


# “Safety supports on employee safety voice”

## AUTHORS

Nuri Herachwati  
Jovi Sulistiawan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9910-3461>  
Zainiyah Alfirdaus  
Bagus Anggara  
Muhammad Atsiruddin Ruslananda

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Zainiyah Alfirdaus, Bagus Anggara  
Yudha, Muhammad Atsiruddin  
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Nuri Herachwati, Lecturer,  
Department of Management,  
Faculty of Economics and Business,  
Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia.

Jovi Sulistiawan, Lecturer,  
Department of Management,  
Faculty of Economics and Business,  
Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia.

Zainiyah Alfirdaus, Department of  
Management, Faculty of Economics  
& Business, Airlangga University,  
Indonesia.

Bagus Anggara Yudha, Department of  
Management, Faculty of Economics  
and Business, Airlangga University,  
Indonesia.

Muhammad Atsiruddin Ruslananda,  
Department of Management,  
Faculty of Economics and Business,  
Airlangga University, Indonesia.



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Nuri Herachwati (Indonesia), Jovi Sulistiawan (Indonesia),  
Zainiyah Alfirdaus (Indonesia), Bagus Anggara Yudha (Indonesia),  
Muhammad Atsiruddin Ruslananda (Indonesia)

## SAFETY SUPPORTS ON EMPLOYEE SAFETY VOICE

### Abstract

The present research aims to assess the influence of supervisor and colleague support on employee safety voice based on the social exchange theory and the effect of employee safety voice on employees' satisfaction towards the organization. The data were collected from 302 bus drivers in Java, Indonesia. The data were then processed using a multiple regression analysis technique. The results indicate that supervisors have a significant negative effect on the action of voicing safety concerns by employees, while co-workers do not have any significant effect in relation to employees voicing their safety concerns. Furthermore, employee safety voice has also been found to have a significant negative effect on employee satisfaction towards their company.

### Keywords

safety support, employee safety voice, social exchange theory

### JEL Classification

M54, J28, O15

## INTRODUCTION

Bus is one of the favorite modes of transportation for most Indonesians. One of its main advantages is the high frequency of departure and its 24-hours availability. Therefore, passengers can flexibly decide on their travel time (Anususanto & Prammarito, 2012).

Data obtained from the Ministry of Transportation showed that there was an increase of 4.28% of bus transportation companies in Java for the period 2009–2014. Similarly, the number of bus passengers tends to increase each year. Unfortunately, this is not accompanied by improvement in road safety. The Ministry of Transportation reported that there has been an increase in the numbers of bus-related accidents and fatalities in Java. Based on the data, it was recorded that there were 15,439 victims died from bus accidents in 2014, an increase from 14,803 victims in 2012. Thus, as quoted at the official website of the Ministry of Transportation of the Republic of Indonesia, human error is the highest contributing factor for road accidents, which is around 80 to 90% ([www.dephub.go.id](http://www.dephub.go.id)). Similarly, the Chairman of the International Organization for Road Accident Prevention had also stated that more than 90% of the cause of accidents is due to human error. In other words, the internal factor of bus drivers becomes the biggest factor in fatal accidents, causing the deaths of either the passengers or other drivers.

Apart from the fact that accidents generally happen due to the mistakes of the bus driver, the bus companies also have a part in influencing the performance of the drivers. Accidents could happen due to

companies which do not emphasize the importance of work safety on their employees. Also, the existence of revenue targets set by the company may also be one of the factors that caused the employees to disregard safety principles in the workplace. Thus, increasing the potential of having working environment which is unsafe and risky.

Tucker et al. (2008) stated that a risky working condition is an unwanted condition and has a big influence in motivating the employees to voice their opinion regarding the unsafe conditions (employee safety voice). The employee safety voice is a form of communication intended to improve the condition of the workplace and also to set a target for safety improvement as a result of the delivery of their opinion. Employee safety voice occurs as a response resulting from the employees' dissatisfaction regarding the safety of the workplace in the company, which becomes the urge for the employees to report their concerns regarding the safety issues. This definition implicitly explains that employees voicing their opinions is a risky behavior because of the intention to change the status quo (Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010).

Literature suggested that there are two predictors potentially influencing employees to voice their opinions, i.e. the support of their supervisor(s) and the support of their coworkers (Tucker et al., 2008). Inherently, a supervisor is an agent of the company (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Therefore, the support of the supervisor can be interpreted a representative of the company's support. As reviewed in the theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964), employees tend to have a perception that the organization supports their needs and respects their contribution to the company based on the quality of the interaction between the two parties. When an organization, represented by a supervisor, shows support to the employees to deliver their ideas regarding work safety, this becomes a motivation for employees to voice their concerns regarding work safety in the company, even though this action is risky.

Other than supervisors, coworkers also have an important role in influencing the risky behaviors taken by employees in relation to voicing their concerns regarding work safety in the organization. This can be explained using a social exchange theory, as when employees exchange information and concern is regarding work safety, there will be a positive reciprocal relationship between employees in the future and employee safety voice will increase in frequency. This reciprocal relationship tends to be a horizontal relationship that directly affects work safety, whereas an employee's relationship with their supervisor is more indirect, because it involves rules and managerial actions.

Finally, when employees expressed their concerns regarding work safety to the company with the purpose of improving work safety, this action will create employee satisfaction towards their current workplace. This is because employees feel that the organization considered them as important (Lind & Tyler, 1988) by recognizing the need of safety in the workplace.

This research tries to assess the effect of supervisor and co-worker support on employee safety voice based on the theory of social exchange, and the effects of employee safety voice to employee satisfaction towards their organization.

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## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Kottke and Sharafinski (1988) stated that supervisor support is a perception formed by employees regarding the support given by supervisors in the condition that the supervisors appreciate the contribution of the employees and is concerned about the welfare of the employees. Eisenberg et al. (1986) also stated that supervisors act as

agents of the organization who are responsible to direct and evaluate the performance of the subordinates. In terms of safety, Supervisor safety support is a form of support given by supervisors regarding the creation and implementation of work safety within the organization. The actions of the supervisor is an important contributing factor in forming the behavior of employees (Branson, 2008).

This assumption could be reviewed by the theory of social exchange (Blau, 1964), which stated that an employee would feel obligated for the support given by the organization, thus they would feel the need to give a good feedback to the organization as a response of that support. In the context of present study, the willingness of employees tends to be based on a reciprocal relationship between the employees and their superiors. Specifically, this occurs when a supervisor shows concern on employee safety and tries to give recommendations to improve their safety. Then, the employees will develop a perception that the organization has a positive orientation regarding their safety and that the organization cares about their safety, which will increase the possibilities of employees to participate in delivering their concerns regarding safety in the company (Michael et al., 2005). The employee safety voice is a form of communication used by employees with the purpose of improving the safety of the workplace.

Supervisor safety support can encourage employees to give their opinions or suggestions regarding work safety. If the supervisor manages to encourage the employees to deliver their aspirations or opinions, then the employees will feel safe and more comfortable in giving their aspirations or opinions regarding work safety (Gao et al., 2011).

*H1: Supervisor safety support has a significant positive influence towards employee safety voice.*

Another predictor that influences the willingness of employees in voicing their opinions regarding safety at the workplace is the support of coworkers (coworker safety support). The results of the research done by Laurence (2005) states that coworkers have an important influence regarding the distribution of information on work safety and the latest safety regulations. Coworkers can also influence the risk-taking behaviors of their colleagues. Unlike supervisor support, coworker support tends to be more horizontal and has a more direct effect to employee safety voice.

An understanding on how coworkers affect employee safety voice can also be reviewed from the social exchange theory. When employees are actively involved in the distribution of information regarding work safety and risks, then the communication regarding work safety will increase as

well (Tucker et al., 2008). It is explained further by Zhou and George (2001) that co-worker support increases inputs received regarding work safety. Therefore, the higher coworker support regarding work safety, then the more eager employees will be to voice their concerns regarding work safety.

*H2: Coworker support has a significant positive influence towards employee safety voice.*

As explained above, employee safety voice tends to be a risky behavior, so there will be a tendency for employees to feel afraid in voicing their ideas regarding work safety (Gephart et al., 2009). However, with supervisor support and coworker support, they will have more courage to contribute in voicing their concerns on work safety. Support of the supervisor, as a representative of the organization, symbolizes the organization's concerns regarding employee safety. If the employees feel that they are considered important by the organization, and thus supported to contribute in providing their ideas regarding work safety in the organization, then the employee will have a sense of satisfaction towards their company (Lind & Tyler, 1988).

*H3: Employee safety voice has a significant positive influence satisfaction with the company.*

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study were obtained through questionnaires. Respondents answered the questions in a Likert scale, starting from the value of 1 for strong disagreement to a value of 5 for strong agreement. The samples of this research are inter-provincial bus drivers and inter-city bus drivers in Java, Indonesia. From 400 questionnaires distributed, 302 questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 75.5%. Respondent details in this research are 100% male, 31.4% aged under 40 years old, and 68.6% aged over 40 years old. 78.43% of the respondents have worked for more than seven years. A double regression analysis technique is used to test the correlation between variables, using factor analysis to test the validity of the indicators of each research construct and reliability test using a Cronbach's Alpha 0.6 value. The data are processed using an SPSS statistics program version 21.0.

### 2.1. Supervisor safety support

The supervisor safety support variable is the support given by supervisors to the organization and subordinates regarding work safety. The measurement of supervisor support uses a question components adapted from the two indicators used in the research by Huang et al. (2004) and three indicators used in the research by Lauver et al. (2009). These indicators describe faith towards the support and supervision from the supervisor regarding safety practices of the drivers while doing their jobs.

### 2.2. Coworker safety support

The coworker support variable is the perception of bus drivers regarding how much their coworkers support work safety. In this research, coworkers are conductors and driver’s assistants. According to the Indonesia Dictionary, a conductor is the person who checks for tickets or to charge passengers for the transportation fee, whereas driver’s assistants are people who assists bus drivers in ways such as directing parking positions, selecting lanes, and navigating. The measurement of coworker support uses the three indicators adapted from the research by Tucker et al. (2008).

### 2.3. Employee safety voice

This research uses an employee safety voice variable, which is a form of communication intended to increase the motivation to improve an unsafe working condition, which affects the work safety of the individual and the company. The measurement of employee safety voice uses five measurement indicators adapted from the research by Tucker et al. (2008).

### 2.4. Satisfaction with the company

Satisfaction with the company is described as the level of satisfaction of bus drivers to the company

they are working for. Indicators for satisfaction with the company used in this research are taken from the research of Huang et al. (2004), in addition to one indicator from Rizwan and Mukhtar (2014) for a total of 3 indicators.

## 3. RESULTS

The validity test uses factor analysis with the purpose of measuring how far a measurement instrument can measure its construct precisely (Cooper & Schindler, 2003). Based on the calculation of factor analysis data using SPSS, indicators ESV 3 and ESV4 measuring the construct employee safety voice must be removed from the model because they do not meet the cutoff value of 0.5, leaving only indicators ESV1, ESV2, and ESV5. Supervisor safety support variable consists of indicators SSS1, SSS2, SSS3, SSS4, and SSS5. All those indicators met the cutoff value of 0.5. The variable of coworker safety support consists of indicators CSS1, CSS2, and CSS3. All three indicators have met the cutoff value of 0.5. Lastly, the variable satisfaction with the company consists of indicators SWC1, SWC2, and SWC3. None of these indicators need to be removed from the model, because all have met the cutoff value of 0.5.

The reliability test was measured using a Cronbach Alpha value where the cut off value set is 0.6. Based on Table 1, only the supervisor safety support variable meet the cutoff value of 0.6. Cooper and Schindler (2014) stated that the validity test is the most important aspect in the evaluation of measurement model compared to the reliability test. Therefore, even if the reliability test is not fulfilled, as long as the validity test is fulfilled, then the analysis may be continued.

Table 1 also shows the correlation between constructs that indicates if the value of correlation coefficient approaches 0, then the correlation be-

**Table 1.** Mean, standard deviations, Cronbach Alphas, correlations

| Variables | Mean  | SD    | SWC      | SSS      | ESV     | CSS     |
|-----------|-------|-------|----------|----------|---------|---------|
| SWC       | 3.860 | 0.474 | (0.498)  | –        | –       | –       |
| SSS       | 3.924 | 0.585 | 0.541**  | (0.726)  | –       | –       |
| ESV       | 3.608 | 0.769 | –0.171** | –0.174** | (0.597) | –       |
| CSS       | 3.429 | 0.746 | –0.046   | 0.239**  | –0.04   | (0.546) |

Note: *N* = 302. Cronbach Alphas (diagonal). Correlations (below diagonal). SWC – satisfaction with the company; SSS – supervisor safety support; ESV – employee safety voice; CSS – coworker safety support. \*\* *p* < 0.01.

tween those constructs become weaker. The value above 0.8 indicates a strong correlation. The result of data processing shows that the highest correlation occurs on the correlation coefficient between the variables supervisory safety support and satisfaction with the company at 0.541, with a positive significant value at the level of 0.01. Correlation coefficients are below 0.5, which means that the correlation between those constructs are weak, indicating the non-existence of multicollinearity.

**Table 2.** Result of multiple regression test  
**Model 1**

| Variable                  | Employee safety voice |       |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
|                           | B                     | Sig   |
| Constant                  | 4,501                 | 0,000 |
| Supervisor safety support | -0,229                | 0,003 |
| Coworker safety support   | 0,001                 | 0,981 |

**Model 2**

| Variable              | Satisfaction with the company |       |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------|
|                       | B                             | Sig   |
| Constant              | 4,240                         | 0,000 |
| Employee safety voice | -0,105                        | 0,003 |

Based on the results in Table 2, the value of Model 1 is 4.501, indicating that all values are free and the value of control is zero. Therefore, the value of employee safety voice is 4.501. The value of the constant in Model 2 is 4.24, indicating that if all value is free and the value of control is 0, then the value for satisfaction with the company is 4.24. The t-test result indicates that supervisor safety support has a significant negative influence on employee safety voice. This is similar to the effect of employee safety voice which has a significant negative influence on satisfaction with the company. However, coworker safety support does not have a significant effect to employee safety voice due to the value of significance being over 0.05.

## 4. DISCUSSIONS

The result of the multiple regression analysis shows that the three hypotheses in this research are not accepted. Hypothesis 1 indicates that if there are more support given by the supervisor, then the lower the willingness of the employees to voice their concerns regarding work safety in the organization. This may be caused by the perception of

the employees who feel that the support given is ineffective, so the employees tend to choose to not give out their opinion. Jansen et al. (1998) stated that employees tend to voice their dissatisfaction to their job if they consider that their supervisor is an effective voice manager. In this research, the intensity of employees meeting their supervisor is very minimum. That is because the supervisor is more likely to be in the office, while the driver is always working outside. Thus, this kind of relationship is causing the lack of communication between the two parties, which then causes the tendency of the employees to feel that the role of the supervisor is ineffective in influencing their performance. If we review it from social exchange theory, thus there is no reciprocal relationship between driver and supervisor. Additionally, the supervisor is also considered as not always effective in solving safety issues as they are often sent directly to the supervisor's subordinates or directly to the bus driver. This causes the bus drivers to feel reluctant in voicing problems or opinions because the resolution of those problems are often returned to the bus drivers themselves.

On the other hand, hypothesis 2 indicates that there is no significant influence between coworker safety support and employee safety voice. This shows that the support of coworkers do not have any role in employees decision to voice opinions regarding work safety in the organization. This may be caused by the majority of respondents who are aged over 40 years old. As explained previously, employee safety voice is the result of the dissatisfaction on work safety. Older employees tend to have a tolerance for satisfaction (Burt in As'ad, 2003, p. 35). Therefore, even if they feel dissatisfied with what they get from the organization, the employees will tend to accept and choose to stay silent than to try and voice their opinions regarding their dissatisfaction. In addition, the fact in the field revealed that the role of coworker is not supporting the driver in regard of safety. Instead, they tend to support the driver to achieve the income targeted by the company. Thus, the relationship between coworker and driver is not relating to the safety at all.

Lastly, hypothesis 3 indicates that employee communication regarding work safety in the organization would instead lower the level of employee sat-

isfaction to their current organization. This may be caused by the risks inherent in voicing their opinions. As explained above, employee safety voice is a risky action, but if they receive positive support from their supervisors or their coworkers, then the employee will disregard the risks and voice out their opinions. This research uses drivers as respondents whose working hours are spent almost entirely outside the office, hence causing a very low intensity of meeting with their supervisor. This also indicates that the quality of the support received by from their supervisor is also very low. When employees try to voice their ideas regarding work safety, and as they realize that the support from the supervisor, as a representative of the organization, is not as expected, then this will lower the employee satisfaction to current or-

ganization. This assumption is similar to the disconfirmed expectancy theory, where an individual will feel discomfort as a result of the difference between the expectation and the reality received (Anderson, 1973). If employees feel uncomfortable, then the satisfaction level to the organization will also decline.

In addition, field study revealed that the priority set in the company is the income, not safety. Thus, the driver would be more likely to achieve their income target first and tends to think that voicing safety would be just a waste because it has no advantage for their work. Instead, it may bother the driver because it is only enhance their workload. Therefore, voicing safety could only decrease the satisfaction of the driver with the company.

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## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

Drawing from social exchange theory, supports coming from supervisor and coworker affect employees' risk behaviors related to voice their concerns regarding to work safety in the organization. However, the results of this study showed that both of the supports has no significant positive effects towards employees' safety voice. In addition, the effect of employees' safety voice toward employees' satisfaction to their company is also can not be proven. It is important to note that the sample of this study is bus driver in Java, Indonesia. Researcher did some interviews with respondents and it is found that there is a tendency for employees to not give great attention to the safety at work which became a culture among them. In addition, organization tends to hide the accidents created by their employees instead of trying to decrease it through safety improvement programs. Therefore, it builds employees' perception that safety at work is not a priority. Instead, employees would put their best effort to reach the targets made by the company eventhough they have to ignore safety. However, it is possible to have different results if this study applied to another type of company. Future studies is necessary to explore this.

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