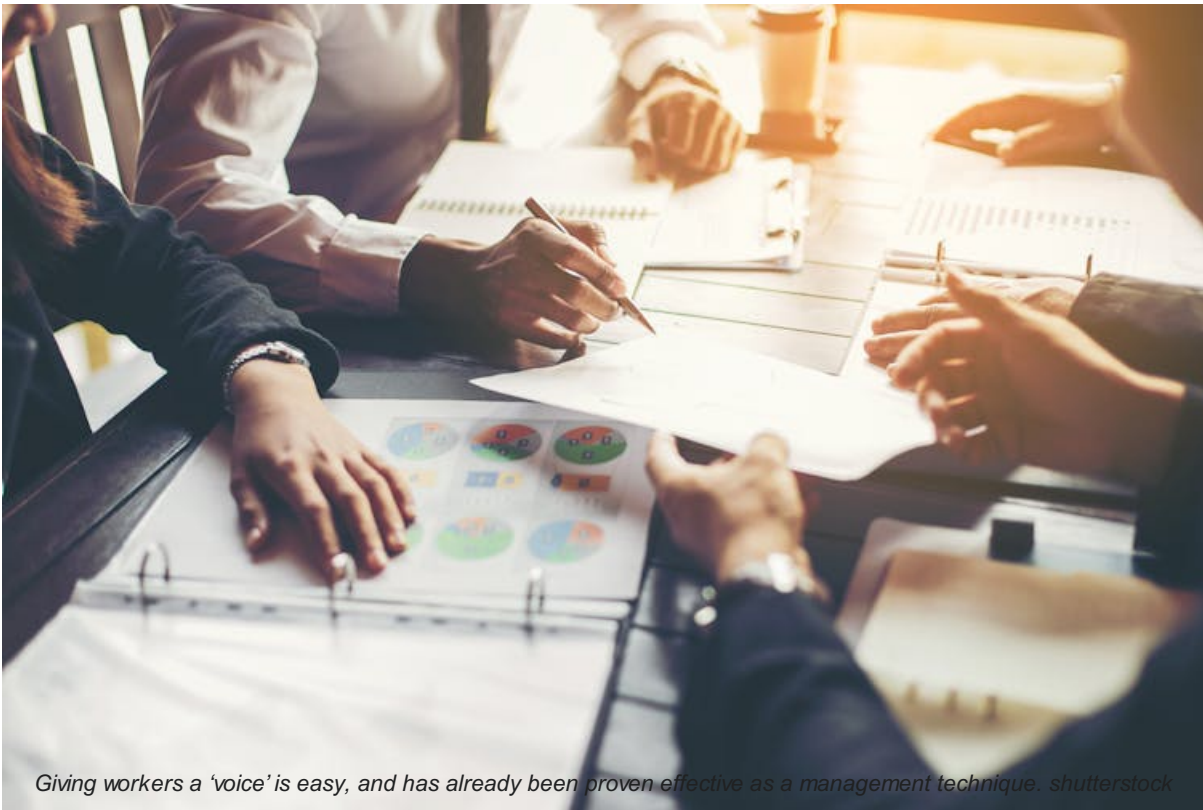


# The key to a vibrant democracy may well lie in your workplace

By [Andrew Timming](#)

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It turns out that bosses who take the time to listen to their employees and involve them in organisational decisions may be inadvertently strengthening their country's democracy.



*Giving workers a 'voice' is easy, and has already been proven effective as a management technique. shutterstock*

When you go to work, does your employer [tell you what to do](#) and expect you to do it? Or do they instead [ask you what you think](#) the company should be doing to improve its operations and become more efficient?

In a new [paper](#), my colleagues and I show that the key to a vibrant democracy may be as simple as giving employees a “voice” in the workplace.

When workers feel empowered over the decisions that affect them at work, they are more likely to engage in politics outside of work. So, employees can potentially learn about the merits of democracy in the workplace and carry those skills and positive attitudes with them into civil society.

Using a sample of more than 14,000 workers across 27 countries, we found that employees whose bosses give them some discretion over their work tasks are significantly more likely to vote in elections, belong to a political party, sign petitions, boycott products, and contact politicians, among other political behaviours.

In contrast, employees who have no control over their work are much more likely to be politically apathetic outside the workplace.

## **Silenced employees can damage the community**

Now more than ever before, democratic societies need to take action to safeguard our political freedoms.

Our research shows that a simple and effective way to instil a love of democracy is to practice what we preach in the workplace. This means a dramatic change in the way the workforce is managed.

Our research's findings suggest that treating workers like soldiers whose only job is to execute management's orders without questioning them can have dangerous consequences on the societies and communities in which we live.

Authoritarian managers often stifle debate, silence critics, and devalue the views and opinions of their subordinates. Employees who dare to speak up are silenced quickly and learn not to speak up at all, but rather just to do what they're told.

Outside work, they feel demoralised and are much less likely to become involved in local, regional or national politics. Such employees, while perhaps easier to manage than engaged ones, do not make good citizens.

## **Related benefits of giving workers a 'voice'**

Giving workers a "voice" is easy and has already been proven effective as a management technique. This might involve, for example, [sharing strategic information with employees](#) and asking for their input or ideas. Or it may mean consulting with employees (or their representatives) about the company's strategic direction and giving them an opportunity to make suggestions or recommendations.

This may be as simple as allowing them to decide where to hold the staff Christmas party, or perhaps something more complicated like organising production around self-managed teams.

[Employee ownership](#) is another innovative organisational form that encourages worker participation in management decision-making.

Initiatives like these empower workers and make them feel listened to at work. Our research shows they will take this appreciation for the political process and bring it into their communities, resulting in a renewed enthusiasm for electoral politics.

Employee voice can have benefits not only at home, but also abroad. Previous attempts to spread democracy through war have been [expensive](#) and of [questionable success](#).

Perhaps a more efficient way to spread democracy is not from the top-down, but rather through the bottom-up. By promoting participative management practices abroad, we could be sowing the seeds for non-violent change toward freer and more democratic societies.

So, if you're an employee, share this article with your co-workers and your boss. Your country's political future might depend on it.

*This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).*

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