

As drafted by David W Brown January 6, 2019

I welcome suggestions and examples that come to mind as you read this.

Email djbrown2d@yahoo.com

Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*

Throughout life many of us have tough choices to make about whether to hang in there—

...with a friend who is bullying other kids at school?

...with a favorite fast-food chain that's found to be exploiting its workers?

...with the church denomination that our parents brought us up in?

...with a job that we don't like?

And so on.

State and national leaders these days have been facing very big choices about whether to stay with it or to quit.

...Congressmen who are at strong odds with what their political party is pushing for.

...Cabinet appointees who don't like what the President is doing.

...Government agency heads and staff who believe that what they are asked to do is immoral.

If you were in one of these situations, what would you do? Just go with the flow? Or at the other extreme, just quit? Or is there something else in between that you can best do?

There have been earlier times in America's history when big choices like these have been faced ... by "little" people as well as "big" people. Stay in Puritan Massachusetts, or move to Roger Williams' Rhode Island? Go along with torture of Native Americans in King Philip's War? Take up arms against England? Secede from the Union? Go on strike for decent working conditions in a place with only one big employer? Go against usual norms by treating Blacks, Hispanics and recent immigrants better than others in your home town were doing?

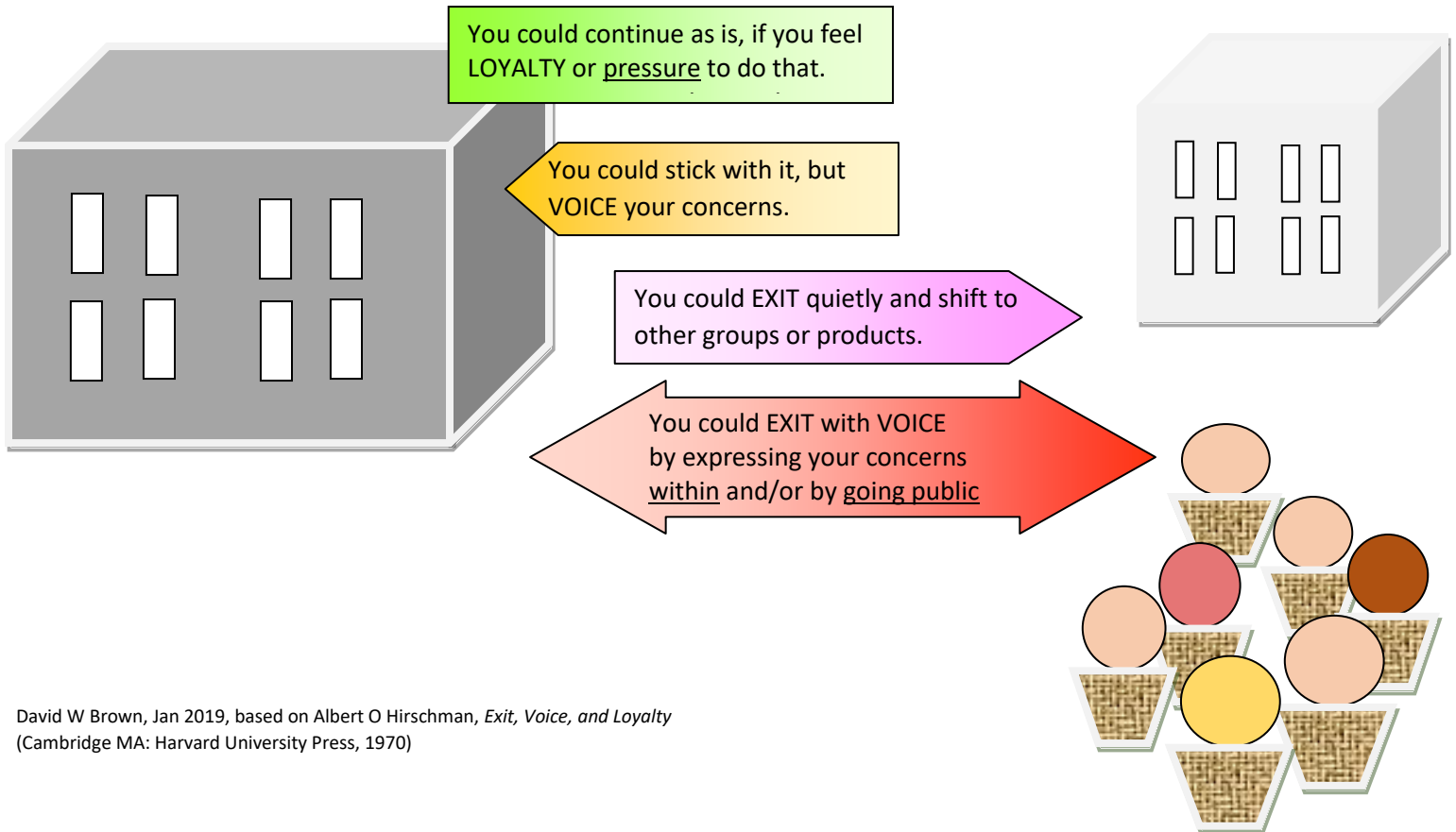
In the late 1960s, events on the minds of many American people and leaders included:

- Vietnam – the drafting of young men to fight there, and air attacks that killed villagers
 - Poor quality cars with defects that had destroyed lives, leading to Ralph Nader's efforts
 - Unsafe working conditions in factories, mines, construction, etc.
 - Spotty implementation of racial integration, and Affirmative Action delays
 - Beginnings of the women's liberation movement
 - Poor public schools in quite a few places, without affordable options
 - "Lazy monopolies" like the U.S. Postal Service then, and some stores in ghettos and small towns
- In some industries, unions were stronger. But overall there were fewer public protections.

This led a well known economist, Albert A. Hirschman, to write an insightful little book, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). What he did was not to provide answers so much as provide a framework for thinking more systematically about how to deal with these kinds of rubs in life. Recently I have re-read his book. It strikes me as still relevant and helpful.

Hirschman's framework built around the voice and exit options, as one becomes discontent with a product or group. Here is a chart in which I've tried to highlight his main points:

If you become uneasy about a group or product,



David W Brown, Jan 2019, based on Albert O Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970)

The above chart focuses on what one could do if disgruntled. One also faces questions of whether and when. ... factors to take into account before acting. Questions like:

- If I hang in there, can I still be useful, even if it's just keeping things from getting worse?
- If overwork and stress are part of the problem, can my health take that much longer?
- What would be the negative and positive effects on my co-workers, my family and others, if I speak out or leave?
- What's my "opportunity cost"? If I exit, could I have better links and outlets elsewhere?
- What's the ethical thing to do? Can I live with myself if I stay or still use the product?

How one can make the most effective use of VOICE and EXIT is also important. There have been big changes in possibilities since Hirschman's 1960s.

1. We now have **the internet**—fuller, quicker information access and dissemination ... emails, not just snail mail ... social media ... webinars. (But if we aren't careful, these can be used toward further organizational declines too.)
2. Younger generations are devising **fresh ways to mobilize and sustain improvements**—informal , fluid partnerships instead of clunky committees ... use of level-headed, enlightening stories about what is happening, as augments to formal studies and hearings ... focused aims and strategies for inducing changes, not just single-event protests ... better skills in gaining legitimacy with key leaders ... volunteer efforts that provide good socialization as well as being useful ... within some companies (often locally based), work cultures that accommodate family considerations, environmental practices, and civic involvements.

More about *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* ... and Albert Hirschman's unique life

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exit,_Voice,_and_Loyalty

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/exit-voice-and-loyalty#B>

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/reading-albert-hirschman-and-michael-wolff-in-trumps-washington>

<https://scholars.org/brief/albert-hirschman-life-courage-and-creativity-service-progressive-possibility>

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323869604578370743034963414>

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/benjamin-knoll/exit-voice-loyalty-and-mormonism_b_6657142.html

<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/business/albert-o-hirschman-economist-and-resistance-figure-dies-at-97.html>

<https://www.q4tk.com/tag/albert-hirschman/>