

# **Cultivating purpose-driven organizations: The hidden potential of employee activism<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Evolving communication trends have transformed how companies engage with their stakeholders, shifting to a dialogical relationship where transparency and authenticity are paramount. This shift has seen companies and CEOs embracing activism and aligning corporate activities with social issues. Employees are also increasingly acting as internal activists, advocating for changes within their organizations and beyond, which has significant implications for corporate strategy and communication.

Literature highlights the critical role of employees in brand-building through behaviors that align with corporate values, enhancing brand perception and customer engagement. Employee supportive voice, as an internal marketing strategy, improves communication and fosters a sense of responsibility and alignment with the company's purpose.

We conducted in Italy 10 in-depth interviews with corporate communications directors and senior internal communications executives to identify current themes in employee activism as part of a cross-national qualitative study including also the US. Findings reveal that in Italy advocacy activism, which supports corporate initiatives through bottom-up efforts and ERGs, is the most common form. Findings also emphasize that employee advocacy activism thrives in purpose-driven companies, creating synergies between employees and organizations.

Building on marketing and communication literature on employee activism, corporate activism, CEO activism, employee voice and communication behavior, and the results of the empirical study among Italian companies, we arrive to propose a conceptual model to further investigate the factors that may influence employee activism intentions and in particular in its advocacy forms, and the potentially crucial role of CEO and corporate activism in such a relationship.

**Keywords:** Employee Activism, Corporate Activism, CEO Activism, Internal Branding, Employee Advocacy, Purpose-Driven Organizations

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, the evolution of communication trends has marked a significant change in how companies interact with their stakeholders both internally and externally. New communication processes have emerged, highlighting the crucial importance of media and social media in redefining the balance between companies and audiences. The power dynamics between companies and stakeholders have shifted to a dialogical relationship (Kent and Taylor, 2021) where companies must engage personally, earn trust, and demonstrate authenticity, as consumers, employees, and media demand transparency and alignment with their values. This phenomenon indicates a shift in companies' approaches, moving beyond the functional benefits of products to embrace brand activism on social and political issues in response to authenticity demands from society (Mirzai et al., 2022). This paradigm shift signifies an increasing alignment with collective values and a heightened demand for authenticity from businesses. As a result, companies are increasingly engaging in corporate activism and cultivating purpose-driven corporate cultures (Detavernier, 2019). Whereas in the past the corporate vision was the core of a company's positioning, today it is the purpose, i.e. the goal the company aims to pursue in society (Rey et al., 2019). Purpose goes beyond social responsibility, becoming a broader strategic choice.

Companies are redefining their purpose, moving from a profit-centric focus on shareholder value to a broader objective of creating value for the company, its community, and global society. This shift is driven by people's desire for meaningful work experiences and their preference for purpose-driven employers (Adi, 2019). Activism has become a powerful socio-cultural force, influencing changes across social, political, environmental, and economic areas. Activists are now focusing on corporate actions in addition to government decisions, encouraging companies to revise their policies, tackle community issues, and share power (Kalodimos and Leavitt, 2020). Employee activism is rising as workers increasingly voice concerns about ethical conduct, social issues, and workplace fairness (e.g. Briscoe and Gupta, 2021). Key topics include gender discrimination, diversity and inclusion, immigration, abortion, climate change, income inequality, and sexual harassment. In this context, employees are acting as internal activists, advocating for social change within their organizations and challenging their leaders (Li and Soule, 2021; Wowak et al., 2022). They are increasingly expressing their views on various social, political, and environmental issues, both within and beyond the workplace. At the same time, companies and CEOs are addressing these divisive topics to raise social awareness while conducting their main business operations. Employees are pressuring organizations and managers to implement changes through collective efforts, especially when they disagree with company decisions.

Employees significantly influence corporate purpose and strategy by acting as internal advocates or disruptors. Positive employee activism can help organizations improve their social impact on issues such as sustainability, diversity, and inclusion, and effectively communicate these efforts. Conversely, negative employee activism can pose risks and challenges, especially when conflicts become public (Ninova-Solovykh, 2023).

In the following, a review of the literature helps shed light on the emerging trends in employee activism, corporate activism, CEO activism, and shareholder activism through the interconnected dynamics of employee behavior, internal branding, and the roles of employee voice and advocacy.

## **Conceptual framework**

### *Employee behaviors, internal branding, employee voice and employee advocacy*

Understanding employee behaviors is important across various companies and disciplines, including marketing, as these behaviors are key factors in determining organizational success (Mazzei, Ravazzani, 2015).

Employees are increasingly recognized as important strategic assets because they often act as representatives of their organization in interactions with external individuals, such as friends or family members (Kim and Rhee, 2011). These interactions, referred to as Employee Communication Behaviors (ECB), are gaining recognition in both academia and practice for their strategic importance (Lee, 2020). Researchers from fields such as public relations, organizational communication, marketing, and management recognize the value of employees' opinions for companies. These opinions play a crucial role in shaping relationships with external stakeholders and can significantly influence a company's reputation, either positively or negatively. Therefore, increasing emphasis is being placed on understanding employees' information behavior, particularly how they communicate their company's strengths (positive ECB) and weaknesses (negative ECB) (Lee, 2020). The idea of behavioral branding involves employee actions that consistently reflect the brand's values during customer interactions, leading to positive results such as enhanced brand experience, increased customer engagement, and improved customer experience in shopping and service situations (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2015). One widely recognized approach to understanding how brand-building efforts stem from employee behaviors is *internal branding*, a concept developed within the marketing discipline. Internal branding seeks to align employees and all organizational members with the brand to ensure consistency between internal and external brand messages (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2015). This practice facilitates employee behaviors that support the brand.

Moreover, corporate branding uses an organization's unique identity to create a clear branding proposition for stakeholders, incorporating values and characteristics that differentiate it from competitors (Balmer, 2013; McDonald et al., 2001). Internal branding ensures that employees engage with and effectively represent the corporate brand by internalizing and projecting its desired image. This process leads to consistent communication of the brand promise across all stakeholders, aligning with the corporate culture and identity (Foster et al., 2010). Employee behavior plays a crucial role in brand perception, with in-role and extra-role behaviors contributing to brand support. Effective internal branding fosters both types of behavior, turning employees into brand champions and enhancing organizational effectiveness and adaptability (Wallace et al., 2011; King and Grace, 2012; Garas et al., 2018).

Proactive behaviors (Crant 2000; Parker et al. 2006) include actions taken by employees, either within or beyond their regular roles, in anticipation of future events with the intent to create change. When employee behaviors align with a company's brand values, they positively influence the overall brand perception and customer-based brand equity, ultimately providing a brand-building advantage (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2015).

Kim et al. (2014) discuss employee voice as an internal marketing strategy, emphasizing its importance in improving organizational communication and boosting employee career satisfaction when they are encouraged to express their opinions (Wilkinson et al., 2019). Facilitating employee voice entails eliminating communication obstacles to enable the free flow of knowledge, news, and feedback within the company. This practice results in greater employee satisfaction and a positive shift towards customer-focused attitudes, which in turn enhances company profits, product efficiency, and the success of new products (Lings, 1999). Moreover, employee voice strengthens the bond between the company and its employees, promoting involvement in organizational processes and aligning employees with the company's vision and objectives. Improved communication also fosters a heightened sense of responsibility among employees (Varey and Lewis, 1999). In studying employee voice, Thomas (2020) highlights the significance of employee advocacy as a strategic approach to brand promotion, emphasizing its cost-effectiveness and ability to foster authentic engagement between employees and the target market. Employee advocacy involves empowering employees to share company content on their personal social media networks, which enhances the credibility and reach of the corporate brand. This approach leverages employees' genuine connections and interactions to build trust and loyalty among consumers. Thomas (2020) points out that successful employee advocacy requires clear guidelines, motivation, and recognition from employers to ensure active participation and alignment with the company's brand values.

Among expressions of voice and advocacy, employee activism is on the rise as workers increasingly express concerns about ethical behavior, social issues and fairness in the workplace, with employees striving to positively transform their organizations, and promote greater accountability and positive change (Lee, 2022).

#### *Employee activism, corporate activism, CEO activism, and shareholder activism*

Employee activism is a significant communication-driven phenomenon that influences organizational development and reputation (Ninova-Solovykh, 2023). Ignoring employees' concerns can lead to adversarial activism, potentially causing crises when these issues are externalized (Krishna et al., 2023). Krishna (2021, p. 119) describes *employee activism* as "goal-oriented efforts organized and negotiated by individuals and/or groups of employees to internally and/or externally advocate for or against organizational policy and/or decision-making to generate social change".

Literature in this area (e.g. Krishna, 2021; Ninova-Solovykh, 2023; Reyes, 2021) classify employee activism into two types: *adversarial or anti-corporate activism*, where employees raise concerns through confrontation and opposition to their

employer; and *employee advocacy*, where employees support their company while promoting actions that drive social change. Both forms of activism show employees' desire to make a positive impact and improve society, primarily through persuasion (Ninova-Solovykh, 2023). While many studies on employee activism view employees as obstacles or problems, this study highlights them as insider activists who can play the role of supportive communicators.

Within the corporate sphere, activism manifests in various forms such as corporate activism, CEO activism, and shareholder activism, each with unique characteristics and scopes but interconnected with employee activism.

Corporate activism is increasingly influenced by internal organizational dynamics and poses a challenge to traditional theories that emphasize market, political, and social forces as primary drivers, which typically portray firms as primarily profit-oriented and responsive to external pressures (Maks-Solomon and Drewry, 2021). Corporate activism emerges as a response to the growing societal expectation for companies to actively engage in broader social issues beyond pure profit maximization. There is a growing demand from both society and stakeholders for companies to align themselves with their values and demonstrate trustworthy behavior in political, social and environmental areas (Stanley, 2020). Companies are increasingly adopting corporate activism as a strategic approach to integrate social awareness into their core business activities (Villagra et al., 2022).

Similarly, CEO activism involves business leaders publicly expressing their stance on social or political issues to influence public opinion (Hambrick and Wowak, 2021). CEO activism is a strategy CEOs use to convey messages to various stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, alliance partners and local communities. This approach can have different effects on the attitudes and behaviors of these stakeholder groups (Wowak et al., 2022).

Shareholder activism has emerged as a significant institutional force that is changing the dynamics in modern corporations and forcing managers to be accountable to both shareholders and stakeholders (Goranova et al., 2014). In this form of activism, shareholders actively seek to influence corporate policies and practices and extend their influence on areas such as corporate governance and the handling of social, political and environmental issues (Kalodimos and Leavitt, 2020).

Employee activism can drive or be inspired by the above-mentioned forms of activism (e.g. Hong and Ji, 2022; Ji and Hong, 2023). To nurture its advocacy expression, some elements identified by Riggins (2019) as key in corporate activism can also apply to employee activism for fostering an organizational culture that values authenticity and purposeful engagement: clear values and purpose, leadership support, transparency, active listening and co-creation, consistency and alignment, data-driven decision making, and advocacy. Moreover, in purpose-driven organizations there is alignment between the company's overarching purpose and the personal purposes of employees, creating a meaningful and unified work environment. By integrating purpose into strategy and daily operations, these organizations improve employee engagement, motivation and performance. This alignment enables both the organization and its employees to thrive, especially in uncertain and competitive environments, and to develop a deeper sense of purpose and fulfillment at work (Rey et al., 2019). The rise

of purpose-driven organizations has led to a greater focus on aligning corporate actions with stated values. However, this shift has also brought with it significant risks, such as *woke washing* (e.g. Gambetti and Biraghi, 2023) and *corporate hypocrisy* (e.g. Ninova-Solovykh, 2023). Woke washing occurs when companies claim to support social causes without truly aligning their practices, leading to backlash, particularly on social media, and accusations of insincerity (Gambetti and Biraghi, 2023). Furthermore, a company's rhetoric on social issues and its actual behavior, perceptions of corporate hypocrisy can arise, leading to adverse outcomes such as employee disengagement, lower performance, and even active sabotage (Ninova-Solovykh, 2023). These unfulfilled promises can seriously damage a company's reputation and employee morale.

In this context, understanding why employees engage in activist behaviors becomes paramount. Employee activism intentions can be defined as "employees' intentions to participate in collective actions with other coworkers to influence their organization" (Lee, 2022: 6). This definition underlines the collective behavioral efforts of individuals towards their company, which go beyond mere communication while illustrating the close connection between activism intentions and communication behavior.

Building on these literature insights, this study sets out to investigate the factors that may influence employee activism intentions and in particular in its advocacy forms, and the potentially crucial role of CEO and corporate activism in such a relationship.

## **Methodology**

We conducted 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with corporate communications directors and senior internal communications executives from multinational corporations and consulting firms operating in Italy. Data were collected in autumn 2023, with each interview lasting about 1 hour each. The thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012) of the transcribed interview material helped to uncover several core themes related to employee activism, namely: its conceptualization from an organizational perspective; cultural, organizational, and individual influencing factors; prevailing social issues; forms of activism, including internally-driven activism and employee resource groups (ERGs); CEO activism; company voice regulation, risk management and crisis communication.

Building on the few available studies and the findings of this qualitative investigation, it has been possible to frame a research model depicting the factors that have emerged as most likely to influence employees' intentions to engage in advocacy forms of activism as well as the role of corporate activism and CEO activism in this relationship. Hence, this paper will first detail the main findings from the interviews and then present the emerging research model to be tested in future research.

## **Results**

The thematic analysis of the 10 interviews indicated that the *conceptualization of employee activism* is associated with key concepts such as active citizenship, participation, freedom of expression, and external megaphoning, alongside internal values like individual identity, belonging, authenticity, alignment, and trust. Employee activism also fosters cultural change within companies, promoting empowerment,

engagement, and openness in corporate decision-making, creating opportunities for employees to impact strategic decisions, and prioritizing reputation, transparency, and attentive listening. 2. In this regard, Interviewee 6 noted, “At the core, there is a personal assessment of employee activism, exploring how individuals within a company can advocate for a cause. This presupposes having a company that is open and ready to listen”.

Three main categories of *factors* influence employee activism intentions: *national cultural factors*, *organizational factors*, and *individual factors*. National cultural factors, particularly the role of unions, significantly impact the way employees express concerns. Organizational factors include open communication climate, purpose-driven culture, corporate activism, and transparent leadership communication. Individual factors highlight generational differences, with newer generations prioritizing alignment of personal and corporate values.

The interviews highlighted that these factors work together to determine employee activism intentions while significantly boosting employee empowerment, involvement, and the articulation of their opinions.

Concerning the conceptualization of employee activism and the influencing factors, Interviewee 1 stated, “The concept of employee activism is intricately tied to the broader idea of the company’s reputational capital, both within and outside the organization. It involves stakeholders’ ability to express their stance on various company aspects, including products, services, the role of individuals, and extended projects. This activism extends to social issues, aligns with the company’s purpose, and engages in an informal realm of reviews and feedback”. Moreover, Interviewee 1 added, “Employee activism, in this context, differs from corporate activism, which involves a company’s organized engagement in political and social issues. Employee activism, however, reflects the varied positions and opinions of employees, encompassing both positive and negative perspectives toward their company”.

Looking at employee activism intentions to engage in supportive behavior, advocacy activism emerged as the prevalent form of employee activism in Italy. This encompasses bottom-up initiatives and employee resource groups (ERGs) that align with corporate projects on social issues, particularly DEI and sustainability. Concerning bottom-up initiatives, Interviewee 1 said: “Many initiatives stem from suggestions made by employees already actively engaged in associations, prompting them to seek further involvement from the company. These suggestions include proposed activities or sponsorships for local organizations, often integrated into the company’s plans and events”. The connection of bottom-up initiatives and ERGs is further strengthened by Interviewee 3, who said, “Project or initiative proposals that emerge from a bottom-up approach are brought to the attention of ERGs for assessment of feasibility and to determine the appropriate course of action”.

Our findings also suggest that employee activism is more prevalent in purpose-driven companies, where authentic corporate activism on socially relevant issues fosters strong synergies between individuals, the organization, and external stakeholders. Interviewee 9 noted: “Today, it is increasingly important to transcend daily business activities to achieve a higher purpose. As an energy company, employees are more involved in terms of cultural changes stemming from the energy transition. What truly makes a difference

is genuine belief, authenticity, and the alignment of personal values with the corporate mission”. Interviewee 10 further stated: “The transformation of corporate purpose alters the role of activists, aligning them with the new paradigm of the company. As companies evolve, transcending mere financial objectives to embrace higher social goals, activists too are shaped by this shift. This evolution in purpose and values fosters a new organizational identity—one that is increasingly ecologically and socially conscious”. Furthermore, Interviewee 9 stated, “The corporate purpose serves as a guiding force for the business and is poised to become increasingly crucial in the future, within the context of solidifying movements”.

Finally, in Italy, *CEO activism* emerged as a strategic communication approach, where CEOs promote corporate values through storytelling and social media, acting as authoritative voices on societal issues. This strategy fosters supportive employee activism and blurs the lines between internal and external communication. In this sense, Interviewee 10 stated: “CEO activism can manifest either spontaneously or as part of a corporate strategy, whether driven by personal motivations or as a deliberate communication choice”. CEO activism promotes corporate values and encourages supportive employee activism, blurring the lines between internal and external communication. Thus, it is crucial to address employee activism and communication management strategically to enhance these synergies.

### **A research model of employee activism**

Based on the available literature and the results of the interviews, this study delves into employee activism intentions and the organizational and individual factors that may influence them.

Building on the previously presented definition by Lee (2022), this study defines employee activism intentions as the active and intentional participation of employees in promoting social change through collective actions or shared social, political, or environmental issues that have public visibility. These intentions are closely linked to their communication behaviors within companies.

Hence, in the model we are going to present, employee activism intentions are considered as the behavioral component of the model, and organizational and individual factors that may influence them are treated as the independent variables.

#### *Organizational factors*

Organizational factors taken into consideration for this model are the climate of voice, transparent leadership communication, and authenticity.

*Climate of voice.* Employees who actively engage in their workplace by speaking up and offering suggestions demonstrate a proactive approach, influenced by a favorable climate of voice within their work group (Frazier and Bowler, 2012; Morrison, 2011). A climate of voice, shaped significantly by leadership behaviors, encourages employees to express opinions without fear of retaliation (Morrison and Milliken, 2000; Morrison et al., 2011). Psychological safety is crucial in a voice climate, allowing employees to speak up without fearing negative consequences. This sense of safety can



increase employees' willingness to engage in activism on social issues. A supportive environment where coworkers and managers show respect and open communication further enhances employees' motivation to express their thoughts (Ng et al., 2021). Moreover, employees are more likely to voice their opinions when they hold central positions in their team's workflow and friendship networks, especially if the team leader is also centrally positioned (Venkataramani et al., 2016). Thus, a positive voice climate fosters an empowered workforce, encouraging constructive approaches to activism and potentially reducing adversarial forms of employee activism. Hence, this study posits that:

Hp1: A positive climate of voice within the organization is positively associated with employee activism intentions.

*Transparent leadership communication.* Transparent leadership communication is crucial for driving social change, involving the open sharing of information, fostering accountability, and maintaining solid stakeholder relationships. Effective communication requires providing timely, reliable, and pertinent information while avoiding superficial personal opinions, thereby establishing trust and credibility with employees in various contexts such as social responsibility campaigns, organizational change, and crisis management. It involves open, credible, and accountable information flow, fostering mutual understanding and benefiting employee-organization relationships, corporate reputation, and engagement (Jin and You, 2023). Leaders who prioritize transparency gain employee trust, reduce information gaps, and legitimize social advocacy. Key facets of transparent communication include participation (engaging stakeholders in decision-making), accountability (taking responsibility for communication and actions), and substantiality (providing accurate and valuable information). Open communication within the workplace enhances employees' sense of self-worth and contributes to a positive work environment (Hong and Ji, 2022; Ji and Hong, 2023). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hp2: Transparent leadership communication is positively associated with employee activism intentions.

*Authenticity.* Authenticity in corporate behavior is the perceived alignment of a company's actions with its core values and norms (Schallehn et al., 2014). It comprises three elements: consistency (keeping promises), continuity (aligning actions with core values over time), and individuality (unique identity). Authentic companies are seen as value-driven and led by intrinsically motivated individuals, engaging in transparent and consistent communication, and demonstrating social commitment (Gambetti and Biraghi, 2023; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Corporate activism, linked to authenticity, involves companies taking stands on social issues, driven by societal expectations and stakeholder values. This shift requires companies to align their explicit purpose and values with their actions, integrating ethical practices and addressing social issues (Villagra et al., 2022). Authentic corporate activism involves clear communication of a

company's purpose and values, engaging in prosocial business practices, and avoiding negative perceptions such as woke washing, to ensure a genuine and holistic approach that reinforces the company's authenticity and trustworthiness (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Based on this, this study advances the following hypothesis:

Hp3: Perceived corporate authenticity is positively associated with employee activism intentions.

### *Individual factors*

*Individual factors* considered in this model are perceived external prestige, organizational identification, and employee engagement.

*Perceived External Prestige (PEP)* refers to employees' perceptions of how outsiders view their organization. PEP influences the organizational image indirectly, fulfilling employees' needs for self-esteem and self-enhancement, thereby fostering pride and organizational identification. Employees form PEP through external sources such as reference groups and word of mouth (Smidts et al., 2001). It is an individual-level variable, meaning different employees within the same organization may perceive its external prestige differently. PEP and employee activism are interconnected and influenced by organizational values, employee engagement, and culture. A prestigious external reputation promotes employee activism aligned with the organization's values and social responsibility. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be put forward:

Hp4: Perceived external prestige of the organization is positively associated with employee activism intentions.

*Organizational identification* involves the emotional and psychological connection employees feel toward their workplace, influencing their supportive attitudes and alignment with organizational goals (Smidts et al., 2001). Effective organizational communication, through message content and communication climate, enhances this identification. A positive communication climate encourages self-enhancement and active participation in organizational decisions. The alignment of personal values with organizational values further strengthens this bond, creating a sense of purpose and community. Perceived external prestige also boosts organizational identification by fostering pride and self-esteem (Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Smidts et al., 2001). Strong identification can motivate employees and promote positive activism within the organization. Hence, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

Hp5: Employee organizational identification is positively associated with employee activism intentions.

*Employee engagement* involves employees' enduring motivational and psychological states, where they are cognitively, physically, and emotionally committed to their work.

This state is characterized by energy, enthusiasm, involvement, efficacy, and deep connections. Employee engagement is a dynamic process influenced by personal traits and situational factors, leading to cognitive absorption, emotional dedication, and vigor (Schaufeli et al., 2006; Mazzei, 2018). The benefits of employee engagement extend to both the organization and the individual, contributing to competitive advantage, profitability, innovation, employee retention, and overall organizational success (Mazzei, 2018; Einwiller et al., 2021). Benefits include improved organizational performance and employee outcomes, such as innovation, advocacy, and retention. The research explores if engaged employees are more likely to participate in value-aligned activism, enhanced by a positive voice climate, clear communication, and supportive leadership. Therefore, this study posits that:

Hp6: Employee engagement is positively associated with employee activism intentions.

#### *The moderating role of Corporate Activism and CEO Activism*

Corporate and CEO activism are not only external expressions of organizational values but also internal catalysts that can significantly shape and enhance employee activism. When these forms of activism are authentically aligned with the organization, they can resonate with employees, encouraging them to actively support and advocate for the company's purpose. This alignment can create a more cohesive and purpose-driven organization, where the collective efforts of both leadership and employees are harmonized toward common goals (e.g. Hong and Ji, 2022; Villagra et al., 2022; Ji and Hong, 2023).

Moreover, by examining the supportive aspects of corporate and CEO activism, organizations can gain valuable insights into how these practices influence the relationship between leadership initiatives and employee activism. Specifically, understanding this dynamic can help organizations strategically leverage activism to foster a culture where employees feel more connected to the organization's purpose and are motivated to contribute to its success.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate whether corporate activism and CEO activism can enhance the influence of the six independent variables, namely climate of voice, transparent leadership communication, authenticity, perceived external prestige, organizational identification, and employee engagement, on employee activism intentions.

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hp7: Corporate activism moderates the impact of the six independent variables (Hp1-6) driving employee activism intentions.

Hp8: CEO activism moderates the impact of the six independent variables (Hp1-6) driving employee activism intentions.

The research model is depicted in Figure 1. The hypotheses will be tested using linear and multiple regression analyses to assess both the individual and relative impact of the various factors on employee activism intentions. First, the six independent factors will be examined separately to determine their relationship with employee activism intentions. Then, the moderating effects of corporate activism and CEO activism will be analyzed through multiple regression, with all six independent factors included to assess their combined influence on employee activism intentions.

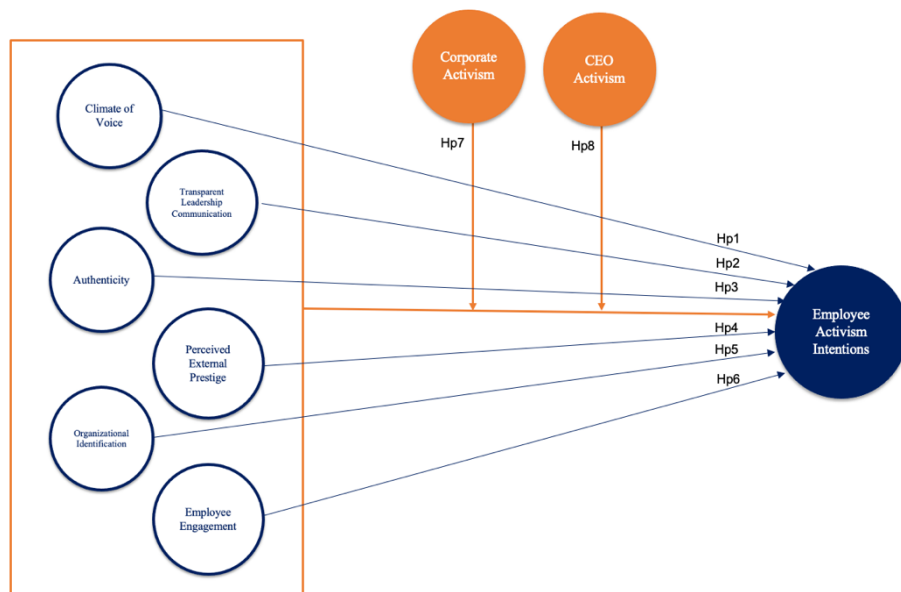


Figure 1. Research Model

### Concluding remarks: Research model testing

Our study highlights the role of employee activism in cultivating purpose-driven organizations, emphasizing the potential for employees to influence corporate culture and strategic direction through advocacy and activism. Previous findings reveal that advocacy activism, particularly when aligned with corporate and CEO activism, fosters a supportive environment where employees can engage in socially relevant issues, thereby enhancing organizational authenticity and stakeholder synergy. Our interview findings confirm that aligning employee, corporate, and CEO activism is essential for organizations to create a truly purpose-driven culture, enhancing strategic communication management and fostering strong synergies between employees, the organization, and external stakeholders.

Purpose-driven companies that embrace transparent communication and employee engagement (Rey et al., 2019) are expected to be better positioned to harness the positive impact of employee activism. To further explore these dynamics, we arrived to propose a research model that examines the factors that may influence employee

activism intentions and in particular in its advocacy forms, and the potentially crucial role of CEO and corporate activism in such a relationship. This model will be tested through a forthcoming survey on Italian employees to validate the developed hypotheses and relationships, providing deeper insights into the mechanisms driving employee activism. Integrating corporate strategies with employee activism and effective communication management is essential for organizations aiming to achieve genuine purpose-driven success.

### **Implications for research and management**

The results of this study on employee activism have important implications for both research and management.

From a research perspective, the study highlights the need to further explore the dynamics of employee activism in purpose-driven organizations, particularly the interplay between employee advocacy and corporate and CEO activism. Future research could focus on quantitatively validating the proposed model in different cultural and organizational contexts to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence employee activism intentions. In addition, examining the impact of additional factors, such as generational differences and organizational culture, on these dynamics would contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical framework and research model. In terms of implications for management, organizations should recognize the strategic importance of fostering an internal climate that supports employee voice and advocacy. By fostering transparent leadership communication, authenticity of corporate actions and alignment between organizational and individual values, companies can improve employee engagement and leverage positive activism. This approach not only helps to mitigate the risks associated with adversarial activism but also strengthens the company's reputation and its alignment with social, political and environmental goals. Therefore, considering employee activism in corporate strategy and communications management is critical to creating a truly purpose-driven organization.

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