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Include Me: The Role of Disability Voice in Co-Constructing the Workplace Inclusion of People With Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

People with disabilities (PWD) often face barriers to inclusion at work. To tackle this challenge, past research focused on the role of organizations to create more inclusive workplaces. What remains understudied, however, is the role that PWD often take themselves in shaping their inclusion experiences. In this paper, we take a co-constructionist perspective on inclusion and study *disability voice* as PWDs' self-inclusion efforts with which they claim inclusion at work through speaking out about their disability-related needs, concerns, and ideas. Using mixed methods, we explore disability voice as a construct and study how it affects the inclusion experiences of PWD in three studies. In Study 1, we draw on 50 interviews with PWD in Germany and in Switzerland and identify seven facets of disability voice. In Study 2, we build on our findings from the first study and develop a disability voice scale. In Study 3, we analyze a sample of 676 PWD across two measurement waves to test a theoretical model examining the relationship between disability voice and PWDs' inclusion perceptions, as well as disability visibility as a potential boundary condition. We find that disability voice is positively related to PWDs' perceptions of opportunity for authenticity and belongingness. However, disability visibility did not significantly moderate these relationships. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

People with disabilities (PWD) are one of the largest minority groups in the world (World Health Organization 2022). They include “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations 2006, 4). With around 16% of the world's population (World Health Organization 2022), PWD represent a large pool of talent that continues to be underrepresented in the workplace (OECD 2022). Past research has made great advances in uncovering the disadvantages that PWD face at work (e.g., Beatty et al. 2019; Ren et al. 2008) and how organizational climates, human resource practices, or leadership can help to better include PWD into the workforce (e.g., Boehm and Dwertmann 2015).

What has largely been overlooked, however, are the self-inclusion efforts that PWD make themselves to improve their experiences at work. While organizations and leaders must do their part in fostering inclusive work environments (Schloemer-Jarvis et al. 2022), only PWD know their unique reality (Jammaers 2023). Thus, they are often required to communicate the specific barriers they face and what they need to participate equally and perform their job effectively. In other words, the voices of PWD are often crucial to help organizations understand their experiences and needs. The slogan “nothing about us without us” has long been used by disability activists to demand that PWD can express their voice and are actively involved in the planning of strategies and policies that affect their lives (Hein and Ansari 2022). Also, the United Nations Convention

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on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) embodies this motto, calling on state parties to “closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities” (UN CRPD, Art.4(3)).

The notion that voice is particularly relevant for the inclusion of minority groups is also not new to research (e.g., Bell et al. 2011). Prior work stressed the importance of the voice of minority groups to break spirals of silence that occur when individuals refrain from voicing unpopular opinions and minority perspectives at work (Bowen and Blackmon 2003). Such minority group voice can take different forms. Marginalized groups may engage in progroup voice behaviors, i.e., speaking up on behalf of one's minority group, with the aim “to improve the organizational context” for the respective minority group (Leigh and Melwani 2019, 577). However, minority group voices may also take more individual forms, such as daily behaviors in which marginalized employees speak to supervisors and colleagues about their own work-related needs and experiences (Florey and Harrison 2000).

We argue that such minority voice behaviors are particularly relevant for PWD, as their work-related experiences and needs can vary greatly depending on the nature of their disability, personal characteristics, and job requirements (Baumgärtner et al. 2015; Schur et al. 2014). In addition, the barriers that PWD experience often directly impact their job performance and their well-being (Baldridge and Veiga 2006; Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall 2014). For example, inaccessible software may hinder PWD from carrying out certain job tasks or a meeting schedule may interfere with an employee's daily therapy. Particularly for employees with disabilities that entail features that are not directly visible to others, disability voice is likely to play an important role as others may struggle to understand how the disability manifests and cannot anticipate barriers that the person might encounter (Santuzzi et al. 2014). Surprisingly though, we know little about how PWD enact voice in organizations and how such disability voice affects PWDs' inclusion experiences at work. While past research examined why PWD may refrain from requesting accommodations (Baldridge and Swift 2013, 2016; Baldridge and Veiga 2001, 2006) or seeking help (Kulkarni 2012), a comprehensive understanding of how PWD use their voice to foster inclusion at work is missing.

In this paper, we thus study disability voice as PWDs' self-inclusion efforts at work. Doing so, we take a co-constructionist approach on inclusion and examine how PWD actively claim inclusion through disability voice across three studies. In Study 1, we aim to explore how disability voice manifests. We conducted interviews with 50 PWD and used thematic analysis to identify different behaviors of disability voice in organizations. In Study 2, we used our findings from Study 1 and three additional samples to develop a disability voice scale. In Study 3, we test a theoretical model examining the relationship between disability voice and PWDs' workplace inclusion (measured by perceived opportunity for authenticity and belongingness), as well as a potentially moderating role of disability visibility.

Thereby, we aim to contribute to the literature on inclusion and disability in three main ways. First, we introduce a novel co-constructionist perspective on inclusion by integrating current conceptualizations of inclusion (Jansen et al. 2014;

Shore et al. 2011) with social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1966). We theorize that social inclusion can be co-created by the individual and the group. Thereby we extend prior ideas about the active role of the individual in inclusion (Jansen et al. 2020) by shedding light on whether and how individuals' motivation to be included can translate into concrete actions.

Second, applying this co-constructionist perspective to PWD in organizations, we conceptualize disability voice as an underexplored phenomenon: PWDs' active efforts to claim inclusion. By defining disability voice as a novel disability-identity related construct and developing a disability voice scale, we examine how it manifests in the everyday work lives of PWD and show that, despite the unique risks involved, PWD actively share their perspectives and needs, aiming to foster their own inclusion at work. This challenges portrayals of PWD as passive recipients of organizational efforts and underscores the active efforts they undertake with the aim to shape their workplace experiences (cf. Randel 2025).

Third, we broaden the nomological network of disability inclusion (e.g., Lee et al. 2026; Stone and Colella 1996) by not only studying disability voice as an individual-level antecedent of PWDs' perceptions of belongingness and authenticity but also by hypothesizing disability visibility as a boundary condition. We thus go beyond understanding what disability voice is and examine its actual effects on the inclusion of PWD, as well as the moderating role disability visibility plays in this relationship. In doing so, we respond to calls to avoid treating disability as an overgeneralized “master status” (Beatty et al. 2019, 132) and instead consider how specific disability attributes might shape workplace behavior and treatment.

1 | Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

1.1 | The Social Co-Construction of Inclusion

Shore et al. (2011, 1265) defined inclusion as “the degree to which [employees perceive] that [they are] an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies [their] needs for belongingness and uniqueness.” True inclusion thus requires both a sense of connection to the group and recognition of individual differences. Jansen et al. (2014) built upon that conceptualization and put a special focus on the perceived value of authenticity. They highlighted that while inclusion inevitably requires to be valued for one's unique characteristics, it also reflects the group's appreciation of one's authentic self in a broader sense—regardless of whether that self is similar to or different from other group members. The authors thus conceptualize belongingness and value of authenticity as central components of inclusion. Belongingness describes an individual's sense of group membership and perception of being liked and appreciated by the group. Authenticity encompasses individuals' perceptions of not only being allowed to be authentic but also being encouraged to be who they are.

The value of authenticity seems particularly important for PWD. This includes having room to be oneself and being valued for one's differences and/or similarities to other group members

(Jansen et al. 2014). PWD authentically expressing their differences and uniqueness may involve being open about impairments and challenges without feeling the need to change. However, also being valued for similarities is important for PWD. This is because valuing the similarities of PWD affirms their capabilities and draws attention to the multiplicity of identities and characteristics they embody beyond disability. In fact, in ableist work contexts, PWD are often perceived as different and face stigma such as being less competent because of their disability (Jammaers et al. 2016). Hence, being valued for their similarities with others in the group shifts this ableist lens to look beyond their disability and acknowledges the similarities they share with others at work. In this vein, PWD are also valued for “prototypical” characteristics unrelated to their disability (e.g., certain interests, capabilities and skills, or educational background) and can express their authentic selves regardless of whether these characteristics align with or differ from those of others. Authenticity is thus important as it captures valuing PWD for their genuine, whole selves, which include both unique and common characteristics.

In Jansen et al.’s (2014) conceptualization and measurement of inclusion, the group is viewed as the primary source of inclusion, while the individual seeking inclusion is considered its target. An individual’s inclusion is therefore seen as dependent on the “group’s willingness to include the individual” and is “determined by the signals that the individual receives from the group concerning [their] position within the group” (Jansen et al. 2014, 372). When the group conveys a sense of belongingness and signals opportunity for individual authenticity, individuals interpret these signals and assess how well they align with their own needs. The greater the perceived alignment with the individual’s needs for belonging and authenticity, the more included they feel (Jansen et al. 2014).

More recently, Jansen et al. (2020) have made a first step in acknowledging that it is not only the group that determines if an individual is to be included but that also the individual has agency in denying or attempting group membership. Specifically, they offer a finer grained view of inclusion as the interplay between the group’s willingness to include and individuals’ motivation to belong and examine how different combinations of these inclusion goals influence well-being and performance (Jansen et al. 2020). What remains underexplored, however, is how individuals may translate their motivation to be included into self-inclusion efforts, and whether these efforts can actually contribute to increased inclusion perceptions.

Building on social constructionism, we advance the idea that individuals have agency in seeking their own workplace inclusion and suggest that inclusion can be co-constructed by both the group and the individual. In their foundational work, Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that what we perceive as societal reality, including beliefs and norms, is not inherently objective or self-evident, but socially constructed through continuous human interaction. Individuals may externalize their subjective experiences, which are then objectivated and later internalized by others through socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Applying this notion of a socially constructed reality to inclusion perceptions suggests that a shared understanding of inclusive collaboration emerges through the exchange of individuals’

subjective experiences. Although everyday life is shared with others, individuals’ perceptions of reality do not fully overlap. To create and maintain a shared sense of reality, individuals must communicate, with language playing a crucial role in objectifying experience and enabling the construction of a common stock of knowledge (Ahearn 2001; Berger and Luckmann 1966). When seeking to establish a social reality of inclusive collaboration that is meaningful to both the including and the included parties, it is thus essential that both exchange their subjective realities.

Subjective reality is shaped by social context: what people perceive as real or true depends on the society or group they belong to (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Hogg and Williams 2000). One such group with a distinct social reality is that of PWD, who often have experiences and needs that may not be visible to or shared by others (Santuzzi and Waltz 2016). PWD actively sharing these perspectives and contributing disability-specific knowledge is therefore critical for shaping and transforming the social construction of an “inclusive” workplace. As initial evidence, Hein and Ansari (2022) show how PWD, working together with nondisabled powerholders, redefined the identity of PWD in a sheltered workshop from benevolently marginalized to included.

When both parties co-construct a reality of connected and authentic collaboration, they can both enhance an individual’s inclusion perception. Using the terminology from leadership identity theory (DeRue and Ashford 2010), we suggest that work groups can “grant” inclusion by signaling their willingness to provide belonging and to value authenticity, while individuals can actively “claim” inclusion by communicating their experiences, perspectives, and needs.

1.2 | Granting Inclusion: The Group’s Willingness to Include PWD

Given the central role of the group emphasized in Jansen et al.’s (2014) definition and operationalization of inclusion, most research on the inclusion of PWD focused on what the group, i.e., organizations as the including party, can do to signal to PWD that they belong and can be authentic at work. Dwertmann and Boehm (2016) and Sanclemente et al. (2024), for example, showed how inclusive organizational climates and social support can promote the workplace inclusion of PWD. Also, leader behavior such as transformational leadership (Kensbock and Boehm 2016) or health-focused leadership (Boehm and Dwertmann 2015; Boehm et al. 2026) as well as human resource practices like organizational career development initiatives for PWD (Kulkarni 2016) and idiosyncratic deals (i-deals; Brzykcy et al. 2019; Ho et al. 2022) were suggested as important factors to enhance PWDs’ inclusion experiences (Beatty et al. 2019; Jammaers et al. 2016).

Besides such broader organizational endeavors, we suggest that a group’s willingness and actions to be inclusive can also follow PWDs’ individual claims for inclusion. By expressing their unique experiences, PWD can inform how they wish to be seen and treated, thereby guiding groups’ inclusive actions and enhancing their own perceptions of inclusion. To co-construct

inclusive workplaces that really answer the individual needs of PWD, organizations and leaders are thus responsible for listening to and acting on the perspectives, needs, and ideas communicated by PWD and thereby conveying their willingness to include PWD.

1.3 | Claiming Inclusion: PWDs' Disability Voice

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that language is key to co-constructing shared realities, enabling individuals to make their perspectives, knowledge, and expectations accessible to others. Language allows individuals to objectify and share experiences, transmit meanings across time and space, and make the everyday world communicable. Unlike other signs, language goes beyond immediate interactions and allows people to capture and share large amounts of meaning (Berger and Luckmann 1966). We therefore suggest that PWD can use language to claim inclusion, articulating their perspectives through disability voice.

Employee voice is a widespread construct in the organizational behavior literature and has been defined as extra-role behavior (Van Dyne and LePine 1998) that describes "informal and discretionary communication by an employee of ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change" (Morrison 2014, 174). As such, employee voice is essential for organizational functioning as it directs superiors' attention to critical issues and shows how things can be done in new or better ways (Maynes and Podsakoff 2014; Van Dyne and LePine 1998).

Employee voice is particularly relevant for minority groups like PWD to improve their inclusion at work (cf. Leigh and Melwani 2019, 2022). Despite substantial research on employee voice, however, the specific perspective and lived experiences of PWD remain largely overlooked (Starzyk and Bauer 2025). Yet, voice seems particularly important for PWD, as their perceptions of belonging and authenticity often depend on workplace accessibility (Van Laer et al. 2022). For instance, PWD may not feel like they belong to the team and can authentically participate in a conversation if a team outing is held at an inaccessible location or if communication occurs through modes they cannot fully engage with. Likewise, a group may intend to be inclusive, yet its actions or statements are not interpreted as such by the individual. A common example in the case of PWD is misguided and unsolicited help such as pushing a wheelchair without permission or spontaneously grabbing a blind person's arm to help them across the street. While the group may perceive such behavior as signals of inclusion, PWD may feel marginalized or disrespected (Buchter 2022; Keller and Galgay 2010). Therefore, it is often up to PWD to actively clarify and prevent misunderstandings or address discriminatory behaviors to facilitate more inclusive actions from the group.

We define disability voice as PWDs' communication of disability-related needs, ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues with the intent to improve their inclusion at work. It further subsumes behaviors

that often occur in informal, daily interactions at work. In line with Starzyk and Bauer (2025), we suggest that disability voice is a distinct type of employee voice that focuses on employee voice behaviors that are disability-related. As such, it may be related to but remains distinct from other disability-specific work behaviors, such as disability disclosure, accommodation requests, or i-deals. Table 1 summarizes how disability voice differs from both general employee voice and these constructs in terms of content, agents, purpose, and implications.

First, manifestations of disability voice as well as its consequences differ from those of general forms of employee voice. Existing operationalizations of employee voice like promotive and prohibitive voice (Liang et al. 2012) are rather broad, can be expressed by any member of a work unit, and address improvements aimed at benefiting the entire unit. In contrast, disability voice can be expressed only by PWD, as it focuses on their personal lived realities and associated ideas, suggestions, and concerns related to their own workplace inclusion. As such, disability voice is inseparable from the agent's identity as a PWD, which also makes them vulnerable for the potential stigmatization of others. While employees making general suggestions about improving procedures or practices for the work group can enhance their social status at work (Weiss and Morrison 2019), disability voice that addresses personal disability-related needs is often risky as PWD face prejudices and discrimination as low-status and low-power organizational members (Jammaers et al. 2016). In fact, PWD often find themselves trapped in voice dilemmas between their lived experiences and organizational expectations, where both speaking up and remaining silent potentially bear negative consequences for their inclusion (Starzyk and Bauer 2025). This distinction of disability voice is also in line with the notion of previous voice literature suggesting that specific voice content matters and needs to be specified (Burriss et al. 2017; Huang and Paterson 2017).

Further, disability voice goes beyond disability disclosure. Disclosure describes an individual's choice to openly talk about their stigmatized identity that could otherwise be concealed (Follmer et al. 2020). While disclosure can include sharing personal experiences and information about one's disability with others, its primary focus lies in identity management, i.e., deciding (how much) to reveal a disability identity at work (Lyons et al. 2017; Santuzzi and Waltz 2016). Disability voice goes beyond the decision to let others know about one's disability identity and reflects sharing specific information, concerns, or ideas aimed at influencing others' understanding and behavior to co-construct inclusion. It involves PWD offering insights not only about themselves and their disability but also about specific changes they believe would enhance their sense of inclusion in the workplace. Disability voice thus reflects PWDs' efforts to initiate conversations and drive change, shaping a more inclusive work environment that may also extend beyond their personal needs.

Finally, disability voice may include but goes beyond (formal) requests for workplace accommodations or i-deals. Accommodation requests aim at reducing disabling barriers by adapting work duties (e.g., task reassignment), the physical work environment (e.g., a single office), work tools (e.g., a screen reader), or work time (e.g., flexible working hours) to suit the particular needs

TABLE 1 | Conceptual distinction of disability voice from related constructs.

Key elements	Disability voice	General voice	Disability disclosure	Accommodation requests	Idiosyncratic deals
Behavioral content	Expressing information, ideas, suggestions, and concerns related to one's disability	Expressing information, ideas, suggestions, and concerns related to the work unit/organization as a whole	Revealing one's disability to others at work	(Formally) requesting workplace accommodations related to one's disability	(Formally) negotiating special employment terms with one's manager that differ from those of co-workers
Agent	Employee with disability	Any employee	Employee with disability	Employee with disability or third-party representative	Any employee or third-party representative
Aim	Initiate change in how PWDs are perceived, treated, and collaborated with within the team/organization	Initiate change that aids the overall performance of the work unit/organization	Reveal one's identity as a PWD in the workplace	Assert the legal right to workplace adjustments that remove barriers and increase accessibility	Obtain tailored work arrangements that enhance person–job fit and benefit both employee and employer
Implications for the individual	- Enables PWD to express their needs and lived experience in disability inclusion - Addressing disability identity may evoke stigmatization	- Intention to improve work functioning may be positively recognized - Risk of backlash if proposed changes are perceived as personal threats	- Enables authentic PWD identity expression - Reduces burden of concealment - Addressing disability identity may evoke stigmatization	- Enables to perform work with one's disability - May evoke coworker resentment and/or intensify stigma	- Supports individualized work design - Fosters motivation and job retention - May evoke coworker envy and resentment
Implications for others	- Enhances insight and understanding of PWD's perspectives and needs - Pinpoints actionable opportunities to increase inclusion of PWD	Helps to identify areas and initiate actions to enhance unit/organizational performance	- Enables identification of PWD (e.g., for quota compliance) - Allows for compliance with equal opportunity policies and legislation	- Legally mandates action, potentially incurring costs - Enables employment and work ability of PWD	- Supervisors are not legally required to grant such arrangements - Also benefits the organization (e.g., through retention)
Seminal works	Current paper	Morrison (2014) Liang et al. (2012)	Santuzzi et al. (2014) Von Schrader et al. (2014)	Baldrige and Veiga (2001) Baldrige and Swift (2013)	Rousseau (2001) Rosen et al. (2013)

and capabilities of PWD (Colella 2001; Schur et al. 2014). They are often legally mandated and follow a standardized, formal procedure to adapt work characteristics to individual needs. Similarly, i-deals are individually negotiated work arrangements that differ from those of colleagues and provide mutual benefits for both the employee and the organization (Rosen et al. 2013; Rousseau 2001). Unlike accommodation requests, i-deals can generally be negotiated by any employee, regardless of disability status. However, for PWD, i-deals can also function as a form of work accommodation, supporting work ability and promoting job retention (Brzykcy et al. 2019). Disability voice provides a means for PWD to initiate discussions about workplace accommodations or i-deals negotiations, thereby enriching existing research (e.g., Baldrige and Swift 2013, 2016; Brzykcy et al. 2019) by emphasizing how PWD can engage with key actors at work to raise and address these needs.

1.4 | Disability Voice and Inclusion Perceptions of PWD

1.4.1 | Disability Voice and PWDs' Perceptions of Opportunity for Authenticity

Disability voice provides PWD a foundation for expressing themselves and their disability identity more authentically. It may involve openly sharing personal and sometimes intimate information about their daily life with a disability, offering a more complete and authentic representation of the individual (Lynch and Rodell 2018; Santuzzi and Waltz 2016). By speaking up about specific experiences, needs, concerns, and ideas related to their disability at work, they articulate not only their differences and unique characteristics (e.g., barriers, limitations) but also their similarities (e.g., their capabilities and what works well for them) to others. Thereby, PWD enable the group to give room for and value their authentic selves. Without knowledge about how PWD experience the workplace with their disability, the group may not know about the characteristics that need room and are to be valued as specific contributions PWD can make to the group (Shore et al. 2011). For example, when an employee with a visual impairment shares their experience of navigating digital systems in the workplace and suggests adjustments to improve accessibility, they reveal not only their needs but also their unique expertise in identifying usability barriers (Dwertmann et al. 2025). Through this open articulation, the team gains a deeper understanding of the employee's perspective and capabilities. Without such insights, the group might overlook both the importance of accessibility and the distinctive contributions that the employee can bring to the group. The same holds for PWD expressing their capabilities and pointing to similarities where they can work like their nondisabled colleagues. Only if the group is aware of these capabilities and contributions can they provide room and truly value the authentic selves of PWD.

At the same time, disability voice offers others the opportunity to learn about an individual's disability and to understand what is needed to work with it effectively. In doing so, it enables colleagues to more fully recognize and support what it means for someone to be their true self with their disability at work. This may spark positive cycles of authenticity, creating

an environment where employees feel comfortable being open, which again reinforces feelings of authenticity. Taken together, we propose that PWD can enhance their own perception of authenticity through disability voice by taking the initiative to speak openly about their disability and related experiences, thereby allowing others to respond and act in ways that support and encourage authentic expression in the workplace.

Hypothesis 1. *PWDs' disability voice is positively related to their perceptions of opportunity for authenticity at work.*

1.4.2 | Disability Voice and PWDs' Perceptions of Belongingness

Similarly, we suggest that disability voice is positively related to PWDs' perceptions of belongingness. By speaking up about specific needs, complaining about barriers, and proactively contributing ideas, disability voice enables others at work to make targeted adjustments to work environments, processes, and behaviors so that PWD can equally participate and perform at work. In turn, when PWD can engage in work tasks and relationships as equals and actively contribute to shaping processes, designing environments, and guiding interactions, they are more likely to feel empowered as valued members of the team, fostering a stronger sense of belonging (Nishii and Leroy 2022).

Importantly, disability voice also involves PWD deliberately highlighting their distinct experiences and needs. Studies show that such hints to group identity differences can trigger in-group-outgroup dynamics, potentially leading to bias against PWD and reduced feelings of belonging to a common social group (Dwertmann and Boehm 2016; Tajfel and Turner 1986). However, such differences are often unavoidably salient in everyday workplace interactions between employees with and without disabilities. For example, when PWD encounter barriers in completing tasks, use alternative communication methods, or are visibly different due to physical characteristics. Likewise, also for concealable disabilities, some evidence of impairment may be apparent but could be misattributed to other causes, such as low physical fitness or lack of knowledge or skills (Santuzzi et al. 2014). Following Berger and Luckmann's (1966) notion that shared social realities emerge when individuals exchange their personal experiences, it can thus be meaningful for PWD to actively share their experiences and needs in order to at least create opportunities for collaboratively shaping a more inclusive way of working together. Evidence supporting the potential effectiveness of this strategy comes from research indicating that positive cross-group interactions can reduce negative intergroup attitudes and stereotypes (Dwertmann et al. 2023). Furthermore, research on the deliberate concealment of disability or efforts to avoid drawing attention to it suggests that such behavior can be linked to psychological strain, self-distancing, and shallower workplace relationships (Santuzzi et al. 2014).

Further, persons without disabilities often feel uncertain about how to interact with someone who has a disability (Baidi and Ilias 2020). For instance, they might not know how to communicate with a person who is blind or deaf. This uncertainty can lead to a fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, which can

result in avoiding interaction altogether (Duronto et al. 2005). When PWD, in turn, openly share how they prefer to be treated and what supports their participation in conversations, it helps others to feel more confident and comfortable and enables further interactions. We argue that disability voice creates understanding by fostering the exchange of perspectives, supporting the identification and removal of barriers between people with and without disabilities. This may ultimately contribute to the development of a shared social identity and PWDs' sense of belonging at work.

Hypothesis 2. *PWDs' disability voice is positively related to their perceptions of belongingness at work.*

1.5 | The Role of Disability Visibility

Importantly, not all PWD identify with or experience their disabilities in the same way. A key consideration is that disability manifestations vary in visibility and can be more or less effectively concealed (Santuzzi et al. 2014). Some disabilities are immediately apparent through visible features, such as physical differences or assistive devices like a wheelchair. Others have manifestations that can be concealed, such as ostomy bags or skin conditions, or have noticeable manifestations that are difficult to interpret as a disability, like fatigue or performance declines from chronic illness or mental health conditions. Also, there are disabilities that can be entirely invisible unless communicated, such as pain or depression.

For PWD who can conceal some or all manifestations of their disability, managing how much to reveal or conceal their disability identity poses a unique challenge. Symptoms that are not immediately visible or that fluctuate in intensity or quality, risk being perceived as less legitimate, faked, or exaggerated (Follmer and Jones 2018; Godard et al. 2022). Openly disclosing concealable aspects of a disability thus carries the risk of stigma and discrimination and can make securing the support of others at work more difficult (Davis 2005). At the same time, concealing a disability or certain manifestations of it can impose a high cognitive and emotional burden on employees (Berkley et al. 2019). Moreover, disabilities with few or no visible manifestations may still involve symptoms or impairments that hinder job performance and limit social integration in the workplace (Brohan et al. 2012; Santuzzi et al. 2014). To achieve authenticity and access the support or accommodations necessary for maintaining functionality and well-being at work, PWD thus need to openly address their disability, experiences, and needs (Santuzzi et al. 2014).

Despite the difficulty of confronting such stigmatizing views, using disability voice allows employees with less visible disabilities to share insights into their experiences, symptoms, and needs, which would otherwise remain hidden or falsely attributed to other factors (Follmer and Jones 2018; Santuzzi et al. 2014). Moreover, disability voice allows PWD to articulate concrete suggestions for how others can best accommodate and include their disability. This can be more difficult to infer when symptoms and manifestations of the disability are less visible. By reducing others' guesswork, it may ease the cognitive and emotional burden of concealing a disability and enable

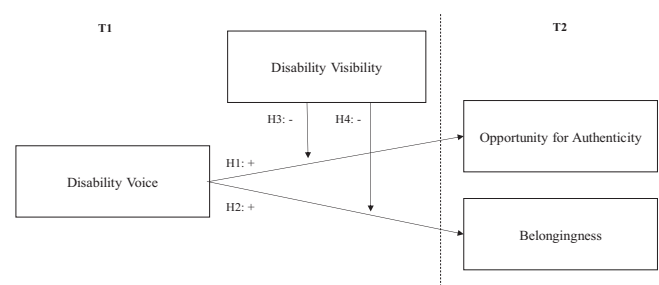


FIGURE 1 | Theoretical model. Note: T1 and T2 indicate the time points of measurement; T1 = time point 1, T2 = time point 2 (6 months after T1). Controls: gender, age, organizational tenure, and disability onset.

open discussion of experiences and collaboration expectations, thereby fostering authenticity at work (Berkley et al. 2019). Also, it may enable organizations and their members to respond with greater understanding, offering more appropriate inclusive efforts and accommodations, which support feelings of belonging. While disability voice likely fosters inclusion for all PWD, its impact may thus be particularly profound for employees with less visible disabilities. The full theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 3. *Disability visibility moderates the relationship between disability voice and perceptions of opportunity for authenticity at work such that the effect is stronger for lower levels of disability visibility.*

Hypothesis 4. *Disability visibility moderates the relationship between disability voice and perceptions of belongingness at work such that the effect is stronger for lower levels of disability visibility.*

2 | Study 1: Exploring Disability Voice Behaviors

2.1 | Research Design and Context

To explore disability voice as a phenomenon, we first draw on 50 in-depth interviews conducted in Germany and Switzerland for a research project on the inclusion of PWD in the competitive labor market.¹ Germany and Switzerland have both enshrined the principles of equality, participation, and inclusion of PWD in their national legislation. Both countries are committed to the UN CRPD and aim to eliminate barriers to ensure equal participation in society. They employ different legal and policy instruments to promote inclusive structures in everyday life, the education system, and the labor market. In Germany and Switzerland, employment opportunities for PWD generally fall into two categories: positions within the competitive labor market and jobs in sheltered employment (Hein and Ansari 2022). The competitive labor market describes the open labor market in which employment relationships are regulated by standard labor laws, wages are determined by market conditions or collective agreements, and jobs are not specifically reserved for PWD. Sheltered jobs are employment-like roles in separated facilities, so called “sheltered workshops,” for PWD only. Sheltered jobs are typically unpaid or compensated with reduced wages and reserved for

PWD who are perceived to be unable to compete in the open labor market without substantial support. This “paternalistic segregation” (Hein and Ansari 2022, 749) is highly controversial. In line with the social model of disability reflected in the UN CRPD, PWD have the right to access open, inclusive, and accessible labor markets (United Nations 2006). To understand how the inclusion of PWD in the competitive, open labor market can be promoted, we focused on this labor market in this study.

While both countries share disability-friendly legislation, there are some contextual differences that we would like to acknowledge. First, German law mandates that companies employing five or more PWD on a permanent basis elect a disability representative (German SGB IX, §177). The disability representative is responsible for promoting the inclusion of PWD in the organization as well as representing their interests and providing them with advice and assistance (German SGB IX, §178). In Switzerland, the appointment of a disability representative within a company is voluntary. In addition, Germany has implemented a quota system requiring employers with more than 20 employees to allocate 5% of their positions to PWD (Kock 2004). To facilitate this, policymakers introduced an official identification card for individuals with “severe disabilities” (“severe disability identification card”), which serves to formally recognize and register eligible individuals. This status grants access to specific rights and supports, such as termination protection or additional annual leave, but may also carry the risk of stigmatization (Brzykcy and Boehm 2022).

2.2 | Data Collection and Sample

We recruited participants in two ways: (1) we contacted PWD who are active in disability-related organizations and/or hold positions in the inclusion domain (e.g., inclusion officers) and asked them to share our study's information within their network; and (2) we posted our study's information on the social network *LinkedIn* to further disseminate our call for participants. To be included in the study, participants had to have a disability and be in competitive employment. The first author of this study conducted all interviews from March to June 2023. The interviews were between 30 and 72 minutes long, with a mean interview duration of 46 minutes. We accommodated the interviewees' preferred interview mode (e.g., virtual, in person, or via telephone) to ensure accessibility. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed with *Whisper* for further analysis. Identifiable information was deleted, and interviewees' names were changed to ensure anonymity. A table with the demographics and interview characteristics of all participants can be found in the online Supporting Information.

The sample of interviewees included employees with all types of disabilities. Of the interviewees, 54% reported to have a physical disability (e.g., neuromuscular disorders or paraplegia), 32% reported to have a sensory disability (e.g., vision or hearing impairment), 6% reported to have a psychological disability (e.g., depression or personality disorder), 4% reported to have a cognitive disability (e.g., dyslexia or autism), and 4% reported to have a combination of multiple disability types. At the time of

the interview, interviewees worked in a variety of managerial, professional, and service jobs in the private and public sectors. More than half of the interviewees were women (68%). The average sample age was 40.29 years.

The interviews were semi-structured such that we prepared an interview guide with topics and questions and used it as an overarching guideline while letting the conversations follow their own logic, depending on the topics and emerging themes that were brought up by the interviewees. At the beginning of the interview, we asked interviewees to introduce themselves and to provide some information on their job and their disability. Then, we asked interviewees about their experiences at work in general, their experiences of inclusion and exclusion as well as critical incidences of speaking up (i.e., Can you recall an incident where you addressed or spoke up about something at work?) and the opportunity to shape inclusion at work (i.e., To what extent do you feel that you can actively shape your inclusion at work?). The full interview guideline is provided in the online Supporting Information.

2.3 | Data Analysis Strategy

To develop a theoretical understanding of the role of PWD in co-constructing inclusion, we employed Gioia's grounded-theory-based approach to guide our data analysis (Gioia et al. 2013). As a first step, the first author conducted a thorough review of the interview transcripts to identify fragments of disability-related voice behaviors, characterized by participants speaking up about work-related ideas, suggestions, concerns, problem-related information, or opinions connected to their experiences of disability to individuals in a position to act. A total of 320 fragments of disability voice were identified. Using descriptive open coding in the subsequent phase, the first author rephrased the identified quotes into terminology closely aligned with the original statements. Disability voice behaviors that reflected similar content and motives were then grouped into seven second-order themes and given descriptive labels.

To enhance coding reliability and validity, the second author independently coded all transcripts for disability voice behaviors, reviewing interview transcripts for the first time without prior knowledge of the first author's selections. All identified voice behaviors were successfully categorized under the predefined disability voice behaviors, with no new behaviors identified. After the coding phase, the first and second authors compared their coding results. Finally, all authors engaged in a constructive and critical discussion (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010) that clarified and refined the distinctions, definitions, and labels of the identified disability voice behaviors. Conflicts were thoroughly discussed and resolved through consensus.

2.4 | Results

In 49 out of 50 interviews, narratives of disability voice emerged both spontaneously as well as in answers to the critical-incident-related questions asked by the interviewer. Most interviewees had openly disclosed their disability within the organization. Reflecting the strong presence of disability

voice in the interviewees' narratives, many emphasized its importance for achieving inclusion in the workplace. Two interviewees explicitly stated, "only those who speak up can be helped" (I08, I13); another interviewee responded to the question of how she could actively shape inclusion: "Simply by addressing it when I feel it's not happening. Otherwise, the other person wouldn't even know that I might have a problem. The only thing that helps is communication. Nothing else helps. That's my firm belief" (I48). Some even stressed that disability voice was often unavoidable when they faced barriers at work that restricted them in fulfilling their job or participating equally in workplace interactions. For example, one participant said:

Yes, sometimes I have no choice but to communicate it, because conflicts arise – there are often barriers, as the requirements of the institution and the requirements of the authorities may contradict each other. So, it's something you can't avoid, and yes, [...] I sometimes have to address it for the benefit of the others as well.

(I15)

Others explicitly pointed to the co-construction of inclusion and stated that inclusion must be a mutual effort, requiring both the initiative of those facilitating inclusion and the proactive engagement of PWD: "Inclusion is essentially equal treatment at all levels. That applies from both sides, of course. I am just as responsible as a nondisabled person." (I03).

In total, we identified seven facets of disability voice: (1) educating others about one's disability, (2) communicating capabilities and limitations, (3) requesting accommodations, (4) informal help-seeking, (5) complaining about barriers, (6) opposing discriminatory remarks and behaviors, and (7) making suggestions to create more inclusive workspaces, products, and processes. Although each of these disability voice behaviors follows different motives, they could occur simultaneously as varied manifestations of a broader disability voice behavior. Table 2 offers a detailed overview of the occurrence and characteristics of all seven disability voice behaviors, along with proof quotes (Pratt 2008).

2.4.1 | Educating Others About One's Disability

This facet of disability voice subsumes accounts of PWD actively educating others about their condition and how it manifests, with the aim of fostering awareness, promoting understanding of their experiences, and preventing misunderstandings or misconceptions about their disability. It involves openly sharing details about symptoms and related impairments at work that accompany a specific disability, which would otherwise not be apparent to others or that PWD believed others were unlikely to be aware of. As such, educating others about one's disability is especially relevant for invisible disabilities or symptoms and disabilities which PWD perceive as being poorly understood or underrecognized in society. An illustrative example is the following quote from "Lina", a consultant with multiple sclerosis (MS):

I was there for about half a year and then I asked my team leader to do a feedback session with me. [...] And there's something about MS, called emotional incontinence. [...] There are phases, so there are also moments, I'm really sensitive [...]. And it comes all of a sudden, it doesn't even have to be triggered, I just have to suddenly start crying and laughing. [...] And on the day we had planned our feedback meeting, it was like that for me. I was all shaky and teary, but without anything actually being wrong. And then I discussed it with my team leader and explained it to her: "So, okay, before we go into the feedback meeting, it could be that somehow, I suddenly maybe start to cry or [...] not react quite the way you would expect. And that has nothing to do with the actual feedback conversation."

(I09)

2.4.2 | Communicating Capabilities and Limitations

In addition to raising awareness and fostering a broader understanding of their disability, PWD frequently reported instances where they clearly communicated their capabilities and limitations in the workplace. This involved explicitly describing specific tasks or behaviors they found difficult or unmanageable due to their disability, as well as those they could perform effectively or that would help them work more comfortably. With this facet of disability voice, PWD aimed to provide clear, actionable guidance to others on how to collaborate with them most effectively. Whereas educating others about one's disability focuses on explaining the disability and its associated impairments, communicating capabilities and limitations is more about establishing specific boundaries and offering practical instructions on how particular impairments should be considered in work interactions and task execution. One example for this was given by "Isabel", who works as a graphic designer with a hearing impairment:

He [a coworker] invited me to a video meeting, and then I had to say that I could do it, but he would need to speak clearly because [...] I am deaf but can lip-read well, and that one can understand me very well, more or less.

(I29)

In some cases, interviewees first educated others about their disability—or created the opportunity to do so by being open to questions—before communicating their specific capabilities and limitations by clearly articulating boundaries and highlighting which tools or tasks presented challenges. In doing so, they not only raised awareness and sensitized their work environment to their needs but also promoted accountability and actively challenged dominant stereotypes, such as assumptions of low productivity or laziness. "Chiara", an education officer with MS described it like this:

TABLE 2 | Study 1: Overview of accounts of disability voice behaviors in interview narratives.

Disability voice behaviors	Number of mentions	Percentage of interviews	Representative quotes
Educating others about one's disability	34	42%	"Yes, it's very personal, but I cannot expect the other person to know everything or have understanding [about my disability] without me explaining it." (I32) "Because I always had to explain myself, I had to explain why I might not be able to perform as much as others." (I50)
Communicating capabilities and limitations	71	70%	"From the very beginning, I have always played with open cards, stating what is possible and what is not possible." (I02) "And I believe it is also important to say: This is what we can do and this is what we cannot do." (I20)
Requesting accommodations	61	68%	"I definitely brought up things that would be helpful for me, would support me. For example, I once asked for a kind of drawing board where I can create drawings myself." (I01) "I usually write back: Yes, I can do that, I'd be happy to, but I would need the following. So, I'm just proactive and write it down. For those who do not know, I have to tell them." (I39)
Informal help-seeking	36	42%	"I try to get help within the team [...] Yes, and there are simply barriers where you are reliant on the help of others in the team." (I36) "And when I need help, I ask." (I39)
Complaining about barriers	61	48%	"Which means that I am always the first one to encounter any barriers and then have to report them somewhere." (I37) "I never get tired of repeatedly speaking up about such issues." (I34)
Opposing discriminatory remarks and behaviors	25	22%	"I find it incredibly discriminatory, I feel like a second-class employee." (I35) "That was when I said: Hey, I do not think that's okay." (I01)
Making suggestions to create more inclusive workspaces, products, and processes	32	34%	"And if it's not possible, I say: Okay, I can offer a solution." (I03) "Then I am also involved in the processes, such as the processes for mobility participation in working life, I am involved in that." (I17)

Note: Number of mentions = The total count of instances where the disability voice behavior was mentioned across all interviews. Percentage of interviews = Percentage of interviews in which the disability voice behavior was mentioned.

So I have to say, I think the fact that it's so transparent and that I'm really very open about it, people can ask me anything at any time, it's also easier for the other person to understand and deal with it, to understand what it means when I'm working from home in the afternoon, that I'm not doing it because I don't feel like going to the office, but because it's necessary. (I16)

2.4.3 | Requesting Accommodations

Another commonly referenced aspect of disability voice among PWD involves proactively requesting accommodations to support their needs in everyday work contexts. Requesting accommodations is a facet of disability voice that has also been investigated by previous literature (e.g., Baldridge and Veiga 2001). Workplace accommodations are aimed at reducing barriers by adapting the workspace to suit the particular needs

and capabilities of a person with a disability (Schur et al. 2014). They may include physical adaptations such as a specific seat or table as well as screen reader software or braille displays but can also take immaterial forms such as reducing work time and changing the work schedule. To receive such accommodations, PWD can file formal requests to have their workspace adapted to their needs. However, accommodation requests are also frequently voiced in rather informal interactions with the supervisor or others in a position to implement the necessary changes. An example was given by “Tom”, an IT consultant with a visual impairment:

I've had this supervisor for two years now and [...] when it came to technical equipment or a software update or something like that, then I brought it up. And now it was about the fact that, because I had a training session where I had to take a fairly long train ride each time, and then with my guide dog. Then the question was whether I'm allowed to travel first class for that.

(I01)

“Nora”, a consultant with depression and a personality disorder, gave an example of requesting an accommodation concerning work hours:

I told the lady [in Human Resources] that I might consider working part-time from the start of the new fiscal year, [...] because it would be more compatible with my illness. And I would like to focus on mental health topics on Fridays.

(I08)

2.4.4 | Informal Help-Seeking

In contrast to requesting accommodations, informal help-seeking does not aim at reducing barriers by adapting the work and workspace but intends to circumvent barriers by requesting others' help. It refers to PWD informally asking others, like colleagues or the supervisor, for help when they face inaccessible workspaces, software, or tools. These accounts of informal help-seeking were frequently addressed in the interviews, even when individual workstations had been adapted to meet interviewees' needs. This is because PWD reported that, despite these accommodations, they continued to face various barriers, particularly in social interactions and situational contexts that required them to seek help. “Karin”, who works as a caseworker in occupational safety and health with a visual impairment, gave an illustration of this type of disability voice:

[...] if it's really just a trivial thing, like I get some piece of paper on my desk and it's handwritten somehow, like I get something back that I had sent out for a signature, and there's a handwritten comment on it, like a sticky note, then honestly, I

just go to another colleague and say: Hey, can you quickly read this out for me? It can't be anything big, it's just a small note.

(I03)

2.4.5 | Complaining About Barriers

Representing more prohibitive accounts of disability voice (Liang et al. 2012), complaining about barriers aims to express PWDs' dissatisfaction with barriers and limitations that are induced by the environment and make others aware of it. It describes PWDs' complaints about inaccessible workplaces, including physical and technical barriers and work processes that could be solved with accommodations so that PWD would not have any problems anymore and could work like everyone else. This quote from “Karin”, the case worker with a visual impairment, exemplifies this type of disability voice:

In this particular case that I have in mind right now, it was an app that we were suddenly supposed to start using. So, I spent time with this app repeatedly [...] trying to make some sense of it. And at some point, I realized, with all due respect, I just couldn't make any sense of it. A large column with lots of tables and impossible assignments, whatever it was. And then I went and said, okay, this isn't going to work.

(I03)

In Germany, these complaints can also take more formal forms such as addressing disability representatives. An illustration was provided by “Matthias” who works as a judicial clerk with a visual impairment:

[In our organization] we are currently on the way to digitalization - electronic files and so on - and I have noticed that the visually impaired are really lagging behind [...]. And we have also addressed that now. [...] It was [...] this annual meeting where all the representatives of the severely disabled come together, and there are also representatives from the [government], and I described that there too.

(I02)

2.4.6 | Opposing Discriminatory Remarks and Behaviors

Opposing discriminatory remarks and behaviors was described as a form of voice behavior, through which PWD spoke out against actions or comments they perceived as unfair, insulting, or discriminatory. This response was intended to express irritation or anger and to restore respectful communication and clear personal boundaries following verbal or physical attacks or other forms of overstepping by others. As such, they represent PWDs' immediate and direct responses to experiences of discrimination. An exemplary cite was given by “Ida”, an employment agent and wheelchair user:

And then the site manager even threw it in my face that my wheelchair was “special” and that I was a special case. I said: No, I’m not. [...] And then, someone from the city administration came and asked me if I could use the toilet in front of her, because she didn’t believe me. And if I could stand up for a moment, and so on. [...] Sometimes I honestly don’t even know what to say. And in that moment, I just knew it was too much. I said: No, I’m not going to do that. And if I say it doesn’t work, then it doesn’t work. I asked her: Why should I torture myself? What exactly do you want from me?

(I17)

A different example was given by “Kim”, a Usability Engineering Specialist with autism:

When I say I’m on the autistic spectrum, most people immediately think [...] that I am cognitively impaired or somehow “crazy”. That has already led to situations where, for example, when I was on the works council and applied for a spokesperson role in a working group, someone told me: You’re a total disaster, this is absolutely not going to work. And I was like: Excuse me, but I didn’t ask for your feedback. I applied here, and you can choose to vote for me or not, but I’m not telling you what I think of you, either. I find that pretty outrageous.

(I44)

2.4.7 | Making Suggestions to Create More Inclusive Workspaces, Products, and Processes

This facet of disability voice captures instances where PWD proactively offered suggestions to reduce barriers and promote inclusion within workplaces, processes, or products. Such contributions extended beyond addressing personal needs, aiming instead to foster accessibility and inclusivity for all. This included PWDs’ involvement in product development, organizational processes, and inclusion initiatives, as well as serving as sparring partners or experts on inclusion-related questions and decisions. In doing so, they play an active role in advancing long-term inclusion within the organization. An example is provided by “Rose” who has a visual impairment and works in customer service:

I work in a technology company and because I have the developers right under my nose, feedback is of course maybe just a keystroke away or an email away [...]. But I really see that as an advantage, that if someone can change something, then it’s technology. So then it’s also us people who are affected, that we then also have to approach the

developer and say, hey, there’s something wrong here [...]. And that’s actually something, that happens relatively often is that some products are simply not accessible [...] and then you invest a lot of time in getting to the bottom of it [...].

(I25)

“Theresa”, a project coordinator with paraplegia, gave an example illustrating how she proactively offered to consult others in disability-related matters:

I’ve actually taken it upon myself, whenever events or outings are organized that don’t take place on our premises, I volunteer as an inclusion sparring partner, focusing solely on accessibility. Because when things didn’t work out before, it wasn’t out of bad intentions. It was just that stupid bus or that location that was completely inaccessible. People simply couldn’t tell me whether there was an accessible toilet or not.

(I38)

2.4.8 | Additional Findings: Disability Visibility

In addition to the different disability voice behaviors that we identified, we also found that not all PWD engage in disability voice. In fact, in line with recent literature (Kulkarni 2022; Lyons et al. 2017; Patton 2022), disability voice often requires the disclosure of one’s disability, which poses a major challenge in its own. Importantly, interviewees also highlighted that finding their voice was a process and it took time until they openly spoke about their disability and learnt to accept help (I08, I09, I11, I14, I19, I17, I23, and I43). For interviewees with less visible disabilities, this process took even longer given the abstractness and stereotypes tied to impairments that are not directly visible to others (I09 and I46). Likewise, PWD with less visible disabilities such as depression or persons on the autism spectrum noted that they not only feared but also experienced a lack of understanding when they expressed their needs and limitations (I08, I31, I35, and I44). Disability visibility thus seemed to play an important role for disability voice and PWDs’ inclusion experiences.

3 | Study 2: The Development and Validation of a Disability Voice Scale

To enable testing our hypotheses, we first used our findings from Study 1 to develop a measurement scale for disability voice and validated the scale with three independent samples. We generated a set of 16 items and used a German sample of PWD (Sample 1) to refine the scale and test the factor structure. In a second step, we then examined the scale’s convergent and discriminant validity with a German (Sample 2) and a US sample of PWD (Sample 3).

3.1 | Item Development and Test of Factor Structure

Based on the seven facets of disability voice identified in Study 1, we generated a set of 16 items to operationalize disability voice (see Table 3). The items were developed to represent general acts of disability voice that may be applied across different disability types and within different organizations. We included the following question prompt preceding the items: “The following questions relate specifically to your disability and how you deal with it at work. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements.”

We first collected a sample of 301 PWD (Sample 1) working in Germany (average age: 43.62 years (SD = 12.71); 59.14% female) to refine and validate the scale using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Participants were recruited via the market research institute Norstat. Following the recommendations by Hinkin (1995, 1998), we first used EFA with

principal axis factoring and Varimax rotation to explore the factor structure and reduce the number of items for a more parsimonious scale. Results showed that while most items showed appropriate loadings on the first factor, some items showed cross-loadings on a second factor. As we sought to develop a unidimensional disability voice scale, we only retained items that showed appropriate factor loadings on the first factor. Specifically, we dropped items that had low loadings (< 0.40) on the first factor and/or higher loadings on the second factor. In total, 10 items were retained. In a second step, we ran a CFA to test the items' indicator reliabilities and the scale's construct validity. Two items showed indicator reliabilities below 0.50. However, one of these two items, Item 4 (“I explain to others how my disability affects the way I work.”), had an indicator reliability (0.49) very close to the cutoff. We thus decided to retain it to ensure a broader representation of different facets of disability voice in the scale. The other item, Item 9 (“I speak up about discriminatory statements.”), was dropped as it is similar to Item 10 (“I speak up when I feel discriminated against.”), which had a higher indicator reliability. All results are depicted in Table 3.

TABLE 3 | Study 2: Disability voice scale items and factor analyses results.

Item: <i>The following questions relate specifically to your disability and how you deal with it at work. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements</i>	EFA		CFA	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor loading	Indicator reliability
1. I say if a work task is too difficult for me because of my disability.	0.76	0.29	0.78	0.60
2. I clearly state what I can and cannot do.	0.72	0.24	0.73	0.54
3. I explain to others how best to deal with my disability. ^a	0.51	0.54	N/A	N/A
4. I explain to others how my disability affects the way I work.	0.55	0.46	0.70	0.49
5. I ask others for help when I need support with something.	0.65	0.32	0.72	0.52
6. I seek help when something at work causes me problems.	0.68	0.35	0.75	0.57
7. I openly address barriers in our company/organization. ^a	0.45	0.71	N/A	N/A
8. I address things that hinder me in my work.	0.62	0.51	0.80	0.64
9. I speak up about discriminatory statements. ^b	0.55	0.38	0.68	0.46
10. I speak up when I feel discriminated against.	0.60	0.43	0.74	0.55
11. I speak up when I feel my needs have been forgotten.	0.58	0.54	0.79	0.62
12. I bring it up when something needs to be adapted to my needs.	0.62	0.51	0.79	0.63
13. I make concrete suggestions on how something can be adapted to my needs. ^a	0.45	0.70	N/A	N/A
14. I suggest concrete solutions on how barriers in the workplace can be removed for me. ^a	0.39	0.73	N/A	N/A
15. I am actively involved in the design of products and processes to make them barrier-free. ^a	0.30	0.83	N/A	N/A
16. I am actively involved in making our company/organization more accessible. ^a	0.28	0.75	N/A	N/A

Note: N = 301; ^a Item dropped after EFA, ^b Item dropped after CFA, N/A: not applicable as item was dropped in the previous step, items of the final scale are in bold.

The resulting measurement model of the nine-item disability voice scale showed good model fit ($\chi^2(27)=46.41$, $p(\chi^2)=0.012$, RMSEA=0.05, CFI=0.98, TLI=0.98, SRMR=0.03) (Hu and Bentler 1999).²

3.2 | Convergent and Discriminant Validity

For testing convergent validity, we examined the relationship of disability voice with other forms of employee voice behaviors. As evidence for convergent validity, we expected disability voice to be positively correlated with promotive voice and prohibitive voice (see Liang et al.'s (2012) five-item measures) as widely used operationalizations of employee voice. To test discriminant validity, we tested our scale's distinctiveness not only from promotive and prohibitive voice but also from organizational citizenship behavior benefitting the organization (OCB-O) and the individual (OCB-I; both with Lee and Allen's (2002) eight-item measures), as well as inclusion (belongingness, authenticity; with Jansen et al.'s (2014) measures).³ All constructs were measured with a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). We then ran a series of chi-square difference tests comparing six two-factor measurement models, in which items for disability voice and the respective comparison construct loaded on two separate factors, with six alternative one-factor models, in which the disability voice items and the items of the respective comparison construct loaded on one—i.e., the same—factor. To conduct these tests, we collected two additional samples.

3.2.1 | Sample 2

We recruited 118 German PWD via Prolific Academic. All participants were in part-time or full-time employment (average age: 33.08 years (SD=9.46); 48.31% female). In this sample, we found that disability voice was significantly positively related to promotive voice ($r=0.23$, $p=0.037$) and prohibitive voice ($r=0.45$, $p<0.001$), supporting convergent validity. With regard to discriminant validity, results showed that all two-factor model solutions had superior fit compared to the alternative one-factor solutions (see Table 4). We thus found support that disability voice is distinct from existing constructs of promotive voice, prohibitive voice, OCB-O, OCB-I, belongingness, and opportunity for authenticity.

3.2.2 | Sample 3

To further test our scale's validity and to replicate our findings, we collected an additional sample of 302 PWD in the United States via Prolific Academic (average age: 38.89 years (SD=11.79); 53.49% female). We translated the nine-item disability voice scale from German into English using the translation-back-translation procedure (Schaffer and Riordan 2003).⁴

Testing convergent validity, we found significant positive relationships of disability voice with promotive voice ($r=0.60$, $p<0.001$) and prohibitive voice ($r=0.71$, $p<0.001$). Hence, our scale's convergent validity was again supported. Also, when testing discriminant validity with the same constructs as with Sample 2, we again found superior model fit for all two-factor

models compared to all one-factor models (see Table 4), further supporting the scale's discriminant validity. In sum, the validity of our nine-item disability voice scale is supported across both samples, validating its use in the following study.

4 | Study 3: Disability Voice and Inclusion Perceptions of PWD

4.1 | Sample and Procedure

We tested our hypotheses on the effects of disability voice on PWDs' inclusion perceptions using data collected from 1832 PWD in Germany. The survey was part of a larger study on employee well-being at work.⁵ Participants were recruited via Norstat. To be included in our study, participants had to have a disability. Disability status was self-reported in the survey based on the question "Do you have a disability?". We used a two-wave design with a time lag of six months to reduce common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In Wave 1 (T1), we measured disability voice and disability visibility. In Wave 2 (T2), six months later, PWD rated their perceptions of opportunity for authenticity and belongingness.

In total, 676 PWD participated in both survey waves (T1 and T2). The average age of participants was 49.63 years (SD=10.11) and 49.85% of participants self-identified as female. On average, participants had worked for their current employer for 15.26 years (SD=12.15). Most participants worked in health care (13.61%), administration and public services (12.43%), transport and logistics (6.66%), IT (6.07%), education, pedagogy, and academia (5.92%), automotive and manufacturing (5.77%), and finance and insurance (5.03%). With regard to disability onset, only 12.43% reported living with their disability since birth, while 87.57% reported having obtained the disability over the course of their lives.

4.2 | Measures

Unless otherwise noted, participants responded to survey items on five-point Likert scales (1, *Strongly disagree* to 5, *Strongly agree*). The survey was administered in German. Items were translated into German by applying a forward-backward translation procedure (Schaffer and Riordan 2003).

4.2.1 | Disability Voice

We measured disability voice using the nine-item scale developed and validated in Study 1 and Study 2 ($M=3.45$, $SD=1.01$). Cronbach's alpha was 0.92.

4.2.2 | Disability Visibility

Following Tam et al.'s (2003) one-item measure for the visibility of disabilities, we measured disability visibility by asking participants: "To what extent is your impairment perceptible or visible to others?" Answers were given on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*Not at all visible*) to 5 (*Clearly visible*) ($M=2.55$, $SD=1.33$).

TABLE 4 | Study 2: Chi-square difference test results for discriminant validity.

Model	Sample	One-factor model						Two-factor model						Model comparison				
		χ^2	df	c	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	χ^2	df	c	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	r	p	$ \Delta\chi^2 ^{*}$
Promotive voice and disability voice	2	311.93	77	1.22	0.16	0.16	0.59	0.52	113.31	76	1.22	0.07	0.06	0.94	0.92	0.23	0.037	251.85
	3	591.59	77	1.34	0.11	0.15	0.72	0.67	204.73	76	1.35	0.05	0.08	0.93	0.92	0.60	<0.001	1235.29
Prohibitive voice & disability voice	2	152.49	77	1.26	0.09	0.09	0.82	0.79	102.40	76	1.26	0.07	0.05	0.94	0.92	0.45	<0.001	42.64
	3	371.53	77	1.33	0.08	0.11	0.82	0.78	220.62	76	1.33	0.05	0.08	0.91	0.89	0.71	<0.001	158.02
Authenticity & disability voice	2	422.38	119	1.24	0.17	0.15	0.74	0.70	172.64	118	1.24	0.06	0.06	0.95	0.95	0.39	<0.001	264.73
	3	892.40	119	1.33	0.15	0.15	0.76	0.73	288.14	118	1.33	0.05	0.07	0.95	0.94	0.56	<0.001	910.11
Belongingness & disability voice	2	410.41	119	1.17	0.17	0.14	0.65	0.60	142.81	118	1.18	0.06	0.04	0.97	0.97	0.36	<0.001	1263.90
	3	846.53	119	1.35	0.15	0.14	0.71	0.67	253.77	118	1.34	0.05	0.06	0.95	0.94	0.54	<0.001	457.09
OCB-I & disability voice	2	338.37	119	1.12	0.13	0.13	0.65	0.60	183.83	118	1.13	0.09	0.07	0.89	0.88	0.41	<0.001	4369.95
	3	642.75	119	1.27	0.12	0.12	0.70	0.66	242.04	118	1.26	0.05	0.06	0.93	0.92	0.47	<0.001	184.82
OCB-O & disability voice	2	443.43	119	1.16	0.18	0.15	0.58	0.52	159.87	118	1.16	0.07	0.06	0.95	0.94	0.30	0.006	2773.32
	3	820.61	119	1.27	0.12	0.14	0.69	0.65	261.65	118	1.25	0.05	0.06	0.94	0.93	0.55	<0.001	210.21

Note: Sample 2: $n = 118$; Sample 3: $n = 302$; c = scaling correction factor for MLM.

*We used the MLM estimator in Mplus (nonnormality robust estimator with Satorra–Bentler correction) and the formula of Satorra and Bentler (2010) that is also available on the Mplus website (<https://www.statmodel.com/chidiff.shtml>) to calculate the difference in chi-square ($\Delta\chi^2$) when accounting for the MLM scaling correction factors (c). $\Delta df = 1$ for all model comparisons. All chi-square difference tests were significant at $p < 0.001$.

4.2.3 | Opportunity for Authenticity

We measured PWDs' perception of their opportunity for authenticity with the eight-item authenticity subscale of the Perceived Group Inclusion Scale (PGIS) by Jansen et al. (2014) ($M=3.70$, $SD=0.96$). An example item was "My team allows me to be who I am." Cronbach's alpha was 0.97.

4.2.4 | Belongingness

We measured PWDs' perceptions of belongingness with the eight-item belongingness subscale of the PGIS (Jansen et al. 2014) ($M=3.85$, $SD=0.86$). An example item was "My team gives me the feeling that I belong." Cronbach's alpha was 0.96.

4.2.5 | Control Variables

We included gender (1 = male, 2 = female, 3 = diverse), age (years), organizational tenure (years), and disability onset (0 = not since birth, 1 = since birth) as controls in our model. We included gender as a control as previous research found that inclusion experiences may differ for men and women with disabilities (Moloney et al. 2019). Likewise, older employees may possess a certain sense of seniority and social status (Fasbender and Gerpott 2021) that could drive their feelings of inclusion at work. Similarly, organizational tenure is likely to influence employees' perceptions of belongingness and opportunity for authenticity because employees with longer tenure in the organization may have developed a sense of security over time (Ashforth and Saks 1996; Dai and Fang 2023). Finally, disability onset is likely to play a role for PWDs' inclusion experiences. Persons who obtained their disability during childhood are among the most marginalized populations and may thus make particularly negative inclusion experiences at work (Baldridge et al. 2017).

4.3 | Data Analysis Strategy

To test our hypotheses, we applied structural equation modeling (SEM) with latent variables and full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation with the Satorra–Bentler correction (Satorra and Bentler 1994), which is robust to non-normality, in *Mplus* version 8.6 (Muthén and Muthén 2017). As a first step, we ran a CFA to test the measurement model with the latent constructs for disability voice, opportunity for authenticity, and belongingness, along with their relationships with the respective indicators, but without assessing structural relationships between the constructs. As a second step, we examined the structural model including the direct effects of disability voice, disability visibility, and the controls on the two outcome variables, i.e., opportunity for authenticity and belongingness. As a third step, we tested the proposed interaction effects of disability visibility with disability voice on opportunity for authenticity and belongingness. We further ran a robustness check for which we ran the model without the control variables.

4.4 | Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations of all study variables are shown in Table 5. CFA results revealed a good fit of the proposed measurement model. All fit indices ($\chi^2(272)=537.70$, $p(\chi^2)<0.001$, RMSEA=0.04, CFI=0.96, TLI=0.95, SRMR=0.04) met the cutoffs as suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999), again supporting construct validity of the measures. When testing the structural model ($\chi^2(387)=671.97$, $p(\chi^2)<0.001$, RMSEA=0.04, CFI=0.95, TLI=0.95, SRMR=0.04), we found a significant positive relationship of disability voice with opportunity for authenticity ($\beta=0.22$; $SE=0.07$; $p=0.003$) and belongingness ($\beta=0.28$; $SE=0.07$; $p<0.001$). Hypotheses 1 and 2 were thus supported. Disability visibility had no significant relationships with either opportunity for authenticity ($\beta=0.08$; $SE=0.07$; $p=0.274$) or belongingness ($\beta=0.03$; $SE=0.07$; $p=0.621$).

TABLE 5 | Study 3: Descriptives and correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Disability voice	3.45	1.01	0.92							
2. Disability visibility	2.55	1.33	0.21***	N/A						
3. Opportunity for authenticity	3.70	0.96	0.29***	0.16**	0.97					
4. Belongingness	3.85	0.86	0.32***	0.11	0.85***	0.96				
5. Gender	1.50	0.50	−0.01	−0.06	−0.04	0.00	N/A			
6. Age	49.63	10.11	0.06	0.00	0.01	0.08	−0.08*	N/A		
7. Organizational tenure	15.26	12.15	0.00	0.06	−0.04	0.02	−0.03	0.43***	N/A	
8. Disability onset	0.12	0.33	0.03	0.19***	−0.05	−0.09	0.01	−0.27***	−0.04	N/A

Note: $N=676$. Cronbach's alpha is shown on the diagonal, where applicable.

*** $p<0.001$.

** $p<0.01$.

* $p<0.05$.

Further, none of the controls had a significant relationship with the two outcome variables.

When investigating the proposed interactions, we did not find a significant interaction between disability visibility and disability voice on belongingness ($\beta=0.10$; $SE=0.09$; $p=0.233$) or opportunity for authenticity ($\beta=0.11$; $SE=0.09$; $p=0.208$). Hypotheses 3 and 4 were thus not supported.

To assess the robustness of these results, we further tested the hypothesized relationships without adding the controls in the model. Results remained the same, indicating that the controls had no significant influence on the study results. The positive direct effects of disability voice on opportunity for authenticity ($\beta=0.27$; $SE=0.07$; $p<0.001$) and belongingness ($\beta=0.33$; $SE=0.07$; $p<0.001$) were again significant and in the same direction as observed when including controls. Further, the interactions of disability voice and disability visibility on belongingness ($\beta=0.10$; $SE=0.08$; $p=0.250$) as well as on authenticity ($\beta=0.10$; $SE=0.08$; $p=0.262$) remained insignificant, thereby supporting the robustness of our findings.

5 | Discussion

In three studies, we introduced a new perspective on disability inclusion by uncovering disability voice as a so far untapped phenomenon. We identified seven disability voice behaviors that together reflect the broader construct of disability voice, which we found to positively impact PWDs' inclusion experiences at work. Our findings show that disability voice can relate positively to PWDs' perceptions of the two components of inclusion: opportunity for authenticity and belongingness at work. This underscores the importance of viewing inclusion not merely as an organizational provision but as a co-constructed process in which PWD actively participate through disability voice. Interestingly, while findings from our interview study (Study 1) pointed to disability visibility as an important boundary condition for when disability voice promotes inclusion, we did not find a significant relationship of disability visibility with PWDs' inclusion experiences in our quantitative Study 3. Taken together, our work reframes disability inclusion from being primarily *about* PWD to being co-constructed *by* PWD. We thereby seek to contribute to the inclusion and disability literature in three important ways.

5.1 | Theoretical Implications

First, we contribute to the inclusion literature more broadly by introducing a novel co-constructionist perspective on inclusion. By integrating conceptualizations of inclusion (Jansen et al. 2014) with social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1966), we propose that inclusion perceptions are fostered when both the individual and the group actively share and negotiate their subjective realities through communication. Recent research has emphasized the importance of the group's willingness to include (Jansen et al. 2014) and individuals' inclusion motivation (Jansen et al. 2020) in shaping experiences of inclusion. Extending this, we suggest that individuals' motivation to be included can translate into

concrete actions and that these, in turn, can influence inclusion perceptions. Borrowing the terminology from DeRue and Ashford's (2010) leadership identity theory, we suggest that inclusion is reciprocal and involves individuals to "claim" and groups to "grant" it. The granting part underscores the responsibility of organizations to establish inclusive structures, practices, and processes and has been extensively studied by past research (e.g., Chakraverty et al. 2023; Kulkarni 2016; Shore et al. 2011). The claiming aspect emphasizes the active role that individuals can take in shaping their own workspaces. In this vein, we theorized inclusion as the outcome of mutual efforts and ongoing negotiation between both actors—the individual seeking authenticity and belonging, and the group or organization that enables these experiences. Through this lens, inclusion is understood as a joint process, continually co-constructed through everyday interactions, communication, and shared understanding. This social co-constructionist perspective emphasizes substantive inclusion that engages with the lived experiences of minority group employees over more symbolic organizational programs that emerge independent from what individuals really need (Levi and Fried 2025).

Second, as we apply this co-constructionist perspective on inclusion to the work experiences of PWD, we contribute to the disability literature by conceptualizing disability voice as a so far underexplored phenomenon of disability-related behavior: PWDs' acts of actively claiming inclusion. While research on disability in the work context has grown in recent years, it still lags behind other diversity dimensions such as gender or race (Colella and Boehm 2026; Colella et al. 2017; Schloemer-Jarvis et al. 2022), particularly in terms of theory development and theoretical integration (Dwertmann et al. 2025). The prevailing exclusion experiences of employees with disabilities (e.g., Baldrige et al. 2019; Boehm and Jammaers 2024; Speech et al. 2023) call for a better understanding of the factors that drive them and what organizations and their members can do to ensure that PWD thrive at work. In fact, PWD are frequently stigmatized as helpless or dependent (Colella and Varma 2001; Kensbock and Boehm 2016), while their active efforts have been scarcely investigated in this area of research to date (Randel 2025). This study challenges these misconceptions and demonstrates how PWD actively voice their perspectives and needs in the workplace. We explored the different facets of disability voice and developed a nine-item disability voice scale, capturing the different ways in which PWD actively share their experiences and realities. Although prior literature focused on PWDs' initial decision of *whether* to disclose a disability or request an accommodation or *i-deal*, disability voice captures *how* PWD articulate their disability identity in the workplace and express how others can support their inclusion at work. In doing so, we also extend prior literature on marginalized groups' voice that investigated how advantaged group members' allyship (Dang et al. 2025) or mega threats (Leigh and Melwani 2019) can promote marginalized employees' progroup voice, i.e., voice behaviors aimed at promoting the organizational context for marginalized groups. In contrast, our findings suggest that although PWD often speak up from their lived experiences in everyday workplace interactions, disability voice is inherently personal rather than collective, constraining access to the protection of speaking as part of a collective. In fact, PWD are not only a historically underrepresented minority group in organizations (Beigi et al. 2025)

but also a highly heterogeneous one, as PWD often have unique sets of impairments and individual needs (Beatty et al. 2019). Moreover, our findings underscore that PWD often have little choice but to actively speak up when inaccessible work environments or the exclusion from critical work processes or interactions hinders their performance. Disability voice thus captures a form of behavior that has received limited scholarly attention but is frequently unavoidable in practice: taking an active role in communicating one's unique workplace experiences to initiate changes that enable or facilitate full participation.

Third, we broaden the nomological network of disability inclusion (e.g., Beatty et al. 2019; Lee et al. 2026; Stone and Colella 1996) and study the effects that disability voice actually has for PWDs' inclusion perceptions as well as disability visibility as an important boundary condition. Specifically, we found that disability voice is positively related to PWDs' perceptions of inclusion as defined by Jansen et al. (2014), i.e., a sense of belongingness and opportunity for authenticity. We suggest that disability voice triggers these positive effects on inclusion perceptions as it makes disability-related experiences more accessible to others, who can in turn act more inclusively in everyday workplace interactions. Interestingly, while we assumed the accessibility of such disability-related information to be particularly relevant for employees with less visible disabilities, results from our quantitative Study 3 did not show a significant interaction between disability visibility and disability voice when predicting perceptions of belongingness and authenticity. However, in line with prior research (Kulkarni 2022; Santuzzi et al. 2014), our qualitative findings from Study 1 suggested that employees with less visible disabilities take longer to find their voice as their impairments are often more abstract and bear stereotypes. They thus not only feared but also experienced a lack of understanding when they expressed their needs and limitations. Conversely, when disabilities are more visible, communicated needs and barriers may be less abstract and easier to convey and understand within the social environment. Likewise, it may be easier for others to anticipate potential barriers for PWD. Hence, although we did not find statistically significant support for disability visibility as a moderator of the relationship between disability voice and inclusion, our qualitative results highlight the need for further investigation of various disability characteristics, such as visibility, as potential boundary conditions. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of the work realities of PWD by overcoming broad, reductive overgeneralizations of disability that can obscure meaningful variation in inclusion experiences (Beatty et al. 2019).

5.2 | Practical Implications

With an aging workforce in most developed countries and the increasing likelihood of disability as one ages (World Health Organization 2022), organizations' inclusion efforts become a necessity to retain talent. Organizations need to move away from treating PWD like a marginalized, overlooked minority group and toward fully embracing, valuing, and promoting PWD as a critical resource. Our study shows that organizations can do so by listening to their disabled members' voices. Inclusion requires dialogue between organizations and PWD to ensure that

measures aimed at promoting disability inclusion fulfill their intention. We found that PWD undertake efforts to claim inclusion at work and communicate the obstacles and barriers they face through disability voice. PWD know best what stands in their way and what would benefit their work, making them critical agents in creating more inclusive workplaces.

To strengthen disability voices, organizations must create and support safe spaces where PWD can freely express their needs and perspectives. An important way of making sure that PWDs' voices are encouraged within the organization is to invest in inclusive leaders (BetterUp 2022; Shore and Chung 2022, 2024). Leaders have been found to account for a large share of employees' experience of belongingness and psychological safety (Zheng et al. 2023) as they have a big influence on the day-to-day experiences of employees (Nishii and Leroy 2022). Organizations thus have to train their leaders' awareness for disabilities and how they may shape PWDs' work experiences (Shore et al. 2018). Leaders, in turn, must invest in meaningful relationships with their subordinates, make time to listen to their needs and concerns, and provide social support.

Similarly, employees without disabilities play an important role in creating psychologically safe and inclusive workspaces. As co-workers of PWD, they have an important influence on the daily work experiences of PWD (Nikita and Lordan 2023). Their reactions to novel perspectives, uncommon opinions, as well as revelations of concealable identities shape the psychological climate and can promote disability voice. Further, if they are the recipients of a colleague's disability voice, their supportive reactions to these voice behaviors can help to make disability voice more heard in the organization and foster future disability voice. In sum, only if organizations, their leaders, and employees make the effort and listen, promote PWDs' voices, and enact change to enhance PWDs' work experiences, truly inclusive organizations can develop.

5.3 | Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While we believe that our research represents an important first step to better understand disability voice in organizations, we are aware of its limitations. First, we study disability voice in the German, Swiss, and U.S. work context, where fostering the inclusion of PWD is part of the legislation (yet in different ways, e.g., quota versus accommodation logics (Colella and Boehm 2026)) and supported by society. We believe that studying disability voice in these disability-friendly contexts is meaningful as the cultural and legal support generally facilitates disability voice. However, disability voice may be less prevalent in other cultural contexts where it is not safe for PWD to voice their needs or not desired that PWD communicate ideas and suggestions to make products and processes more inclusive. Another point to be mentioned in this regard is our network sampling approach in Study 1. While the approach of sampling via LinkedIn provided a heterogeneous sample in terms of disability types, job roles, industries, as well as disability voice, some self-selection bias (Heckman 1979) cannot be ruled out. We thus encourage future research to explore disability voice in other contexts and samples.

Second, while disability voice is enacted by PWD, nondisabled allies such as co-workers may also engage in efforts to promote PWDs' workplace inclusion. In contrast to PWD, who often must speak up to participate in everyday workplace interactions and perform their jobs, disability allyship reflects an active choice to use one's majority-group privilege to overcome ableism and support PWD inclusion (Wolbring and Lillywhite 2023). Effective allyship requires both awareness of a group's marginalization and authentic motivation to stand up for that group (Pietri et al. 2024). Disability voice may therefore offer valuable insight into the everyday realities of PWD at work, potentially motivating co-workers to act as allies. Examining the interplay between disability voice and disability allyship, particularly how they may reinforce each other, represents a promising avenue for future research.

Third, this study focused on the relationship of disability voice and inclusion. While we believe this is an important starting point, the next step would be to investigate potential facilitators and impediments as well as further outcomes of disability voice. In particular, a closer examination of the role of demographic differences such as gender and the intersectionality of disability with other minority or majority-group characteristics represent interesting avenues for future research. Likewise, individual characteristics, including personality and core self-evaluations (e.g., self-efficacy, self-esteem), may shape whether and how effectively PWD engage in disability voice. Moreover, from an empowerment perspective, the dynamics between organizational climate, leadership, and disability voice require further research. In this vein, future research on voice trajectories over time and the role of voice recipients could be meaningful to uncover the specific mechanisms of when and how disability voice is raised and heard in organizations.

In addition, disability voice may not always yield positive outcomes. The "initiative paradox" (Campbell 2000) suggests that initiative is valued until it clashes with organizational interests. Disability-related suggestions may thus be rewarded only as long as they are viewed as feasible and low-cost. However, when proposals require significant resources or challenge entrenched routines, they could trigger resistance or backlash. In fact, the close link of disability voice to employees' personal disability identity also carries risks. Unlike general employee voice that is aimed at benefiting the whole organization (Morrison 2023), disability voice first serves individual disability-related needs. As it involves expressing personal experiences, disability voice entails heightened vulnerability and risks of status loss or stigmatization if it does not resonate with others (Bowen and Blackmon 2003). Following Parker et al. (2019), PWD may therefore need to consider certain internal and external factors when deciding if and when to engage in disability voice to maximize positive outcomes. Future research should thus explore under which conditions disability voice may also elicit negative reactions or outcomes.

Finally, our qualitative study identified seven facets of disability voice in PWDs' everyday work lives, while our scale-development analyses supported a unidimensional measure that represents only six of these facets. The facet involving suggestions to create more inclusive workspaces, products, and processes was not represented. One possible explanation is that

such suggestions are closer to entrepreneurial actions creating and rolling out inclusive solutions than to disability voice. Yet, future research should examine how disability voice may also initiate more collective learning and broader organizational change. Consistent with recent findings that the presence of PWD and colleagues' perspective-taking can foster innovation (Dwertmann et al. 2025), disability voice may offer a mechanism through which such benefits may emerge. Future research could examine the specific creative actions through which PWD shape tangible elements of inclusive environments and clarify how these behaviors relate to, or diverge from, disability voice. Relatedly, scholars might also explore how other (nonverbal) creative expressions support and extend disability voice (for an arts-based example see Macdonald et al. 2023).

6 | Conclusion

This paper joins the debate on how to create more disability inclusive workspaces. While most research on disability inclusion looked at what organizations need to do to create inclusive workplaces, we investigated disability voice as PWDs' self-inclusion efforts at work. We suggest that PWD co-construct their workplace inclusion experiences through various disability voice behaviors. This is supported by initial evidence indicating that disability voice is linked to subsequent perceptions of authenticity and belonging. We conclude that truly inclusive organizations can only emerge when they actively learn from the knowledge and experiences of their employees with disabilities.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Research data are not shared; however, the Supporting Information is available at https://osf.io/kbt3m/?view_only=9c94e64efa7e409a80f2cfce4bd282df.

Endnotes

¹ All studies presented in this paper were approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of St.Gallen.

² We used maximum likelihood estimation with nonnormality robust estimators (Satorra and Bentler 1994) in Mplus version 8.6 for all structural equation modeling analyses in this paper.

³ We also tested our scale's convergent and discriminant validity with additional constructs but focused on these six constructs above due to space limitations. Results for the following additional constructs can

be found in the online Supporting Information: i-deals (task, schedule, and location), accommodation requests, autonomous and dependent help-seeking, leader-member exchange (LMX), and team-member exchange (TMX).

⁴Please note that we show the English translation of the disability voice items in Table 3. The German version of the items can be found in the online Supporting Information. To assess whether the English version of the scale has the same measurement properties as the German version of the scale, we further tested measurement equivalence. Specifically, we examined whether not only the factor structure is equal across the two versions of the scale (configural equivalence) but also if factor loadings between the observed items and the latent variable are equal across the two versions of the scale (metric equivalence). To ensure similar sample sizes, we used the German Sample 1 and the U.S. Sample 3. We found good and very similar model fits for both the metric model ($\chi^2(62)=174.77$, RMSEA=0.08, CFI=0.94, TLI=0.94, SRMR=0.06) and the configural model ($\chi^2(54)=154.35$, RMSEA=0.08, CFI=0.95, TLI=0.93, SRMR=0.04), indicating that the scale was interpreted consistently, regardless of language. When testing the statistical significance of the difference in model fit across the two models, the chi-square difference test was significant ($p=0.012$), which could indicate that constraining the factor loadings in the metric model worsens the model fit. However, as chi-square difference tests are highly sensitive to sample size, the model fit for both models were high, and there were no or only small differences in CFI ($\Delta 0.01$), TLI ($\Delta 0.01$), RMSEA ($\Delta 0$), and SRMR ($\Delta 0.02$) between the models, the results still support metric equivalence (Cheung and Rensvold 2002).

⁵We used data from this data collection not only for Study 3 but also for Sample 1 from Study 2. To ensure that there was no variable overlap as well as independence across the two samples we split the sample as follows: For Study 3, we only used participants who completed T1 and T2, to obtain time-lagged data and test the hypothesized model. Further, we only used data on disability voice that was collected in T1. In Sample 1 of Study 2, we only used participants who completed the second (T2), but not the first wave of data collection (T1). We used their answers to the disability voice items in T2 to test the factor structure during scale validation as described.

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