suggesting ideas to improve work in the organization. Moreover, paternalistic leadership behavior is also significantly related to the creativity of employees (Gu *et al.*, 2015). We believe that this relationship between the entrepreneur's paternalistic leadership behavior and creativity is mediated by employee voice. Employee voice that is fostered by leadership behavior serves as a first step toward creativity because experiencing voice on work-related issues produces the perception that the opinions of individuals are listened to and valued by the management of the organization. Over time, with this perception, individuals go beyond making recommendations by seeking new technologies, processes, products and services.

Despite the significant role of voice in mediating the associations between the entrepreneur's leadership behavior and creativity, very little is known about the mediating role of voice in the link between entrepreneurs' paternalistic leadership style, such as authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership and moral leadership, and creativity. For example, several researchers (Chan, 2014; Zhang *et al.*, 2015) have examined the associations between authoritarian, benevolent and moral leadership styles and voice behavior. Although these authors examined the association between paternalistic leadership style and voice, they did not investigate the creativity resulting from voice, and therefore, they did not measure the mediating role of voice in the relationship between leadership style and creativity. Ng and Feldman (2012) investigated the relationship between voice behavior and creativity. Although Ng and Feldman included creativity in their model, they did not examine the leadership style that contributes to employee voice; therefore, these authors also did not investigate the mediating role of voice in the association between leadership style and creativity. Gu *et al.* (2015) studied the associations between paternalistic leadership style and employee creativity; however, these authors did not include employee voice in their research model. Thus, these authors also did not study the influence of paternalistic leadership style on creativity via voice.

Therefore, the study aims to address the existing gaps in the voice literature by examining the associations between the mediating role of voice in the link between the entrepreneur's paternalistic leadership style, such as authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership and moral leadership, and creativity.

Examining the mediating role of voice in the link between entrepreneurs' leadership style and creativity enables us to have deeper knowledge on the form of leadership style of entrepreneurs that hinders or facilitates creativity via voice. With this knowledge, entrepreneurs will be able to control their leadership style to facilitate creativity in the organization.

Literature review

Employee voice

Van Dyne *et al.* (1995) studied extra-role behavior and suggested a two-dimensional typology. One dimension of the typology compares promotive (encouraging something to occur) and prohibitive behavior (encouraging something to cease). The other dimension of the typology compares affiliative (interpersonal behavior that encourages cooperation and relationships) and challenging behavior (change-oriented behavior that emphasizes ideas and issues). Van Dyne *et al.* compared several types of extra-role behaviors by using this typology. Because voice is perceived as a significant part of extra-role behavior (Mayer *et al.*, 2009) and refers to a “nonrequired behavior that emphasizes expression of constructive challenge with an intent to improve rather than merely criticize” (Van Dyne and LePine, 1998, p. 109), it is categorized in the promotive-challenging typology of Van Dyne *et al.* (1995). In line with previous research on employee voice (LePine and Van Dyne, 1998, 2001; Detert and Burris, 2007; Van Dyne *et al.*, 1995; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008), in our study, voice refers to employees’ behavior in expressing opinions with constructive suggestions and ideas that aim to improve organizational and unit functions.

Voice is different from whistle-blowing (Miceli and Near, 1992). Whistle-blowing refers to ceasing some activity, whereas constructive behavior such as voice refers to improving some activity (LePine and Van Dyne, 1998). Moreover, voice differs from expressing dissent and complaining because dissent reflects an objection on moral and conscientious principles and does not include suggestions on how to do something more effectively (Graham, 1986) and complaining focuses on expressing dissatisfaction rather than suggestions for change (Kowalski, 1996).

Voice benefits both employees and employers; therefore, Strauss (2006) indicated that voice is a “win-win solution” that fulfills the need of employees and helps organizations to attain their objectives. Employee voice can be delivered through written forms, regular meetings between management and individuals, suggestion schemes, electronic communication and briefing groups (Bryson, 2004).

There are two main streams of research on employee voice. One stream of researchers investigated the manager’s behavior in generating voice (Ashford *et al.*, 2009; Detert and Burris, 2007; Detert and Trevino, 2010; Edmondson, 2003; Saunders *et al.*, 1992). The other stream of researchers examined the internal motivational states of employees that increase their willingness to speak up (Frese and Fay, 2001; Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008; Venkataramani and Tangirala, 2010). One perspective that emphasized the manager’s behavior in contributing to voice examined leader openness (Saunders *et al.*, 1992; Detert and Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 2003), ethical and transformational leadership (Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009; Detert and Burris, 2007), the leader-member exchange (Burris *et al.*, 2008) and paternalistic leadership (Chan, 2014) as predictors of speaking up. The other perspective that studied the association between individuals’ personal behavior and voice examined self-efficacy (Axtell *et al.*, 2000), role perceptions (Parker *et al.*, 1997), personal characteristics (Avery, 2003) and control perceptions (Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008) as the antecedents of voice.

Hypotheses

Management research has turned its attention to social exchange theory to explain workplace relationships (Shore *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, we invoke social exchange theory to explain the relationship between the entrepreneur’s leadership style and voice.

This theory is based on the norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). According to the perspectives of this theory, individuals in an exchange relationship voluntarily provide favors to other parties who provide benefits to them (Blau, 1964). In other words, individuals reciprocate by helping those who help them (Gouldner, 1960). Moreover, in a social exchange, one party provides benefits to another, and although there is anticipation of reciprocation, another party is not required to return a social obligation (Nakonezny and Denton, 2008). Blau (1964) clearly distinguished between economic and social exchanges, stating that “only social exchange tends to engender feelings of personal obligations, gratitude, and trust; purely economic exchange as such does not” (p. 94).

Social exchange in the workplace occur when management “take care of employees,” which triggers favorable consequences (Cropanzo and Mitchell, 2005). That is, the favorable behavior of employers to employees produces a positive employee attitude and effective work behavior (Cropanzo and Mitchell, 2005).

An authoritarian style of leadership refers to the behavior of a leader who exercises absolute power of authority over subordinates and who requires unquestionable obedience and fulfillment of tasks (Farh and Cheng, 2000). When individuals follow strict guidelines in their workplace and believe that their superior wants them to obey instructions completely, they will have a lower level of autonomy. Consequently, with reduced autonomy, individuals cannot freely choose their work behavior (Brockner *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, authoritarian leaders tend to exercise strict discipline over subordinates and scold and punish them if employees do not follow the superiors’ rules (Cheng *et al.*, 2000). We believe that individuals who experience this form of unpleasant behavior from superiors become reluctant to reciprocate their organization by providing constructive suggestions and recommendations that will affect the organization due to the belief that authoritarian leaders punish subordinates and do not help them by providing freedom in their work, thinking and behavior.

Benevolence behavior is described as an approach in which leaders show individualized concern for the needs and familial well-being of subordinates (Farh and Cheng, 2000). Other than work-related issues, a leader shows that he or she cares about subordinates’ personal and family issues, expresses kind concern for employees’ comfort, tries to understand when employees do not perform well and helps employees when they are in emergence (Cheng *et al.*, 2000), which results in subordinates’ profound gratitude and obligation to reciprocate in similar manner if given the chance (Tsui and Farh, 1997). In other words, when benevolent leaders devote their energy to taking care of their subordinates, employees feel that they are obligated to their leaders and try to reciprocate by giving constructive suggestions to improve their work and by developing recommendations concerning work-related issues. Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) also stated that an environment of benevolent leadership encourages employees to speak up and express their concerns, thoughts and opinions regarding work improvement.

Moral leadership is a type of behavior in which the leader shows self-discipline, a lack of selfishness and superior personal virtue (Farh and Cheng, 2000). In this leadership style, the leader does not gain special privileges due to authority; subordinates are treated in accordance with their virtue, and the leader’s morality and integrity are respected, with subordinates attempting to imitate these qualities (Yang, 1957). Research on paternalistic leadership suggests that moral leadership is strongly related to positive employee attitudes and behavior (Farh *et al.*, 2006). Moral leadership has an effect on employees’ trust in the leader (Li *et al.*, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2012). In the moral leadership style, leaders demonstrate high standards of trustworthiness and

treat employees with respect, kindness and fairness (Farh *et al.*, 2008). When leaders show high integrity and selflessness, subordinates develop high-quality exchange relationships (Chen and Farh, 2009) and are encouraged to reciprocate with their suggestions and recommendations to improve the quality of their work by speaking up. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1. The entrepreneur's authoritarian leadership is negatively associated with employee voice.
- H2. The entrepreneur's benevolent leadership is positively associated with employee voice.
- H3. The entrepreneur's moral leadership is positively associated with employee voice.

Employee creativity is associated with the promotion, generation and implementation of useful and novel ideas about procedures, practices, products and services (Zhou, 2003). Employees are perceived as the main source of creativity and innovation (Huang *et al.*, 2005). Proactive employees who initiate change and attempt to influence the environment are more likely to be creative (Bateman and Crant, 1993). According to Deci and Ryan (1987), when individuals are encouraged to voice concerns, they are more likely to show interest in their work and become creative. Hence, we believe that the first step toward creativity starts with voice by making recommendations concerning issues that affect the work group and communicating opinions about work-related issues. When individuals believe that recommendations and suggestions are listened to and are taken into account by their leaders, they are more likely to believe that their voice is not wasted and has an impact on the environment. With this belief, individuals tend to go further by devising with new and practical ideas to improve performance and by seeking new technologies, processes, techniques and/or product ideas. In other words, individuals do not become creative overnight, first, they attempt to communicate their opinions on work-related issues, and when they feel that they are successful with this attempt, they are more likely to go beyond communicating their opinions on work-related issues by devising with creative solutions to problems and having new innovating ideas. Previous scholars have also reported a significant relationship between voice and creativity (Ng and Feldman, 2012). Thus, we believe that employee voice plays a critical role in enhancing creativity and propose the following hypothesis:

- H4. Employee voice is positively associated with creativity.

Previous research reported that leadership behavior influences employee creativity (Bosiok and Serbia, 2013; Gu *et al.*, 2015). We believe that the relationship between leadership behavior and employee creativity is mediated by employee voice. In other words, employees assess the behavior of their leaders before voicing. Depending on the behavior of their leaders, employees decide to make recommendations on work-related issues, and their decision on making improvement-oriented suggestions and recommendations serves as the groundwork for their further extra-role behavior such as creativity. When the leader is concerned with the needs and feelings of employees, there will be an increase in employees' initiative at work, allowing employees to be more creative (Cummings and Oldham, 1997). By contrast, when superiors do not involve employees in decision making, pressure employees to think and behave in certain ways and closely monitor and control employee behavior, the creative performance of individuals is more likely to decrease (Deci *et al.*, 1989; Deci and Ryan, 1987) because individuals do not experience what it

is to express their opinions on work-related issues. Thus, we suggest the following hypotheses (Figure 1):

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- H5. Employee voice mediates the relationship between the entrepreneur's authoritarian leadership and creativity.
- H6. Employee voice mediates the relationship between the entrepreneur's benevolent leadership and creativity.
- H7. Employee voice mediates the relationship between the entrepreneur's moral leadership and creativity.

Method

We collected data from entrepreneurs and their highly skilled full-time employees working in small and medium manufacturing companies in the Republic of Korea. The researchers personally contacted the entrepreneurs and invited them to participate in the survey, explaining the aim of the research and the data collection procedures.

Data collection was organized in two phases. First, the researchers randomly selected employees and asked the management of the companies to invite them to participate in the survey. The surveys for employees were conducted in small group sessions in each organization. On the cover letter, the researchers gave written and verbal assurances of the confidentiality of responses. The employees answered questions pertaining to authoritarian leadership, moral leadership and benevolent leadership, in addition to demographic data. Each survey form was coded with a researcher-assigned identification number to match the responses of employees to the evaluations of their leader. The second phase of data collection consisted of surveying the respondents' leaders (entrepreneurs). The entrepreneurs were asked to rate the voice and creativity of the employees who participated in the survey. Of the participants, 96 were entrepreneurs and 443 subordinates. Of the 443 employee-leader dyads, 56 sets of questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to missing data; thus, there were 387 responses in total. These dyads involved 96 entrepreneurs, for an average of 4.03 employees (33.9 percent female and 66.1 percent male) per entrepreneur. With respect to age, 23.7 percent were between 25 and 35 years, 44.8 percent were between 36 and 45 years, 20 percent were between 46 and 55 years, and 11.5 percent were between 56 and 65 years.

Common method bias test

To assess the potential influence of common method bias, we used Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). According to the principles of this technique, either a single factor will emerge from the factor analysis or general factors will account for the majority of the covariance among the measures if there is common method bias. No single factor emerged

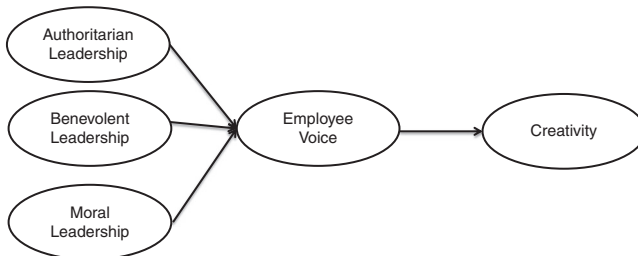


Figure 1.
Hypothesized
research model

in the results, and there was no general factor that accounted for the majority of the variance. The results indicate that unrotated factor analysis extracted five factors that accounted for 73.547 percent of the total variance. The largest factor explained 32.138 percent of the variance. These findings demonstrate that common method bias is not likely to be a significant problem in this study. Moreover, we tested common method bias with a single-factor measurement model by combining all items into a single factor (Dedahanov and Rhee, 2015; Rhee *et al.*, 2014). The findings indicated a poor model fit: comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.326; Tucker Lewis index (TLI) = 0.294; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.223; root mean square residual = 0.444; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.171. These findings also demonstrate that common method bias is not likely to be a significant issue in our study.

Measures

Because the original measures used in this study were developed for use in an English-language context, professional translators translated the items into the Korean language. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, we followed Brislin's (1993) recommendation by back translating the measures into English. Moreover, to ensure the semantic equivalence and the appropriateness of the scales, the review process was repeated until bilingual experts found no further inaccuracies in the translations (Schwab, 2005). In our study, all scale items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Leadership style

The items that we used to measure authoritarian leadership, moral leadership and benevolent leadership were taken from the study by Cheng *et al.* (2004). In the questionnaire form, we referred to entrepreneurs as leaders and explained it to the participants of the survey. Authoritarian leadership (e.g. "My leader asks me to obey his/her instructions completely") was measured using nine items; benevolent leadership (e.g. "My leader devotes all his/her energy to taking care of me") was evaluated by using 11 items; and moral leadership (e.g. "My leader employs people according to their virtues and does not envy others' abilities and virtues") was assessed with eight items. The scales' α reliability values in this study were 0.965, 0.872 and 0.855, respectively.

Voice

To measure employee voice, six items were adapted from LePine and Van Dyne (1998). Example items from this scale include "This employee develops and makes recommendations concerning issues that affect this work group," "This employee speaks up and encourages others in this group to become involved in issues that affect the group" and "This employee communicates his/her opinions about work-related issues to others in this group even if his/her opinion is different and others in the group disagree with him/her." Cronbach's α coefficient for this scale was 0.946.

Creativity

Creativity was measured using 13 items from Zhou and George (2001). Example items from this scale include "This employee suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives," "This employee exhibits creativity on the job when given the opportunity to do so" and "This employee often has new and innovative ideas." Cronbach's α reliability in this study was 0.864.

Control variables

We controlled for the age, gender (0 = female; 1 = male) and organizational tenure (1 = 5 years or less; 2 = 6-10 years; 3 = 11-15 years; 4 = 16-20 years; 5 = more than 20 years) of the respondents due to their potential influence on voice (Chan, 2014).

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Results

Previous studies (MacCallum, 1986; Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996) recommended examining the measurement model before the construction of a structural model. Thus, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the measurement model. Common goodness of fit measures such as the ratio of the χ^2 statistics to the degrees of freedom, the CFI, the GFI, the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), the normed fit index (NFI) and the RMSEA (Kline, 2010) were utilized to evaluate the measurement model. A reasonable model fit is indicated when the values of the CFI, GFI, AGFI (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and the NFI (Bentler and Bonnet, 1980) exceed 0.90 and the value of the RMSEA is less than 0.60 (Hu and Bentler, 1999). All goodness-of-fit measures demonstrated a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.560$; CFI = 0.970; GFI = 0.916; AGFI = 0.912; NFI = 0.968; RMSEA = 0.038). Construct validity is assessed by evaluating convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity refers to the degree to which the items of the constructs that are supposed to be related are in fact related (Wang *et al.*, 2014). We examined the convergent validity by evaluating the composite reliability and the factor loadings, which should be greater than 0.80 and 0.60, respectively (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The results indicate that the composite reliabilities exceeded 0.80 and all factor loadings exceeded 0.60. Thus, the measures demonstrate convergent validity. Discriminant validity refers to the degree to which the measures of different latent constructs are distinct from those of other constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Discriminant validity can be demonstrated when the value of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than 0.05 and the squared correlation between the same construct and other constructs. In our study, the AVEs exceeded both the threshold (Hair *et al.*, 2010) and the squared correlations between the construct and the other constructs in the CFA model. Hence, our model meets the criteria of discriminant validity.

Table I demonstrates the standard deviations, means, AVEs and correlations among the constructs. The findings indicate that employee voice is positively correlated with the benevolent ($r = 0.102, p < 0.05$) and moral ($r = 0.468, p < 0.01$) leadership styles and creativity ($r = 0.279, p < 0.01$) and negatively correlated with the authoritarian leadership style ($r = -0.375, p < 0.01$).

We conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) procedures with minimum likelihood estimation to assess the validity of the hypotheses. The structural model analysis suggests a good fit, based on the following GFIs: $\chi^2/df = 1.562$; CFI = 0.966; GFI = 0.913; AGFI = 0.910; NFI = 0.964; and RMSEA = 0.038 (Table II).

Variables	Mean	SD	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1 Authoritarian leadership	3.2969	1.2432	0.751	1				
2 Benevolent leadership	3.0166	1.1424	0.623	-0.392**	1			
3 Moral leadership	3.1820	1.2165	0.728	-0.265**	0.167**	1		
4 Employee voice	3.0786	1.2568	0.746	-0.375**	0.102*	0.468**	1	
5 Creativity	3.0267	1.1561	0.692	-0.366**	0.157**	0.319**	0.279**	1

Notes: AVE, average variance extracted. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table I.
Means, standard deviations, AVEs and correlations among the study variables

Table II.
Standardized
structural estimates
from the
structural model

Path	Standardized coefficient	t-Value
<i>Direct effects</i>		
Authoritarian leadership → employee voice	-0.365	-6.187*
Benevolent leadership → employee voice	-0.125	0.031
Moral leadership → employee voice	0.441	8.635*
Employee voice → creativity	0.294	5.953*
Age → employee voice	-0.058	0.347
Gender → employee voice	0.085	0.482
Tenure → employee voice	0.067	0.285
<i>Indirect effects</i>		
Authoritarian leadership → employee voice → creativity	-0.093*	
Benevolent leadership → employee voice → creativity	0.001	
Moral leadership → employee voice → creativity	0.127*	
Note: * $p < 0.01$		

The results from the SEM analysis suggest that authoritarian leadership ($\beta = -0.365$; $p < 0.01$) is negatively and significantly associated with voice whereas moral leadership ($\beta = 0.441$, $p < 0.01$) is positively related to voice. Thus, *H1* and *H3* are supported. In *H2*, we hypothesize that benevolent leadership has a positive relationship with voice. Contrary to our expectation, the findings reveal an insignificant association between benevolent leadership ($\beta = -0.125$, $p > 0.05$) and voice. Therefore, *H2* is not supported. Moreover, the findings show that employee voice is positively and significantly associated with creativity ($\beta = 0.294$, $p < 0.01$). Hence, *H4* is supported.

The results from the bootstrapping analysis indicate that voice mediates the relationship between the authoritarian ($\beta = -0.093$, $p < 0.01$) and moral ($\beta = 0.127$, $p < 0.01$) leadership styles and creativity. Hence, *H5* and *H7* are supported. Meanwhile, the findings demonstrate that voice does not mediate the associations between benevolent leadership and creativity ($\beta = 0.001$, $p > 0.05$). Thus, *H6* is not supported. Moreover, according to the results, the control variables such as gender ($\beta = 0.085$, $p > 0.05$), age ($\beta = -0.058$, $p > 0.05$) and organizational tenure ($\beta = 0.067$, $p > 0.05$) of respondents do not influence their decision to voice their opinions.

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the mediating role of voice in the relationship between the authoritarian, benevolent, and moral leadership styles and employee creativity. The findings indicate that authoritarian leadership is negatively associated with employee voice. In other words, when leaders ask employees to obey their instructions completely and punish them for not following their rules in accomplishing the tasks, employees become reluctant to communicate their opinions about work-related issues to others. Moreover, the results from the empirical analysis reveal that moral leadership is positively related to employee voice. That is, when leaders employ people according to their virtues, do not envy others' abilities, do not use their authority to seek special privileges for themselves and do not take advantage of employees for personal gain, employees are more likely to develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect their work group or organization and intend to speak up with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures. Our findings are consistent with the study by [Chan \(2014\)](#), who reported a negative association between authoritarian leadership and

voice and a positive relationship between moral leadership and voice. Meanwhile, the results suggest that benevolent leadership is not significantly related to voice. In other words, being concerned with the everyday lives of employees and devoting energy to take care of them do not influence employees' decision to voice their concerns on work-related issues. This insignificant relationship can be explained as follows.

Typically, individuals distinguish the difference between work-related relationships and personal relationships. The authoritarian and moral leadership styles are closely related to work relations, whereas the benevolent leadership measurement items measure the personal relations of leaders with employees. Because voice is associated with expressing opinions on work-related issues, leadership behaviors that are associated with work-related relations and issues may have a significant link with voice and leadership behavior that is not related to work-related issues may not have a significant relationship with voice. Moreover, results demonstrate that voice has a positive relationship with creativity. More specifically, individuals in organizations become more creative by seeking new technologies, processes, techniques or product ideas when they feel that they are able to express their work-related concerns. This finding is in line with that of Deci and Ryan (1987), who found that encouraging individuals to voice their concerns lead to creativity. Further, the results from the bootstrapping analysis show that voice mediates the link between authoritarian leadership, moral leadership and creativity. In other words, when superiors treat employees fairly, do not take credit for employees' achievements and contributions for themselves and do not act as a commending fashion, employees tend to reciprocate these behaviors of their superiors by voicing their ideas to improve the work. Typically, experiencing voice provides the perception that the ideas and opinions of employees are valued by the management of the organization, and with this perception, individuals tend to go beyond voicing by seeking new technologies, processes, products and services.

Theoretical implications

This study extends the voice literature by examining the mediating role of employee voice in the link between the entrepreneur's paternalistic leadership style and employee creativity.

Despite the number of studies on employee voice and paternalistic leadership, previous studies (Chan, 2014; Zhang *et al.*, 2015) have investigated the link between a paternalistic leadership style and employee voice, the associations between employee voice and creativity (Ng and Feldman, 2012) and the relationship between a paternalistic leadership style and creativity (Gu *et al.*, 2015) by overlooking the mediating role of voice in the link between a paternalistic leadership style and creativity. Hence, very little has been known about the mediating role of employee voice in this dynamic. Therefore, our study addressed these gaps and contributed to the voice literature by providing empirical evidence on the mediating role of employee voice in the relationship between the entrepreneur's paternalistic leadership style, such as authoritarian, moral leadership and employee creativity.

Practical implications

Our study provided practical implications for entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that an authoritarian leadership style is negatively associated with employee voice and mitigates employee creativity via employee voice. To encourage employee voice and creativity, entrepreneurs should avoid an authoritarian leadership style. Leaders can avoid an authoritarian leadership style by refraining from autocratic decision making

and by asking individuals for their ideas and opinions to enhance their sense of importance and participation (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the results reveal that moral leadership facilitates employee voice, which, in turn, enhances employee creativity. Therefore, we suggest that entrepreneurs demonstrate personal integrity (Tang and Liu, 2012), treat individuals fairly and use their authorized power in the best interests of their employees. Additionally, we posit that entrepreneurs can act as moral leaders by demonstrating that they are open to receiving information and by providing constructive feedback (Chan, 2014). Further, our study recommends that entrepreneurs facilitate employee voice by sharing information with individuals and by establishing an open communication channel to hold open discussions about specific tasks (Chan, 2014). Furthermore, we suggest that entrepreneurs participate in moral leadership programs and training (Gu *et al.*, 2015).

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite the contribution of our study, it has several limitations. First, our study measured the mediating role of a unitary construct of voice that emphasizes the behavior of voice itself rather than the individual's intention to voice. Therefore, we recommend that future studies should examine the associations among a paternalistic leadership style, different forms of voice such as acquiescent, defensive and prosocial (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003) voice that attribute the intentions of individuals to voice and creativity. Second, the present study conducted cross-sectional study. We suggest that future researchers should conduct longitudinal research with a time lag between employee voice and creativity because the relationship between employee voice and creativity develops overtime. Third, our study collected data only from one country, the Republic of Korea; therefore, we recommend that future research should examine this form of study in other regions where paternalistic leadership is prevalent, such as Latin America, the Middle East (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2008; Farh *et al.*, 2006) and China.

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Corresponding author

Do Hyung Lee can be contacted at: dh0123@ynu.ac.kr

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