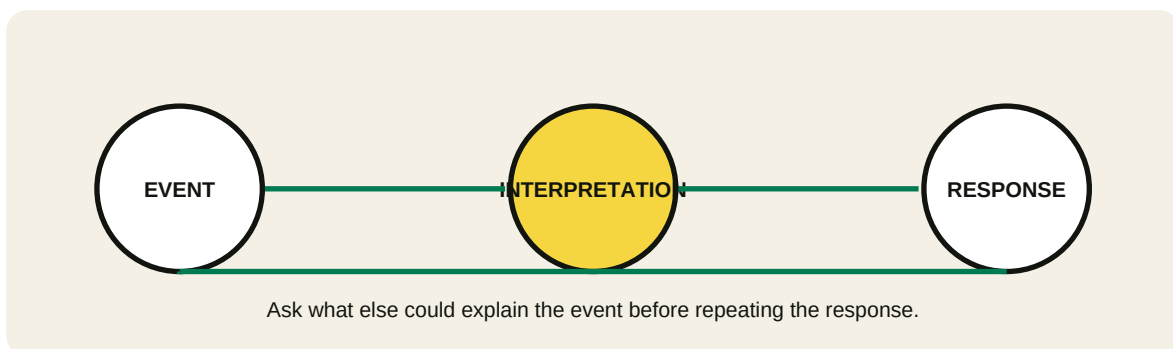


MONKEY BUSINESS SCHOOL / FIELD GUIDE 01

The meeting could have been a banana.

A field guide to voice, work design, power, and learning in absurd workplaces.

THE MEETING MACHINE



A comic model of a loop that returns to the meeting instead of reaching action.

Fictional casework. Research-informed lenses. No score, diagnosis, or management magic.

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A note from the dean

We are still in the game. Workplaces are not weather systems that must be endured without question. They are made from repeated choices, roles, incentives, tools, and stories. Some are deliberate; others survive because nobody has had the time or permission to inspect them.

This guide uses satire to make familiar routines visible. The joke is directed at organizational machinery and our shared habits of explanation, not at a named employee. Beneath the joke is a serious invitation: describe what happened, separate it from what you think it means, and ask what small test could improve the next attempt.

The material is educational and interpretive. It is not a diagnostic instrument, a validated leadership test, or a promise that one meeting trick will repair a workplace. The cases are fictional demonstrations. Research findings are reported with their context and limits.

Reading map: five lenses

Contents at a glance · Voice · Work design · Power · Learning loops · Reversible experiments · Reflection worksheet

1. Voice and interpersonal risk. When is it possible to raise a concern, ask a question, or admit uncertainty?
2. Work design. How do task structure, autonomy, feedback, and resources shape the experience of work?
3. Status and process. Who can change a definition, interrupt a meeting, or decide what counts as evidence?
4. Learning loops. Does a team merely repeat a response, or inspect what its response teaches it?
5. Small experiments. How might a team change one routine, observe what happens, and revise?

Suggested route: read the case, draw the evidence/interpretation split, choose one lens, then use the worksheet. The diagrams are original teaching schematics, not empirical measurements.

1 / Voice is a human act in a system

Employee voice refers broadly to work-related input such as suggestions, concerns, or information that could help a group. Employee silence refers to withholding such input. These terms describe behavior in context; they do not tell us why any one person stayed quiet. People may be uncertain, busy, strategic, unheard before, using another channel, or simply have nothing to add.

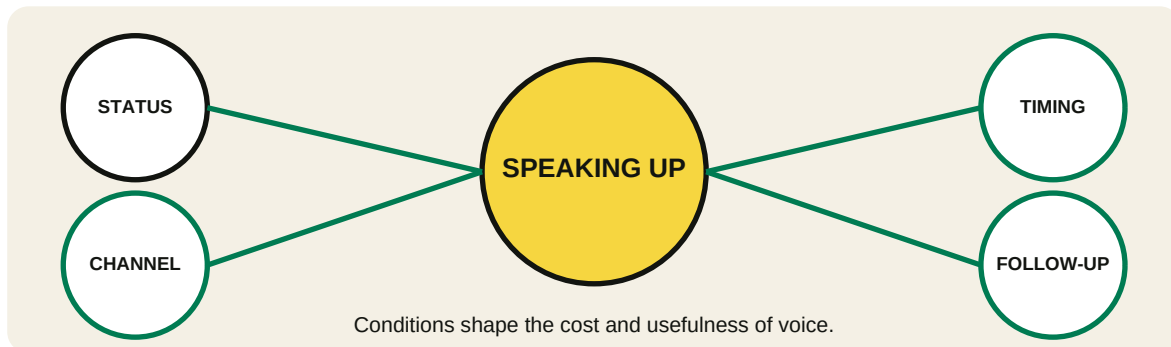
Edmondson's 1999 study examined 51 work teams in one manufacturing company. Team psychological safety was associated with learning behavior in that setting. The finding supports treating interpersonal risk as relevant to team learning; it does not mean psychological safety is a universal cause, a personality trait, or an explanation for every silence.

Morrison's 2014 review synthesizes research on employee voice and silence. It is useful for seeing that speaking up is shaped by more than confidence: perceived consequences and organizational context matter.

Practice: instead of "Why didn't anyone speak up?", ask: "What did people know? What did the meeting invite? What happened the last time someone raised a concern? What follow-up would make speaking useful?"

A diagram for separating the story

VOICE IS SHAPED BY CONDITIONS



Schematic only; it depicts questions to ask, not measured causal weights.

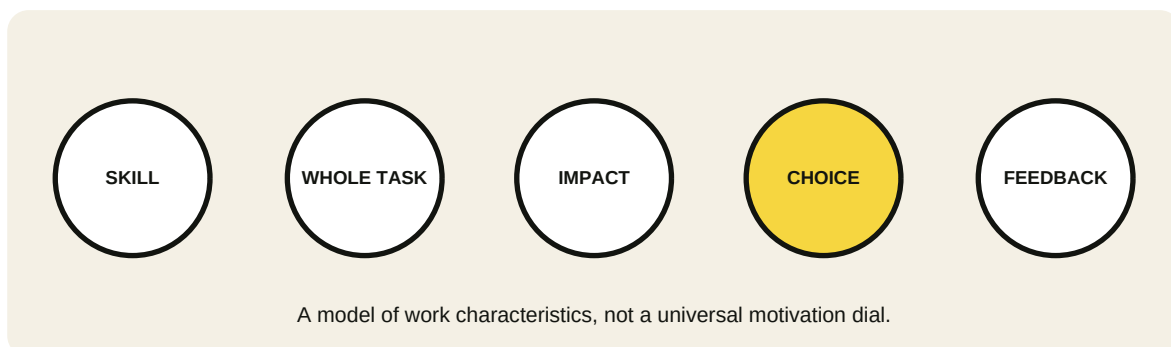
Start with the event you could record on a camera or in a log. Then list interpretations as hypotheses, not facts. A third column names what evidence might distinguish among them.

Example: “The launch date moved twice” is an observable description. “The team is lazy” is a judgment. “An added approval step lengthened the handoff” is a testable possibility. “The team may be protecting a green status metric” is another possibility that needs evidence.

The point is not to ban interpretation. It is to keep interpretation revisable. When a team labels an inference as a fact, it can stop looking. When it labels an inference as a question, it can learn.

2 / Work design is part of motivation

WORK HAS DESIGN CHARACTERISTICS



A teaching schematic based on the job characteristics vocabulary; not a scorecard.

Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model examines dimensions including skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Their 1976 paper tested a theory about how characteristics of work relate to outcomes. The model offers a vocabulary for discussing design. It is not a universal switchboard for motivation, and its concepts do not remove the influence of pay, workload, health, relationships, or opportunity.

Ask about the job before diagnosing the worker. Does someone see a whole piece of work through? Can they use judgment where judgment is needed? Is feedback timely and informative? Do systems create rework that is invisible to the person being evaluated?

A humane job-design conversation also asks what must remain constrained for safety, fairness, or coordination. Autonomy does not mean abandonment. Feedback does not mean surveillance. Significance is not a substitute for adequate resources.

Worked case A / Project Banana Clock

Fictional demonstration. A team's deadline slips after an approval step is added. The dashboard stays green because "on track" is redefined. In the meeting, a new analyst notices the mismatch; the chair says, "Let's keep it positive."

Observed: the deadline moved; an approval step appeared; the dashboard definition changed.

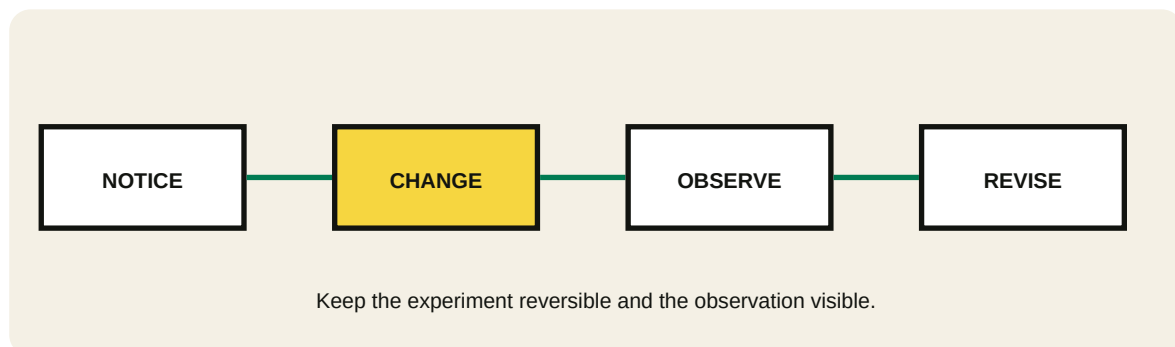
Unknown: why the step was added; who saw the definition change; whether the team has capacity; what "positive" was intended to mean.

Possible interpretation: the metric rewards a clean status more than an accurate forecast. Alternative: the dashboard was updated according to a legitimate new milestone, but the meeting failed to explain it. Another: the analyst's observation is incomplete.

A useful next move is inquiry, not a verdict. Draw the handoff. Ask who owns each step, what the measure means, and what evidence would change the current explanation. Then choose a small, reversible test.

3 / Power hides in ordinary process

MAKE THE NEXT ATTEMPT OBSERVABLE



Original process schematic: notice, change, observe, revise.

Status can shape who is interrupted, who gets asked, whose mistake becomes "a learning opportunity," and whose becomes a performance problem. Power also appears in definitions: who gets to decide what counts as complete, urgent, risky, or "on track"?

Edmondson's 2003 study examined 16 operating-room teams learning new technology. The article describes how leaders' communication and attention to power and status differences related to speaking up and team learning in that setting. Operating rooms are a specific, high-stakes context; the study is not a universal recipe for every boardroom.

Practical questions: can a concern be raised before a senior person announces a preference? Can a junior member disagree without having to perform certainty? Is there a private or written channel for people who need time to think? Does the leader visibly close the loop?

A meeting ritual can redistribute a little airtime, but it cannot by itself fix unequal pay, insecure employment, retaliation risk, or a structurally unsafe process. Name the scale of the problem honestly.

Diagram / from meeting to learning

A learning loop makes its assumptions visible. First, state the expectation. Then notice what happened. Compare the gap without assigning intent too early. Choose a response and inspect whether it changes the conditions.

A meeting that ends with “we will communicate better” may have made no testable change. A more observable plan might name an owner, an altered handoff, a short time window, and an agreed sign that the change helped or caused a new problem.

This is a teaching diagram, not a guarantee of improvement. Some changes fail. A responsible experiment includes a way to stop or reverse them.

Worked case B / The applause metric

Fictional demonstration. A fictional service desk rewards teams for closing requests quickly. Staff begin splitting one complicated request into several easy closures. The dashboard shows more closures; customers still repeat their story.

Observed: closure counts rose in the fictional scenario; repeated contact also appeared. Possible interpretation: the measure may be encouraging fragmentation. Alternative: a temporary reporting change or a different customer mix may account for the pattern. The scenario does not establish real-world effects.

A small test: follow a sample of requests from first contact to resolution, with privacy protections. Compare the definition of “closed” with what the requester needed. If a new measure is tried, check for gaming, extra burden, and unintended delays. Include frontline workers in deciding what counts as resolution.

Lesson: measures are part of a work system. A number can be accurate about its definition while misleading about the outcome people care about.

4 / Try a reversible experiment

A small experiment is a way to learn, not a miniature reorganization. State the problem in observable terms. Record a starting point if appropriate and ethical. Name one change, a time window, an owner, and the people affected. Decide in advance what evidence could support keeping, adapting, or stopping the change.

Avoid turning a subjective reflection into a score. This project's examination creates a written debrief from choices; the result is an interpretation of the fictional moves, not a measurement of the visitor.

Example: for two meetings, circulate the decision question in advance and ask each participant to write one risk before discussion. Afterwards, ask whether relevant risks surfaced and whether the process created pressure or improved clarity. Two meetings cannot prove a universal intervention effect. They can provide local information.

Do not run experiments that expose people to retaliation, remove essential safeguards, or quietly collect sensitive information. Consult appropriate staff and policies when the stakes require it.

Worksheet / one meeting, four columns

Choose one recent recurring moment. Keep names and sensitive details out of these notes.

OBSERVED: What would a neutral observer record?

INTERPRETED: What explanation did I supply? What alternative explanation is plausible?

MISSING: Whose perspective, context, or data would help? What should not be collected?

TEST: What small, reversible change could make the next instance more informative or humane? Who needs to agree? What would be a reason to stop?

AFTER: What happened? What changed? What remains uncertain?

Use the worksheet to guide a conversation, not to build a dossier about a colleague. If the issue involves discrimination, safety, health, or legal obligations, a playful worksheet is not a substitute for appropriate specialist support.

Limits, references, and attribution

This guide draws on four scholarly sources. Evidence is bounded by each study's design, sample, and setting. Correlations do not prove causation. A research concept may help frame questions without correctly explaining a specific team. Fictional examples illustrate reasoning only and are not evidence.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). "Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999> — supports the bounded summary of a 51-team study and association with learning behavior.

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). "Motivation through the Design of Work: Test of a Theory." *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16(2), 250–279. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(76\)90016-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90016-7) — supports the job-design model discussion.

Morrison, E. W. (2014). "Employee Voice and Silence." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 1, 173–197. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091328> — supports the voice/silence framing.

Edmondson, A. C. (2003). "Speaking Up in the Operating Room: How Team Leaders Promote Learning in Interdisciplinary Action Teams." *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(6), 1419–1452. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00386> — supports the specific 16-team example.

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