

Research Fellowships Fellow Spotlight – Feb 2023

Examining Voice Behavior in Organizations

Dr. Priyanka Joshi

Research Project:

Transcending the here and now: Examining the Impact of Leader's Future Oriented Communication on Employee Voice



After training as a clinical psychologist, Priyanka Joshi realized she was more interested in addressing normal behavior than abnormal behavior. This insight led to work as a social psychologist and pursuing a doctorate in social psychology until questions around how power shapes people revealed a new path. She pondered: “How do people respond to contextual factors that make them either feel empowered or lacking in power, and how does that then contribute to decision-making, emotions, conditions, and behavior?” This inquiry prompted her transition from the psychology department to the Marshall School of Business at University of Southern California where she received her Ph.D. She is currently an assistant professor in the Lam Family College of Business at San Francisco State University and think2perform Research Institute’s newest Research Fellow.

Her most recent research project explores what drives voice behavior in organizations. “What got me to this question was my interest in temporal perspective, future discounting and an interest in understanding what makes people pick the present over the future or the future over the present,” says Priyanka.

As people focused on healthy eating and diligent saving well know, many real-life choices require us to forego immediate gratification. “Many decisions that require us to sacrifice our present for the future can have a lot of positive consequences,” says Priyanka.

“What is interesting about this project is that we're trying to link this idea of future connection to voice behaviors. Voice behaviors inherently involve some amount of risk in the present — especially voice behaviors called prohibitive voice. Promotive voice is providing information or giving feedback that makes the organization better. Prohibitive voice, on the other hand, also wants to make the organization better, but in this instance, the person is pointing out problems.”

Depending on organizational culture or a manager’s perspective, individuals engaging in prohibited voice can be seen as creating problems and potentially penalized in the present for speaking up despite the positive consequences of their input over the long term.

Priyanka is interested in what organizations can do to lead people to provide more future-oriented prohibitive voice: “How can leaders make people think about the future, feel more connected to the future so that they are willing to take these risks in the present for the benefit of their organization?”

With the help of some collaborators, Priyanka is collecting multi-wave data from a large organization in China. “We have this opportunity to collect data from employees and managers. We’re collecting survey data from employees using a scale that measures

construal level — whether people tend to perceive objects places in terms of the concrete or the abstract — to see how variance in construal level can then impact temporal perspective or future orientation. Then we ask employees to self-report their voice and we also ask the supervisors to report their perspective of how much voice the employee provides and how positive it is,” says Priyanka.

While it’s too early to share any analysis or findings from her research, Priyanka revealed that one of her goals for the project is “to identify what leaders, or as an organization in general, can do to promote a culture or environment that can stimulate people to speak up.”

When Priyanka’s research project is finalized, she hopes to present her work at research conferences and publish it in academic journals, share in her business school classroom. In addition, her research presentation and social impact paper will be available at t2pri.org.

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