

THE IMPACT OF DISSENT AND WORKPLACE FREEDOM OF SPEECH ON  
EMPLOYEES' WELL-BEING

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Blessing Ekene Okafor

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**Title**

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE**

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Dr. Catherine Kingsley Westerman

---

Chair

Dr. Cheng Zeng

---

Dr. Pamela Emanuelson

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Approved:

June 21, 2019

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Date

Dr. Stephenson Beck

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Department Chair

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of dissent and workplace freedom of speech on employees' well-being (subjective, psychological and workplace well-being). Data for the study were collected through an online survey distributed to employees of various organizations. The findings revealed that upward dissent was positively related to subjective well-being (consisting of life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect), psychological well-being, workplace wellbeing, and workplace freedom of speech. Lateral dissent was positively related to negative affect, workplace well-being and negatively related to life satisfaction and positive affect. However, there was no relationship between lateral dissent and psychological well-being. Workplace freedom of speech was positively related to psychological well-being and workplace-wellbeing. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: *dissent, workplace well-being, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, workplace freedom of speech*

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to God Almighty, for giving me the grace to finish strong. And to my wonderful parents, Mr. and Mrs. Godwin Okafor for their invaluable support.

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## INTRODUCTION

Employee well-being is essential to society, organizations, and employees because of increasing mental health issues today. Employee well-being is defined as not only the absence of disease and reduced physical functioning but the presence of positive physical, mental and psychological states of being (Sears et al., 2014). Although employee well-being is paramount, not all employees are well. Research has shown that approximately 1 in 25 adults in the U.S. – 9.8 million, or 4 % – experiences a serious mental illness in a given year that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities (National Institute of Mental Health, 2015). Mental health issues such as mood disorder (dysthymic disorder, bipolar disorder, depression), loss of self-esteem, hypertension, alcoholism, and illicit drug consumption (Quick, Wright, Adkins, Nelson & Quick, 2012) are detrimental to employee functioning and healthy living. Mental health issues can lead to problems such as social exclusion, stigmatization, and economic costs for people with mental health problems and their families (Gabriel & Liimatainen, 2000).

Researchers who study employee well-being have taken a unilateral approach by studying individual aspects of employee well-being such as subjective well-being (Bass & Weatherby, 2010; Bakker & Oerlemans, 2011), psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Gilbreath & Benson, 2004), work-related well-being (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002; and social and emotional wellbeing (Barrios-Choplin, Mccraty, & Cryer, 1997). In contrast, Page and Vella-Brodrick, (2009) argue that employee well-being should be studied holistically, and it consists of three aspects: subjective, workplace and psychological well-being. This study examines these three aspects of employee well-being.

To organizations, the indirect costs of untreated mental health disorders result in a \$79 billion annual loss to businesses due to loss of productivity and absenteeism (Center for Prevention

and Health Services, 2010). In addition, employers spend a considerable amount of money and time hiring employees and trying to generate products, profits, and maintain loyal customers (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002).

Employee well-being is key to organizational functioning; one potential contributor to employees' well-being is employees' ability to dissent. Dissent is the expression of varying or contradictory opinions about organizational policies, practices, and operations (Kassing 1997). If employee well-being depends in part on the ability to dissent, organizations may benefit from creating an environment where dissent is not only encouraged but embraced.

Not only can the ability to dissent potentially impact employee well-being, dissent is also healthy for organizations. Research has shown that organizations stand to benefit from employee dissent because it can serve as corrective feedback which enables the organization to be aware and adapt to changing conditions, (Kassing, 2006; Hegstrom, 1995; Redding, 1985). Encouraging employee dissent can help to improve organizational health and wellbeing (Cotton, 1993; Hirschman, 1970; Kassing, 2000a) because employees' opinions can lead to improved decision making, organizational effectiveness, employee commitment and satisfaction (Garner, 2009). Through dissent, employees can make known underlying problems affecting the health of the organization that the management is not aware of, hence, leading to organizational learning and development (Bisel, Messersmith, & Kelley, 2012).

Whereas much is known about the benefits of employee dissent to organizational well-being, there is little or no research on how dissent impacts the well-being of the dissenter. Additionally, research on how the environment in which employees choose to dissent (represented here as workplace freedom of speech) affects employees' well-being is sparse. Understanding the impact of organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech on employees' well-being can

provide organizations (management, supervisors, and employees) information critical to improving and promoting employee effectiveness and efficiency. This study argues that dissent and employees' perception of workplace freedom of speech are potentially vital for employee's subjective, psychological and workplace well-being (see Figure 1).

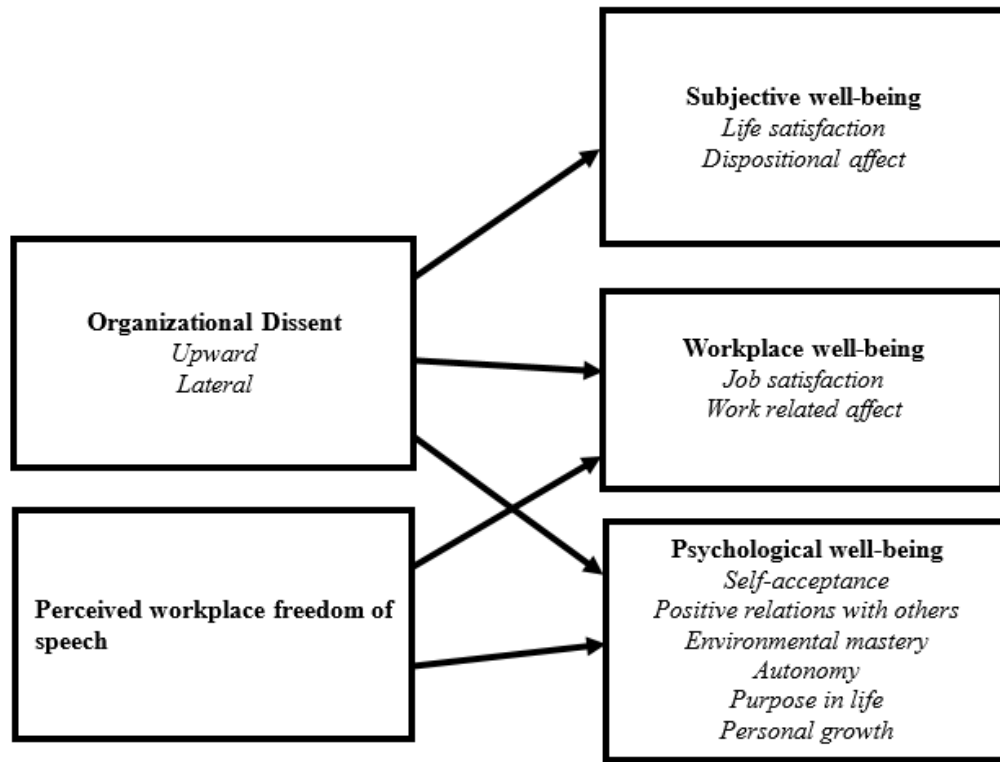


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Organizational Dissent**

Organizational dissent is the expression of disagreement or contradictory opinions about organizational policies, practices, and operations (Kassing, 1998). Practices refer to informal ways of doing things or getting tasks done as employees try to figure out better ways to accomplish a task. Policies and operations refer to the formal ways in which an organization function (Kassing, 2011). Dissent is a form of employee voice (Gorden, 1988; Kassing, 1998) that must be expressed to a person, must be a disagreement or contradictory opinion, and must be about an organization's policies, practices, and procedures (Kassing, 1997; Croucher, Kassing, & Diers-Lawson, 2013).

Dissent can be considered a subset of a conceptually similar form of workplace expression known as voice (Hirschman, 1970). Voice is a “constructive challenge to the status quo with the intent of improving the situation rather than merely criticizing” (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998, p. 853). The term voice was first identified by Hirschman (1970). He proposed a theory of exit, voice, and loyalty; later, Farrell (1983) added the fourth employee response of neglect. The theory of exit, voice and loyalty suggests that an employee who is dissatisfied with workplace policies, practices and operation can use one of these four responses. Exit occurs when employees terminate their employment relationship with their organization. Voice occurs when employees discuss problems with their supervisors, coworkers or when they take action to solve problem. Loyalty is a feeling of attachment to the organization and giving private and public support to the organization. Neglect is when employees have a reduced interest or effort and allow the conditions to worsen. Dissent and voice are similar because they are both driven by dissatisfaction, perceived violation of personal principles, and desire to improve an organization's internal policies, practices and procedures by giving different possible approaches or strategies (Detert & Burris, 2007;

Kassing, 2011; Ryan & Oestreich, 1998). Since dissent is a form of voice that can be constructive (Kassing, 2011), employees who engage in dissent are also engaging in voice.

### **Dissent triggering events**

Employees' dissent expression does not just occur; it is triggered by an event or incident that makes an employee want to initiate the action to communicate their dissatisfaction. These antecedents of dissent are known as dissent triggering events (Kassing & Armstrong, 2002) which Kassing classified into three domains: 1) those that involve organizational processes such as decision making, coordinating organizational change, and distributing resources, 2) those that relate to personal matters like employee treatment, role responsibilities, and performance evaluations, and 3) those that entail wrongdoing, malfeasance and unethical behaviour. Other dissent triggers are supervisors' inactivity, supervisors' poor performance, and supervisors' indiscretion (Kassing, 2009) which are classified in the study as the fourth domain known as supervisor relationship.

When employees experience a triggering event, it does not move them immediately to dissent. They work through a series of initial considerations like how serious the issue is, how much personal responsibility do they have to report the issue, and will the organization pay attention to the issue being reported (Kassing, 2011)? Garner (2013) quantifies the process by proposing a model of organizational dissent which focuses on sequences of events. Garner's (2013) model highlights the vital function of supervisors and coworkers in the dissent process and signifies that dissent is not a discrete event but a co-constructed process or an interactional phenomenon. Garner (2013) argues that there are three stages of dissent conversation which are: first, precipitation, where the dissenter is trying to make sense of the situation and considering the options for expressing dissent. The second stage is the initial conversation where the dissenter

engages in dissent action. Here the dissent audience is important because their response facilitates the third stage which is residual communication. Residual communication relates to every communication after the initial conversation. The dissenter, dissent audience and others in the organization who are involved in the dissent process are key to deciding whether the dissent experience is a negative or positive one. The decision formed in the residual communication stage will determine future precipitation (Garner, 2017).

### **Dissent goals**

Employees do not just dissent for the sake of dissenting; they have a goal they want to achieve. Dissent is strategic communication in that employees' dissent messages (ingratiation, venting, humor, exchange, inspiration, coalitions) are motivated by influence goals (Garner, 2009) and every communication is goal driven (Waldron, 1999). Kassing (1998) argues that employees may express dissent based on the following reasons: when they want to fight psychological and political restraints imposed by modern organizations, when they choose to exercise freedom of speech in the workplace, and when they decide to use dissent as a means of participation.

Dissent may be motivated by multiple goals. Garner (2009) found that employees strategically choose dissent messages based on multiple goals such as providing guidance, getting advice, obtaining information, gaining assistance, seeking emotional support, changing the audience's opinion. This implies that employees tactically choose dissent messages based on the goals that they want to achieve.

### **Dissent audiences**

Organizational dissent may be directed to three different audiences: upward to management, laterally to coworkers, and displaced to people outside of the organization such as



family and friends (Kassing, 1997; 1998). This study will focus only on upward/articulated dissent and latent/lateral dissent because they are dissent expressed within the organization.

**Upward/articulated dissent.** Upward, or articulated, dissent is when the members of an organization express their views or opinions to individuals who are above them in the organizational hierarchy (Kassing, 1997, 1998). These individuals such as managers or supervisors are assumed to have responsibility or to be in a position to take effective action. Employees are more likely to engage in upward dissent when they perceive that the work environment tolerates employee freedom of speech, when they are more satisfied with and committed to the organization (Gorden & Infante, 1991; Kassing, 1998, 2000a), when they possess a greater degree of organization-based self-esteem (Payne, 2007) and when they hold management positions (Kassing & Armstrong, 2001; Kassing & Avtgis, 1999). Research has also shown that employees (subordinates) dissent upward when they have higher leader member-exchange quality with their supervisors (Kassing, 2000b; Graen, & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and when they are fully engaged to participate in decision making in the organization (Kassing & McDowell, 2008).

Upward dissent can be expressed using five different strategies: According to Kassing and Kava (2013), the five employee upward dissent strategies can be placed on a continuum from competent (face-preserving) to less competent (face-threatening) strategies. These strategies include; solution presentation, direct factual statement, circumvention, repetition, and threatening resignation. When an employee supports his/her dissent expression by using factual evidence like citing workplace issues or organizational policies, it is a direct factual statement. When they present evidence or a possible solution to the issue, it is known as a solution presentation strategy. Solution presentation and direct-factual appeal are both prosocial strategies that limit the relational damage that accompanies dissent expression. Employees can also go above their supervisors to

dissent to someone higher in the chain of command; this is known as a circumvention strategy. They can raise the issue repeatedly (repetition strategy). The last strategy, threatening resignation, is also known as the strategy of choice which occurs when subordinates threaten to leave the job amidst a difficult situation. Subordinates use threatening resignation when they have reached a deadlock (Kassing, 2011, 2002) and it is less often used because it is seen as a strategy of last resort.

**Upward influence.** Upward dissent is conceptually similar to upward influence. Given that dissent has to do with sharing information about problems, and that it is risky to share this kind of information with superiors in an organization, when employees do engage in upward dissent, it is likely that they are hoping for some kind of change or improvement. That is, employees who engage in upward dissent are also engaging in upward influence attempts. Upward influence is conceptualized as “a deliberate attempt by a subordinate to select tactics that will bring about change in a more powerful target and facilitate achievement of a personal or organizational objective” (Waldron, 1999, p. 253). Employees use different upward influence tactics in order to obtain supervisors’ approval and receive favorable consequences. They use tactics such as rationality/reason, ingratiation, exchange/bargaining, assertiveness (pressure), coalition, upward appeal, consultation, inspirational appeals, and repetition (Kipnis, 1980; Waldron, 1999). Some of these tactics are similar to upward dissent strategies, such as: direct-factual statement, solution presentation, repetition, circumvention, and threatening resignation. Rationality or reason is similar to a direct factual statement strategy where the employee provides job related information, explanations, and reasons to the supervisor in order to influence his or her thinking. Assertiveness tactics, which are also known as pressure tactics (Falbe & Yukl, 1992), are similar to the repetition strategy identified in dissent literature. Upward appeal is similar to the circumvention strategy

because upward appeal (Waldron, Hunt & Dsilva 1993) involves going “over the head” of the leader to achieve the desired goal.

**Lateral/Latent dissent.** The second type of organizational dissent is lateral or latent dissent. Not all employees can or will dissent upward because dissenting upward is a risky proposition (Kassing, 1997, 1998), so some employees dissent to coworkers. Lateral, or latent, dissent is when an employee expresses their disagreement or contradictory opinion to coworkers on the same level of the hierarchy. Employees connect with their peer coworkers more than they do with any other member of the organization because they have many coworkers who they interact and work with but only one supervisor (Sias, Krone & Jablin, 2002). Organizational members see their peer coworkers as valuable in terms of receiving technical and social information (Morrison, 2002), uncertainty reduction (Teboul, 1994), emotional support (Fritz, 1997; Odden & Sias, 1997) and reducing role ambiguity (Kramer, 1994). Sollitto & Myers (2015) found that special and collegial peers engage in greater amounts of lateral dissent expression than information peers. Their study also revealed that employees express the same dissent messages (humor, venting, and coalitions) regardless of the type of co-worker relationship involved.

Organizational dissent can be influenced by peer co-worker relationships. Lateral dissent occurs when there is no opportunity or limited opportunity to express upward dissent. Employees engage in lateral dissent when they perceive that there is a lack of workplace freedom of speech, when they perceive that the management is not open to employees’ input, when they feel less empowered and less involved in the organization, when they are not satisfied with the organization, or when they have a low quality relationship with their supervisor or manager (Kassing, 1998, 2000a). Kassing (2000a) found that employees who perceived that they had a low quality relationship with their supervisor or that their work environment did not encourage workplace

freedom of speech used less upward dissent and more lateral dissent. Employees may not want to dissent upward because any concern raised by them may be interpreted as irrelevant by those up at the chain of command or seen as a threat to their authority in the organization (Allen & Tüselmann, 2009).

Kassing (1997) argued that employees channel their dissent elsewhere (e.g. coworkers, friends and families) when their judgement of organizational, relational and individual influences show that the risk of retaliation is more and the possibility of being perceived as adversarial is high. Thus, it is clear that dissent expression differs along with employee general attitudes and orientations regarding work.

### **Workplace Freedom of Speech**

Dissent may be facilitated or hindered by the presence or lack of workplace freedom of speech. Workplace freedom of speech is the degree to which employees perceive that their organizations tolerate and embrace their input. When the climate in the organization is perceived as intolerant to employee voice, that is, when workplace freedom of speech is low, employees tend to withdraw and remain silent regarding organizational issues. Organizations can create communication climates that foster workplace freedom of speech; the climate related to voice is determined in part by an organization's management practices (Hegstrom, 1990). Waldron and Kassing (2011) identified four important reasons why organizations should foster and embrace dissent: 1) dissent draws attention to overlooked issues, 2) it exposes unethical behaviour and organizational wrongdoing, 3) it provides corrective feedback, and 4) it helps in dealing with organizational constraints.

Some organizations foster employee feedback and create organizational climates where dissent is encouraged (Cotton, 1993; Hegstrom, 1990; for an example, see Pacanowsky, 1988).

Organizations can work to develop a climate of high freedom of speech in a few ways. First, by differentiating principled dissent from other forms of criticism and opposition, managers and leaders can perceive dissenters as key organizational voices (Shahinpoor & Matt, 2007) rather than troublemakers. Taking this stance can set up a climate where dissenters are accorded honor and respect and are rewarded for dissenting. Those dissenters are then likely to become more dedicated, loyal employees, benefiting the organization. Some research shows that employees who perceived they had freedom of speech in their workplaces reported higher levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Tutar and Sadykova, 2014; Gordon and Infant 1980). In addition, when the dissenter (employee) sees that he/she has been rewarded for expressing dissent, it may lead to increased job satisfaction (Lutgen-Sandvik, Riforgiate, & Fletcher, 2011), decreased burnout (Avtgis, Thomas-Maddox, Taylor, & Patterson, 2007), and potentially improved well-being.

### **Employee Well-Being**

Well-being is essentially how someone feels about various aspects of their life – their home life, their health, their relationships with others, their job and other activities. It’s about whether they feel well and happy. Numerous studies have provided evidence of the benefits of employee well-being. For example, happier employees are healthier (Waddell & Burton, 2006), take fewer sick days (Bertera, 1990), earn higher salaries (Koo & Suh, 2013) and get promoted quickly (Boehm & Lyubomirsky, 2008). They are more productive (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009), more effective (George & Bettenhausen, 1990), exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors (Organ, 1988), and stimulate customer loyalty (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002). They stay in their jobs longer (Judge, 1993) and they help to increase the well-being of other employees (Christakis &

Fowler, 2009). Organizations can benefit in many ways from ensuring employees' well-being is supported.

Employee well-being is an essential precursor to organizational well-being, which is evident in its connection to employee turnover and performance (Page & Vella, 2009). Employee well-being is positively related to important work outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction (Lutgen-Sandvik, Riforgiate, & Fletcher, 2011; Daniels, Brough, Guppy, Peters-Bean, & Weatherstone, 1997), job performance and decreased burnout (Avtgis, Thomas-Maddox, Taylor, & Patterson, 2007), and decreased turnover (Spencer, 1986). Employee well-being is negatively related to employee turnover, intention to leave, burnout, exhaustion, and higher absenteeism (Rath & Harter, 2010; Wright, Cropanzano, Bonett, & Diamond, 2009).

Research on employee well-being has covered individual aspects such as subjective well-being, psychological well-being, work-related well-being, social well-being and emotional well-being. Nevertheless, only a few researchers have examined the multidimensional nature of employee well-being. Page and Vella-Brodick, (2009) argue that employee well-being should consist of subjective well-being (life satisfaction plus dispositional affect), workplace well-being (job satisfaction plus work-related affect) and psychological well-being (self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life and personal growth). In order to capture the whole framework of employees' well-being, this study examines Page and Vella-Brodick's (2009) model of employee mental health, which consists of these three core components of employee well-being: subjective well-being, workplace well-being and psychological well-being.

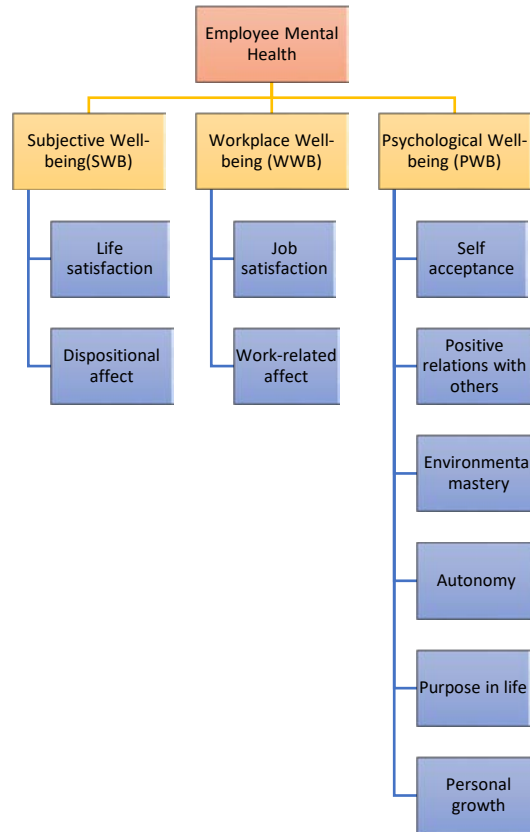


Figure 2. Model of employee mental health. Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009).

### Subjective well-being

Subjective well-being is a person’s self-reported happiness as it reflects their overall life experiences (Diener, 1984; see Figure 1). According to Page and Vella-Brodrick, (2009), subjective well-being consists of life satisfaction and dispositional affect (positive and negative emotion). Each will be discussed further below.

First, life satisfaction is the extent to which individuals feel happy about their life and circumstances. Rode (2004) conceptualized life satisfaction in part as the result of satisfaction with various life domains such as work, family, and health. This suggests that being satisfied with life is not restricted to one aspect of one’s life (marriage, work, health, or finance) but rather, it is a

positive holistic evaluation of life in general. When individuals have more pleasure than pain and are satisfied with their lives, they have high subjective well-being (Diener, 2000).

Employees' personal and work life are interrelated. Theoretical models such as the demand– control–support model (Karasek, 1990) and the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) postulate that work-related experiences can affect personal well-being (subjective well-being). Blauner (1964) asserts that "work remains the single most important life activity for most people in terms of time and energy, and... the quality of one's work life affects the quality of one's leisure, family relations, and basic self-feelings [p. 184]." This overlap between work and other aspects of one's life make it difficult to separate work life and personal life. Research in this area has found that work and personal lives are not separate entities but rather interrelated and intertwined domains that have reciprocal effects on each other (cf. Caudron, 1997; Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). This indicates that if employees are not allowed to dissent at the workplace, and because of this relationship between work-life and other domains of their lives, it may impact their subjective well-being (i.e., life satisfaction).

Unhappy employees often spend time worrying and thinking about their work problems both during and outside work hours, unintentionally impacting their mental well-being as well as the quality of time spent with their family. From this perspective, an employee who is willing to dissent upward about the performance review process, organizational decisions, roles and responsibilities, or employee treatment knowing that their dissent will be given attention or rewarded will tend towards being satisfied with this life domain (work). By contrast, research indicates that lateral dissent correlates negatively with employee satisfaction and commitment (Kassing, 1998). In the same vein, lateral dissent decreases when employees perceive that there is



procedural justice within an organization (Kassing & McDowell, 2008). Based on these arguments, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Upward dissent will positively relate to life satisfaction

H2: Lateral dissent will negatively relate to life satisfaction

The second element of subjective well-being is dispositional affect, which is the likelihood of responding to situations in a stable or predictable way. Dispositional affect consists of positive affect and negative affect which in this study will be analysed as two distinct emotional constructs.

First, positive affect is the degree to which someone feels enthusiastic, active, alert (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), happy, contented, engaged, pleasant, and good (Diener, Wirtz, Kim-Prieto, Oshin, & Biswa-Diener, 2009). Having positive emotion means that the individual's goals are being achieved, and the resources needed are provided (Carver & Scheiner, 1998; Clore, Wyer, Dienes, Gasper, & Isbell, 2001).

Employees who dissent upward despite potential consequences are more likely to possess some level of positive affect. Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) found that employees with positive affect are confident, exhibit high levels of self-efficacy, have a positive view of others, possess a sense of sociability and enact prosocial behaviours. This suggests they may be likely to employ prosocial upward dissent strategies like solution presentation and direct factual statement in their dissent expression.

In addition, Cropanzano, James and Konovsky, (1993) found that those who possess positive affect are committed and satisfied with their organization. While Kassing (1998) and Payne, (2007) found that employees engage in upward dissent when they are committed and satisfied with their organization. Because of these associations between upward dissent and positive affect, it is hypothesised that:

H3: Upward dissent will positively relate to positive affect

But when employees consistently feel as though they can't take their concern to the management or their supervisor because of the fear of reprisal or because they have learned through experience that taking concerns to management does not produce desired results and it comes with negative consequences, they are likely to resort to dissenting to their co-workers who likely cannot actually solve the problem or dissatisfaction (Kassing, 1998, 2000). When their dissatisfaction remains unsolved, they are unlikely to feel much positive affect. Hence it is hypothesized that:

H4: Lateral dissent will negatively relate to positive affect

The second element of dispositional affect is negative affect, defined as the expression and experience of unpleasant emotions and negative moods (Diener, 2000). Examples of negative affect include; anger, contempt, disgust, sadness, nervousness, fear (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), hopelessness, shame, worry, and uselessness (Frey & Stutzer, 2001). According to the negative state relief model (NSR; Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973), a negative mood is accompanied by an intrinsic drive to alleviate the bad feelings (Carlson & Miller, 1987). Employees who are dissatisfied with workplace practices may try to relieve their dissatisfaction by dissenting upward to the management or someone in the organization who has the power to bring about change and alleviate the dissatisfying situation. This upward dissent is likely to counterbalance the negative affect because when employees' issues are solved, they are satisfied, and this might reduce negative affect. Hence it is hypothesized that:

H5: Upward dissent will negatively relate to negative affect.

However, it is likely that those who dissent laterally will also experience negative emotion. If employees only resort to dissenting to coworkers who do not have the power of effecting

organizational decisions and activities, or have the capacity to provide solutions to their dissent problem, it can elicit strong negative emotional reactions. Cropanzano and Wright (2001) argue that employees who are unhappy or who report a high level of negative affect will feel more threatened, pessimistic and defensive. Similarly, Cropanzano, James, & Konovsky (1993) argue that people who report high levels of negative affect are likely to be anxious, afraid, and angry. These feelings can be associated with the feelings employees experience when they engage in lateral dissent. Both negative affect and lateral dissent correlate positively with lower job satisfaction (Cropanzano, James and Konovsky, 1993; Kassing, 1998, 2000) therefore it is expected that lateral dissent and negative affect will relate. Hence it is hypothesised that:

H6: Lateral dissent will positively relate to negative affect

### **Workplace well-being**

Workplace well-being is the second facet of employee mental health (see Figure 2). It relates to overall aspects of working life such as the quality and safety of the physical environment, how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work, and work organization (International Labour Organization, 2009). Workplace well-being is a substantial and influential part of individual, organizational and community well-being. It affects the quality of an individual's life and his/her mental health, which can potentially affect the productivity of an entire community (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002).

Page and Vella (2009) conceptualized workplace well-being as job satisfaction and work-related affect. Job satisfaction refers to the personal fulfilment one gets from the job and work-related affect refers to the moods and discrete emotions experienced by the workers (Brief & Weiss, 2002). These moods and emotions can be positive or negative (anxiety-comfort, depression-pleasure, bored-enthusiasm, tiredness-vigor, angry-placid, (Daniel, 2000)) depending

on whether employees are satisfied with their work or the work environment. In this study, both job satisfaction and work related affect have a mutually dependent relationship so they will be measured as a single construct.

**Workplace well-being and dissent.** Employees who express upward dissent are likely to have workplace well-being. Upward dissent has been shown to be associated with a variety of indicators that are also associated with workplace well-being. For example, Kassing (1998) found that people who were more satisfied with their work expressed upward dissent to management more than those who were less satisfied. Payne (2007) found that those who identify strongly with and are highly committed to the organization favor upward dissent expression. Finally, Kassing, Piemonte, & Mitchell, (2012) found that the expression of upward dissent signaled work engagement. People who were able to dissent upward were engaged in their work. Because of these associations between upward dissent and other variables known to be associated with workplace well-being, it is hypothesised that:

H7: Upward dissent will positively relate to workplace well-being

Lateral dissent could be a way of building social support among coworkers. It may be used when things are not going well, yet it can potentially improve how employees are feeling. Some research has shown that lateral dissent is expressed when employees perceive less workplace freedom of speech, when they believe that they possess comparatively poorer quality relationships with their supervisors, when their organizations are comparatively intolerant of employee feedback, and when they register comparatively low levels of satisfaction and commitment (Kassing, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, Kassing et.al.,2012). However, Cortina and Magley (2003) argue that employees can resist interpersonal mistreatment by expressing their discontent to colleagues. Garner (2009) found that employees sometimes get some emotional support through this type of

dissent expression. Similarly, Zeng and Croucher (2017) found that engaging in critical discourse and opening up to colleagues (lateral dissent) could serve to build trust and interpersonal relationships in Chinese organizations. Because lateral dissent appears to be used in cases of discontent, but could also improve trust and relationships through social support, the following research question was posed:

RQ1: How will lateral dissent impact employee workplace well-being?

### **Psychological well-being**

Psychological well-being, the third facet of employee mental health (see Figure 2), can be defined as an internal feeling of hope, a sense of life's purpose and empowerment (Prilleltensky, 2008), or the overall effectiveness of an individual's psychological functioning (Gechman & Weiner, 1975; Jamal & Mitchell, 1980). Psychological well-being can be understood as six dimensions of wellness (Ryff, 1995), including self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth. Taken together, these elements represent the optimal psychological characteristics of a fully functioning person.

According to Ryff (1995), *self-acceptance* explains the possession of positive attitude towards self, with the acknowledgment and acceptance of both positive and negative aspects of one's self. *Positive relations with others* means having warm, satisfying, and trusting relationships with others. *Environmental mastery* explains that the individual has a sense of mastery and is competent in managing and controlling the environment. *Autonomy* is a sense of self-determination, independence, and ability to resist social pressure and pursue one's own decisions. *Purpose in life* is the belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful. *Personal growth* is a progressive state of development of one's potential where the individual sees the self as growing

and expanding with an openness to new experiences. In this study, these elements will comprise and be measured as a single construct.

**Psychological well-being and dissent.** Employees who engage in upward dissent are likely to have better psychological well-being than those who do not. Cortina and Magley (2003) examined the experiences of employees who had suffered interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace and found that those employees who suffered extreme victimization but chose not to speak up about their mistreatment reported the poorest psychological and physical health outcomes, suggesting that withholding information ultimately can be detrimental to one's well-being. More so, employees who perceive interpersonal fairness (the extent to which employees perceive that their supervisors treat them with dignity and respect, Greenberg, 1993) and who are close with their superiors (personal relations with others) will be less inclined to feel fearful of rejection, ridicule or victimization when they dissent upward. These findings suggest that it is likely that when employees dissent upward they will not only feel fairly treated, but will also feel more psychological well-being.

Therefore it is hypothesised that:

H8: Upward dissent will positively relate to psychological well-being.

Those who dissent to their peers and coworkers may reduce the risk of psychological distress. Sollitto and Myers (2015) argue that the expression of lateral dissent could be cathartic and a way of seeking emotional support from peer coworkers. In the same vein, Kassing, (1998) found that high argumentatives do not ultimately withhold their dissatisfaction after they are rejected by those in the hierarchy, rather they complain to colleagues by venting their frustration (dissent), thereby maintaining psychological well-being (Finkenauer, Kuback, Engels, & Kerkhof, 2009), and possibly receive constructive suggestions from their colleagues who at the same time,

protect them against significant negative consequences. Even though coworkers may not be able to change or offer effective solutions to the dissatisfying situation, they are able to provide emotional support to the dissenter (Garner, 2009). The following hypothesis is proposed.

H9: Lateral dissent will positively relate to psychological well-being

**Workplace freedom of speech and workplace place well-being.** Perceptions of organizational climate, such as perceived workplace freedom of speech, can either foster or impede dissent (Graham, 1986; Hegstrom, 1990; Kassing, 1998, 2000a). This may relate to well-being because perceived organizational support, and supportive climate are also predictors of general satisfaction and employee well-being (Lapierre & Allen, 2006, Luthans, Norman, Avolio & Avey, 2008). One of the ways an organization supports its employees is by creating an organizational climate that tolerates employee voice and dissent expression. Employees are likely to be more productive, satisfied and committed to an organization when they believe workplace freedom of speech is high (Kassing, 2000b, Gorden & Infante, 1991).

Conversely, when employees perceive a “climate of silence” in an organization, they are forced to remain silent. Morrison and Milliken’s (2000) notion of a climate of silence describes how and why employees choose to remain silent, why managers are occasionally unwilling to respond to employees’ speaking up behavior and how silence can become a collective phenomenon in some organizational settings. Morrison and Milliken explain that an organization with “a climate of silence” is a type of organization where speaking up is perceived to be dangerous as well as risky. In promoting well-being at work, Harter et al. (2002) assert that organizations should aid employees to do what is naturally right by giving them the volition to engage in behaviours that will influence their engagement and their willingness to freely speak up.

The perception that one can express dissent without fear of being punished and that it will be accepted with some degree of openness may also lead to improved mental health. Research has shown that employees' perception of their work environment can play a vital role in explaining mental health outcomes (Bronkhorst, Tummers, Steijn, & Vijverberg, 2015). Bronkhorst et al. (2015) found that perceptions of a good organizational climate were significantly associated with positive employee mental health outcomes such as lower levels of burnout, depression, and anxiety. Kelloway and Day (2005) also argued that employees' perception of their work environment influences the way they relate to their job and their tenure in the organization. All these suggest that perceptions of workplace freedom of speech may impact workplace well-being. Thus the following hypothesis is posed:

H10: Employees perception of workplace freedom of speech will positively relate to workplace well-being.

**Workplace freedom of speech and psychological well-being.** When employees experience workplace freedom of speech, they are likely to feel psychologically safe as well as experience some of the elements of psychological well-being: autonomy (internal locus of evaluation), positive relations with others (warm and trusting relationship with the management and supervisors) sense of self-acceptance (that the organization cares about them), environmental mastery, and sense of personal growth (Ryff, 1989, 1995). Recent research (Persson, Windstorm, Nelson & Blomqvist 2018) demonstrates that an open climate, listening to each other and daring to express oneself without having to worry about being judged, were of great importance for trust between colleagues because they provided a sense of cooperation at work which contribute to psychological well-being of employees. It is also likely that when employees do not perceive high



workplace freedom of speech, they may experience harmful impacts in the same areas of psychological well-being. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is posed.

H11: Employees' perception of workplace freedom of speech will positively relate to psychological well-being.

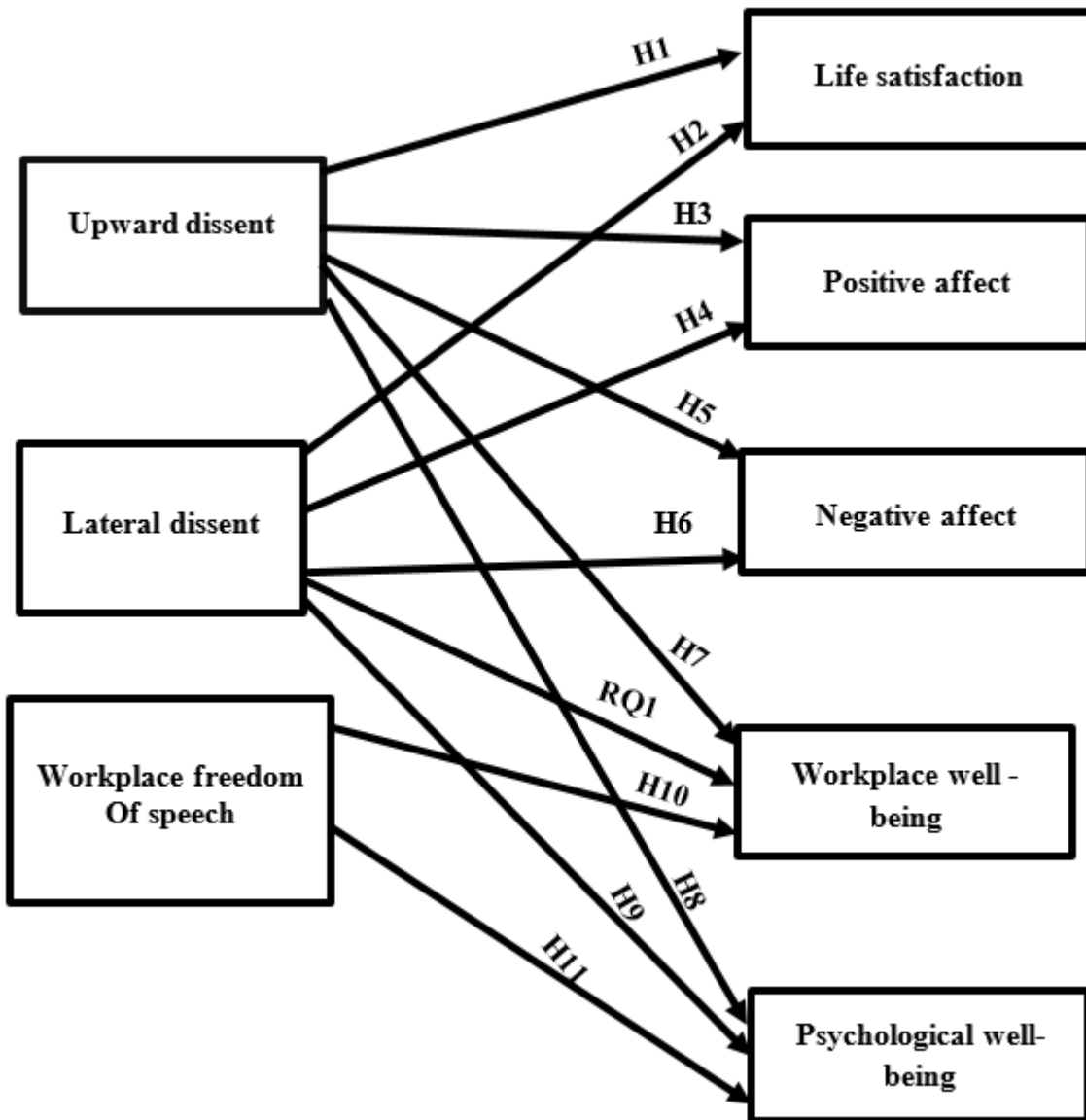


Figure 3. Conceptual model of the study 2 with hypotheses

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

Following IRB approval, three hundred and thirteen ( $N = 313$ ) employees participated in the study. Respondents worked for a variety of organizations including marketing ( $n = 10$ ), engineering ( $n = 36$ ), advertising ( $n = 2$ ), finance ( $n = 5$ ), customer service ( $n = 75$ ), accounting ( $n = 10$ ), education ( $n = 47$ ), healthcare ( $n = 33$ ), manufacturing ( $n = 3$ ), computer/information technology ( $n = 5$ ), retail/sales ( $n = 8$ ), agriculture ( $n = 7$ ), service ( $n = 15$ ), administrative support ( $n = 3$ ), and others ( $n = 54$ ). The sample was comprised of 163 males (52.1 %) and 147 females (47.0 %) and 3 non-binary/third gender (1.0 %). The age of employees participating in this study ranged from 18-64 years ( $M = 23.99$ ,  $SD = 8.64$ ), job tenure ranged from less than a year to 26 years ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 3.78$ ) and the number of full-time employees was 83 (26.5%), while part-time was 230 (73.5%). Approximately (244) 78.0 % of respondents reported their ethnicity as white, (25) 8.0% as African American, 1.3 % as American Indians, 2.9 % as Latino/Hispanic/Chicano, 1.0 % as African, 8.0 % as Asian/Pacific Islander, 0.3 % as Middle Easterners, 0.3 % as Biracial black and white, and 0.3 % as White and Middle Eastern/Arab. Participants were asked if they have a supervisor and if they supervise others. Of the participants, 94.9 % of the respondents indicated they have a supervisor, 4.8 % indicated they do not have a supervisor. Of the participants, 25.2 % indicated they supervise others whereas 74.8 % said they do not supervise others.

### **Procedures**

An online survey questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was comprised of several survey instruments and a set of demographic questions. The survey was distributed

through a university listserv to all employees. To participate, individuals were required to be at least 18 years old and have a part-time or full-time job.

## **Measures**

### **Organizational dissent**

The 18-item Organizational dissent scale (Kassing, 2000) measures how employees express their disagreement and contradictory opinions about work along two dimensions: articulated dissent which is also known as upward dissent and latent dissent which is also referred to as lateral dissent. The measure uses a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The upward dimension, (e.g., "I speak with my supervisor or someone in management when I question workplace decisions," "I do not question management") consists of 9 items. The lateral dimension, (e.g., "I join in when other employees complain about workplace changes," "I make certain everyone knows when I am unhappy with work policies"), consists of 9 items. Higher scores on the upward dissent scale mean increased upward dissent strategy. Higher scores on the lateral dissent scale mean increased lateral dissent strategy. Previous measures of articulated dissent produced a coefficient alpha of .83 and lateral dissent produced a coefficient alpha of .87 (Kassing, 2000). The reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for the upward dissent scale in this study was .76. The reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for lateral dissent in this study was .83.

### **Workplace freedom of speech**

Gorden and Infante's (1991) scale and two additional items created by Kassing (2000b) were used to measure the degree to which people perceive that their organization or employer or both permit and encourage feedback and input from employees. The 10 items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. A sample item includes: "In my workplace, I feel I have freedom of speech." Higher scores on this scale mean

higher freedom of speech. Reliabilities for the Workplace Freedom of Speech Scale (WFSS) have ranged from 0.74 to 0.91 (Gorden & Infante, 1991; Kassing, 2000). The reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for workplace freedom of speech scale in this study was .81.

### **Subjective well-being**

Subjective well-being was measured using two measures. The first measure is Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) satisfaction with life scale. It is a 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. The measure uses a 5-point Likert type scale that ranges from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. Sample items include "In most ways, my life is close to my ideal" and "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing." Higher scores on this scale indicate greater subjective well-being. Previous use of Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .86 (Galanakis, Lakioti, Pezirikianidis, Kaakasidou & Stalikas, 2017). The reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of satisfaction with life scale in this study was .81.

### **Positive and negative affect**

Positive and negative affect were measured using Diener et al.'s (2009) scale of positive and negative experience. These affects are measured as separate experiences in this study. The measure is a 12-item scale with six items devoted to positive experiences and six items designed to assess negative experiences. Each Scale of Positive and Negative Emotion (SPANES) item is scored on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represents "very rarely or never," and 5 represents "very often or always." Sample items for positive affect include positive, good, pleasant, happy, and joyful. Sample items for negative affect include negative, bad, sad, unpleasant and afraid. A respondent with a very high score of 30 for each scale reports that she or he rarely or never experiences any of the negative feelings, and very often or always has all the positive feelings. The

reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) for positive affect scale in this study was .89. The reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of the negative affect scale was .85.

### **Workplace well-being**

Demo and Paschoal's (2016) well-being at work scale was used in this study. The 29-item work-related questionnaire has 3 subscales; positive affect (9 items), negative affect (12 items), and fulfilment (8 items) which measures workplace well-being on a 5-point scale from (1= not at all to 5= extremely). Sample items include: "Over the past six months, my work made me feel happy," "Over the past six months, my work made me feel upset," and "In my work, I achieve my potential." Higher scores on this scale indicate greater workplace wellbeing. The measure has a reported reliability score ranging from .88 to .93 (Paschoal and Tamayo, 2008). The reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of workplace well-being scale in this study was .89.

### **Psychological well-being**

The Psychological Well-Being Scale–Short (PWBS-S; Ryff, 1989; Schmutte & Ryff, 1997) was used in this study. The PWBS-S measures six psychological domains of well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth. Although the original scale has 120 items, this study used a shortened version consisting of 18 items. Based on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), higher scores indicate an increased level of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Sample items include "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live" and "I sometimes feel as if I have done all there is to do in life." Previous use of the PWBS-S with Mexican American adults revealed an adequate internal consistency coefficient of .73 (Murguía, 2001) and .84 (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull and Villegas, 2009). The reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of the psychological well-being scale in this study was .77.

## RESULTS

Multiple regression was used to test the relationship of the three independent variables (upward dissent, lateral dissent and workplace freedom of speech) with each of the five dependent variables (satisfaction with life, positive affect, negative affect, workplace well-being, and psychological wellbeing).

First, a multiple regression was run to test hypotheses 1 and 2 which predicted that upward dissent will positively relate to life satisfaction and lateral dissent will negatively relate to life satisfaction. Together upward dissent and lateral dissent accounted for a significant portion of the variance in life satisfaction,  $F(2, 310) = 6.03$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .03$ ,  $p < .01$ . Life satisfaction was positively related to upward dissent,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ , and negatively related to lateral dissent,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p < .05$ . The data were consistent with both H1 and H2.

Second, a multiple regression was run to test hypotheses 3 and 4 which predicted that upward dissent will positively relate to positive affect and lateral dissent will negatively relate to positive affect. Together upward dissent and lateral dissent accounted for a significant portion of the variance in positive affect,  $F(2, 310) = 12.40$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $p < .001$ . Positive affect was positively related to upward dissent,  $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ , and negatively related to lateral dissent,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p < .05$ . The data were consistent with both H3 and H4.

Third, a multiple regression was run to test hypotheses 5 and 6 which predicted that upward dissent will negatively relate to negative affect and lateral dissent will positively relate to negative affect. Together upward dissent and lateral dissent accounted for a significant portion of the variance in negative affect,  $F(2, 310) = 17.61$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $p < .001$ . Negative affect was negatively related to upward dissent,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p < .05$ , and positively related to lateral dissent,  $\beta = .31$ ,  $p < .001$ . The data were consistent with both H5 and H6.

Fourth, a multiple regression was run to test hypotheses 7 and 10 which predicted that upward dissent and workplace freedom of speech will positively relate to workplace well-being and a research question which asked how will lateral dissent impact workplace well-being. Together upward dissent, workplace freedom of speech, and lateral dissent accounted for a significant portion of the variance in workplace well-being,  $F(3, 309) = 6.45$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ . Workplace well-being was positively related upward dissent,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ , workplace freedom of speech,  $\beta = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ , and lateral dissent,  $\beta = .12$ ,  $p < .05$ . The data were consistent with both H7 and H10.

Finally, a multiple regression was run to test hypotheses 8, 9 and 11 which predicted that upward dissent, lateral dissent and workplace freedom of speech, will positively relate to psychological well-being. Together upward dissent, lateral dissent and workplace freedom of speech, accounted for a significant portion of the variance in psychological well-being,  $F(3, 309) = 12.16$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $p < .001$ . Psychological well-being was positively related to upward dissent,  $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .01$  and positively related to workplace freedom of speech,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .001$ , but was not positively related to lateral dissent,  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $p = .35$ . The data were consistent with both H8 and H11, but were not consistent with H9.

Table 1

*Summary of Regression Results*

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B
Life satisfaction	Upward dissent <sub>(H1)</sub>	.15**
	Lateral dissent <sub>(H2)</sub>	-.13*
$F(2, 310) = 6.03, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .03, p < .01$		
Positive affect	Upward dissent <sub>(H3)</sub>	.25***
	Lateral dissent <sub>(H4)</sub>	-.12*
$F(2, 310) = 12.40, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .07, p < .001$		
Negative affect	Upward dissent <sub>(H5)</sub>	-.12*
	Lateral dissent <sub>(H6)</sub>	.31***
$F(2, 310) = 17.61, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .10, p < .001$		
Workplace well-being	Upward dissent <sub>(H7)</sub>	.15*
	Workplace freedom of speech <sub>(H10)</sub>	.13*
	Lateral dissent <sub>(RQ1)</sub>	.12*
$F(3, 309) = 6.45, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .05, p < .001$		
Psychological well-being	Upward dissent <sub>(H8)</sub>	.16**
	Lateral dissent <sub>(H9)</sub>	-.05
	Workplace freedom of speech <sub>(H11)</sub>	.23***
$F(3, 309) = 12.16, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .10, p < .001$		
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$		



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of organizational dissent and workplace freedom of speech on employees' subjective, workplace and psychological well-being. The findings and implications are discussed below.

### **Life Satisfaction**

The first hypothesis, which predicted that upward dissent will be positively related to life satisfaction, was supported. Those who reported a stronger likelihood of using upward dissent also reported higher life satisfaction. This suggests that employees who are willing to go to management to express their dissatisfaction or disagreement will tend to be satisfied with their lives in general, contributing to their subjective well-being. This finding adds to knowledge from previous studies, which have shown that upward dissent is related to job satisfaction (Kassing, 1998, 2000, Gordon & Infante, 1991).

The second hypothesis, which predicted that lateral dissent will be negatively related to life satisfaction, was also substantiated. When people were more willing to dissent to their coworkers, they reported lower life satisfaction. This indicates that the feeling that one must dissent to coworkers contributes to being less satisfied with life in general. This is similar to previous research (Kassing, 1998, 2000) that found that lateral dissent is related to lower employee satisfaction. It could be that the coworkers are an ineffective audience to dissent to, which would explain why life satisfaction was lower in association with the willingness to dissent laterally.

### **Positive Affect**

The third hypothesis, which predicted that positive affect will be positively related to upward dissent, was supported. Employees who express upward dissent despite potential

repercussions have also been found to have confidence, engagement, self-efficacy, organizational based self-esteem, and a good relationship with their supervisor (Kassing, 1998; Payne, 2007). The relationship between positive affect and upward dissent makes sense, given what is already known about upward dissent and these other organizational concepts.

Likewise, the fourth hypothesis, which stated that lateral dissent will negatively relate to positive affect, was substantiated. Employees who were willing to engage in lateral dissent reported lower positive affect. This could be because even though these employees speak to their coworkers about troubling workplace issues, but because their dissatisfaction remains unsolved, they are unlikely to feel much positive affect. The findings of this study were consistent with the existing research (Kassing, & Avtgis, 1999) showing that lateral dissent does not lead to positive emotions.

### **Negative Affect**

The fifth hypothesis, which predicted that upward dissent will be negatively related to negative affect, was supported. This is also not surprising because employees who dissent upward tend to have a greater level of satisfaction, commitment, engagement and happiness (Kassing 1998, 2000) and are able to alleviate their dissatisfaction by dissenting to people who can address their situation. Through upward dissent, employees are able to move the problem from themselves to others up the hierarchy. So, it is logical that these employees will not experience negative affect.

The sixth hypothesis, which predicted that lateral dissent will be positively related to negative affect, was also supported. This could be because lateral dissent has a cycling effect. When employees were willing to use lateral dissent, they also experienced more negative affect. Perhaps when employees cannot complain or bring their concern to an audience who can provide solutions to their problem, and therefore have to resort to lateral dissent, they will experience

negative emotions such as anger, hatred, sadness, and depression. Because the problem does not cycle out of their hierarchical level, but remains with coworkers, the negative emotions do not dissipate but rather continue to circulate. Finally, engaging in lateral dissent may be accompanied by negative affect because it is perceived by the organization as antagonistic. Lateral dissent has been labelled as a negative communication event for this reason (Sollito & Meyers, 2015).

### **Workplace Well-Being**

The seventh hypothesis, which predicted that upward dissent will be positively related to workplace well-being, was substantiated. Employees who were willing to dissent upward also reported higher workplace well-being. The result suggests that employees who engage in upward dissent are more satisfied and engaged in their organization (Gorden & Infante, 1991; Kassing, 1998, 2000a). It also indicates that these employees exhibit more positive work related affect such as pleasure, enthusiasm and vigor. Employee job satisfaction and work related affect are all indicators of employee workplace wellbeing.

A research question was posed to find out how lateral dissent would impact workplace well-being. The result indicates that lateral dissent was positively related to workplace well-being. This is quite unexpected because previous research has shown that employees use lateral dissent when they perceive that management is not receptive to employee dissent (Kassing & Avtgis, 1999), when they are not satisfied or committed to the organization (Kassing 1998, 2000), or when they do not have a positive relationship with their supervisor (low trust, respect, obligation and limited resources) or identify with the organization. However, it is possible that the feelings of social and emotional support employees receive when they dissent to coworkers may actually improve workplace well-being.

### **Psychological Well-Being**

The eighth hypothesis, which stated that upward dissent will be positively related to psychological well-being, was supported. Employees who were willing to dissent upward reported higher psychological well-being. The result suggests that employees who use upward dissent are experiencing positive psychological functioning. This makes sense in the light of the fact that employees who express upward dissent possess some level of autonomy, relate positively with the management/supervisors, have environmental mastery, have a sense of self-acceptance, and have a sense of purpose, all of which are elements of psychological well-being.

One unexpected finding was the ninth hypothesis, which predicted that lateral dissent will be positively related to psychological well-being, but was not supported. This prediction was based on the idea that the expression of lateral dissent could be cathartic and a way of seeking emotional support from peer coworkers (Sollitto and Myers, 2015) to minimize psychological distress. But the finding indicates that there is no relationship between lateral dissent and psychological wellbeing. This could be because even though employees were able to get emotional support from their coworkers, it does not make any difference because the dissent audiences (coworkers) are not able to provide the necessary solution to their dissatisfaction. If the dissenting employee cannot find a resolution, then his or her psychological well-being might be helped by the act of dissenting, but then hurt by the lack of resolution. This would explain why there was no relationship between the two.

### **Workplace Freedom of Speech**

The tenth hypothesis, which predicted that workplace freedom of speech will positively relate to workplace well-being, was supported. Employees who reported that there is workplace freedom of speech in their organization also reported having higher workplace well-being. This

finding indicates that employees who perceive that their organization allows them to express dissatisfaction and provide feedback will tend to experience more workplace well-being than those who perceive less workplace freedom of speech. This result is consistent with previous work showing that employees report more satisfaction and commitment when they perceive that workplace freedom of speech exists in their organization (Kassing, 2000, Gorden & Infante, 1991).

The eleventh hypothesis, which stated that workplace freedom of speech will be positively related to psychological well-being, was substantiated. Employees who reported workplace freedom of speech in their organization also reported having higher psychological well-being. The study outcome indicates that creating an atmosphere where workplace freedom of speech is tolerated will allow for high psychological well-being of employees. Employees will feel a psychologically safe environment devoid of harmful psychological impacts such as anxiety, feelings of sadness, worthlessness, and hopelessness (Robert, 2018).

### **Lateral Dissent**

Lateral dissent in previous studies has been conceptualized as a negative communication event that occurs as a product of the oppression of upward dissent. In keeping with this expectation, lateral dissent was positively related to negative affect and negatively related to positive affect and life satisfaction. However, lateral dissent had no relationship with psychological well-being, and it was positively related to employees' workplace well-being and workplace freedom of speech. In some cases, lateral dissent may not be entirely negative. These mixed findings suggest lateral dissent requires more investigation to tease out the differences that lead to these different relationships.

### **Practical and Theoretical Implications**

As indicated earlier in the study, employee well-being is a critical issue for organizations, so managers and supervisors may glean useful practical knowledge from the results of this study. The current study underscores the importance of upward dissent expression, and workplace freedom of speech to employees' well-being. Based on the results of this study, managers and organizations should encourage the use of upward dissent because employees who use upward dissent reported more subjective, workplace and psychological well-being. Encouraging upward dissent expression, may help to reduce the tendency to use lateral dissent (which is related to negative affect), although this study did not test the relationship between upward dissent and lateral dissent.

Also, organizations should facilitate or create an environment where workplace freedom of speech is tolerated. When employees perceive that they have workplace freedom of speech, it will increase their workplace and psychological well-being and organizations stand to benefit. When employees are well, there will be low turnover intentions, decreased absenteeism, decreased burnout, and increased productivity (Rath & Harter, 2010; Wright, Cropanzano, Bonett, & Diamond, 2009; Avtgis, Thomas-Maddox, Taylor, & Patterson, 2007).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

One limitation of this study is that it relied on self-reported assessments of all the well-being constructs (subjective, workplace and psychological well-being). As with all self-report instruments, respondents may have a tendency to answer questions in a way that feels more favorable to them rather than reveal their actual response to each statement. Thus, future examinations of these constructs could also include qualitative elements (Schullery, 1999) or a peer-rating measure (Hsu, 2007) to diminish the potential effect of social desirability.

The sample in this study consisted of mostly part-time employees. Kassing, Faneli, Chakravarthy (2015) found that employment status has a crucial effect on the expression of upward dissent with full-and part-time employees relying on differing tactics. Future research may also investigate if there is a difference in the impact of dissent on the well-being of part-time versus full-time employees. Additionally, sampling from one organization would potentially give a more consistent read on workplace freedom of speech, although individual employees are able to report on their own perceptions of workplace freedom of speech. Finally, the types of organizations and the nature of the work were not considered in the current analyses but should be in future analyses.

A longitudinal study could be conducted to examine the resolution of dissent episodes, that is, how success or failure of the resolution impact people's responses and whether resolution happens or not.

Employee well-being is paramount in workplaces but has received little attention in organizational dissent scholarship. This work begins to address that oversight by emphasizing how dissent expression and workplace freedom of speech impacts employees' subjective, workplace and psychological well-being. The present findings contribute to the growing body of literature assessing the nature of dissent and well-being literature.

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## **APPENDIX A. KASSING (2000) ORGANIZATIONAL DISSENT MEASURE**

This is a series of statements about how people express their concerns about work.

Considering how you tend to express your concerns at work, indicate your degree of agreement with each statement by using the scale provided. 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree some and disagree some 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

1. I am hesitant to raise questions or contradictory opinions in my organization.
2. I complain about things in my organization with other employees.
3. I criticize inefficiency in this organization in front of everyone.
4. I do not question management.
5. I'm hesitant to question workplace policies.
6. I join in when other employees complain about organizational changes.
7. I share my criticism of this organization openly.
8. I make certain everyone knows when I'm unhappy with work policies.
9. I don't tell my supervisor when I disagree with workplace decisions.
10. I bring my criticism about organizational changes that aren't working to my supervisor or someone in management.
11. I let other employees know how I feel about the way things are done around here.
12. I speak with my supervisor or someone in management when I question workplace decisions.
13. I do not criticize my organization in front of other employees.
14. I make suggestions to management or my supervisor about correcting inefficiency in my organization.
15. I do not express my disagreement to management.

16. I hardly ever complain to my coworkers about workplace problems.
17. I tell management when I believe employees are being treated unfairly.
18. I speak freely with my coworkers about troubling workplace issues.

**APPENDIX B. GORDEN AND INFANTE'S (1991) WORKPLACE FREEDOM OF  
SPEECH MEASURE**

(1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree)

1. In my workplace, I feel I have freedom of speech.
2. In my workplace, superiors do not encourage subordinates to argue corporate issues.
3. In my workplace, employees are penalized if they disagree with management practices.
4. In my workplace, employees who speak up about job related matters are team players.
5. In my workplace, there is fear of expressing your true feelings on work issues.
6. In my organization, there is commitment to quality.
7. In my organization, there is more concern for quantity than quality.
8. In my organization, achieving excellence is an important goal.
9. In my organization, there is talk about quality, but not much action.
10. In my organization, pride is taken in what is produced.

**APPENDIX C. DIENER, EMMONS, LARSEN, AND GRIFFIN'S (1985) SATISFACTION  
WITH LIFE MEASURE**

5- Strongly agree

4 - Agree

3 - Neither agree nor disagree

2 - Disagree

1 - Strongly disagree

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing

## **APPENDIX D. DIENER, WIRTZ, KIM-PRIETO, CHOI, OISHI, AND DIENERET (2009)**

### **MEASURE OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE**

For each item, select a number from 1 to 5, and indicate that number on your response sheet.

1. Very Rarely or Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Very Often or Always

Positive

Negative

Good

Bad

Pleasant

Unpleasant

Happy

Sad

Afraid

Joyful

Angry

Contented



## APPENDIX E. DEMO AND PASCHOAL'S (2016) WELL-BEING AT WORK MEASURE

(1= not at all to 5= extremely)

1. Over the past six months, my work made me feel happy.
2. Over the past six months, my work made me feel excited.
3. Over the past six months, my work made me feel cheerful.
4. Over the past six months, my work made me feel enthusiastic.
5. Over the past six months, my work made me feel proud.
6. Over the past six months, my work made me feel content.
7. Over the past six months, my work made me feel willing.
8. Over the past six months, my work made me feel calm.
9. Over the past six months, my work made me feel active.
10. Over the past six months, my work made me feel distressed.
11. Over the past six months, my work made me feel upset.
12. Over the past six months, my work made me feel depressed.
13. Over the past six months, my work made me feel jittery.
14. Over the past six months, my work made me feel angry.
15. Over the past six months, my work made me feel nervous.
16. Over the past six months, my work made me feel frustrated.
17. Over the past six months, my work made me feel impatient.
18. Over the past six months, my work made me feel annoyed.
19. Over the past six months, my work made me feel worried.
20. Over the past six months, my work made me feel anxious.
21. Over the past six months, my work made me feel bored.
22. In my work, I achieve my potential.
23. In my work, I develop abilities that I consider important.
24. In my work, I engage in activities that express my skills.
25. In my work, I overcome challenges.
26. In my work, I achieve results that I regard as valuable.
27. In my work, I advance in the goals I set for my life.
28. In my work, I do what I really like doing.
29. In my work, I express what is best in me.

**APPENDIX F. SCHMUTTE & RYFF, (1997) PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING  
MEASURE**

Instructions: Circle one response below each statement to indicate how much you agree  
or disagree.

1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

1. "I like most parts of my personality."
2. "When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far."
3. "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them."
4. "The demands of everyday life often get me down."
5. "In many ways I feel disappointed about my achievements in life."
6. "Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me."
7. "I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future."
8. "In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live."
9. "I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life."
10. "I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life."
11. "For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth."
12. "I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world."
13. "People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others."
14. "I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago"
15. "I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions"
16. "I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others."

17. “I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think.”

18. “I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.