

# Employee activism: cross-country perspectives and individual-organizational drivers

## RESEARCH TOPIC

In a context of rising social expectations, employees are increasingly taking an **active role** in socially relevant issues. Employee activism emerges as a **bottom-up phenomenon** that can support the organization (**advocacy**) or oppose it (**adversary**), unfolding internally or externally and shaped by cultural, organizational and individual factors. The **activism intentions** of employees can be *communicative*, such as voicing concerns, raising issues or advocating for change, or *actionable*, when employees take concrete steps such as joining collective initiatives or participating in visible protests. Understanding the conditions under which these intentions emerge and how they intersect with **corporate and CEO activism**, is essential to transform activism from a potential reputational risk into a lever for **purpose-driven change**.

For further information

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## OBJECTIVES

To explore the phenomenon of employee activism (EA) within organizations, analyzing:

- how **communication professionals interpret** it and **manage** it across different cultural contexts;
- which **organizational** and **individual factors** influence the **intentions** of employees to engage in **communicative** and **actionable** forms of activism on socially relevant issues.

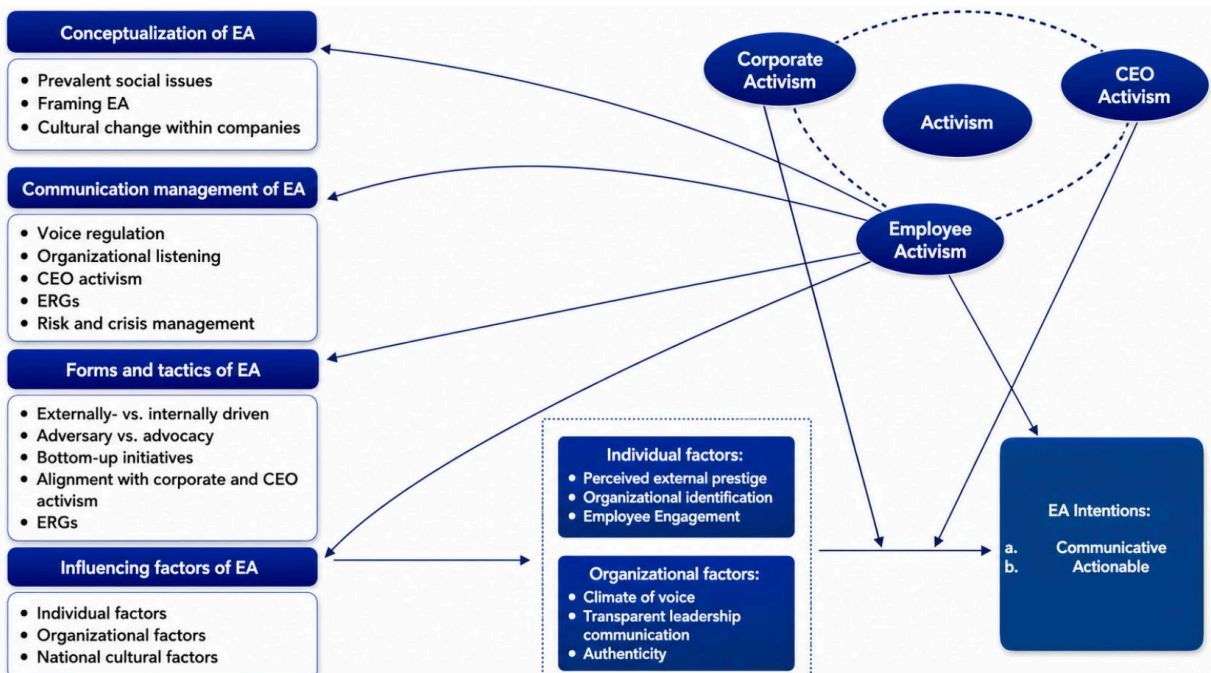
## METHODOLOGY

### Study 1: Qualitative cross-country (Italy/USA)

- 20 semi-structured interviews with communication professionals
- Data collection: August–November 2023
- Thematic analysis

### Study 2: Quantitative (Italy)

- Survey on 324 Italian employees
- Data collection: June–July 2024
- Regression analysis and moderation effects (PROCESS Macro, SPSS)



## KEY FINDINGS

- EA is a dynamic process influenced by **factors at three levels: national-cultural** (role of unions, social norms), **organizational** (climate of voice, transparent leadership, authenticity, purpose-driven culture), and **individual** (organizational identification, personal values, generational differences)
- **Cross-country differences** are substantial: in Italy, activism mostly takes advocacy forms that are internally directed and aligned with corporate activism; in the USA, adversarial and externally directed forms are more frequent
- **Climate of voice** and **organizational identification** are significant predictors of communicative activism intentions; however, **authenticity** has a negative effect, suggesting that employees who already perceive their organization as authentic may feel less urgency to act
- An **intention–action gap** emerges: no factor significantly predicts actionable intentions, because of perceived risks, organizational barriers, and collective dynamics
- **Corporate activism** and **CEO activism** positively moderate the relationship between organizational or individual factors and communicative intentions, reinforcing the effects of climate of voice, transparent leadership, authenticity, and identification

## IMPLICATIONS

- A **supportive climate of voice** and **transparent leadership communication** are enabling conditions for employees to feel legitimized in expressing **constructive forms of activism**
- **Alignment among employee, corporate, and CEO activism** is essential to build authentically **purpose-driven organizations** and prevent reputational tensions
- **Employee Resource Groups** (ERGs) and **voice regulation** (social media policies, ethical codes, whistleblowing channels) can serve as strategic instruments for **listening, dialogic communication** and **risk prevention**
- To close the intention–action gap: **concrete opportunities, reliable protections** and a **sense of efficacy** are needed; these aspects determine whether voice remains aspirational or becomes concrete
- A **culturally contextualized approach** is necessary, as activism management strategies that are effective in one country may not be transferable to other contexts

## REFERENCES

- Ravazzani, S., Jin, Y., Conti, S., Rachwalski, A., & Robinson, S. G. (2025). Seeking social change from the inside out: a cross-country study on employee activism. *Journal of Communication Management*.
- Conti, S., Wang, Y., & Ravazzani, S. (2025). From Voice to Action? A Survey on Organizational and Individual Factors Impacting Employee Activism Intentions. *International Journal of Business Communication*.

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