Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

Dedication and distinction: How reputational and branding pressures influence teacher work effort

Dag Yngve Dahle

d.y.dahle@ils.uio.no

University of Oslo

Research Article

Keywords: School marketization, work effort, employee voice, psychological safety, reputation, branding

Posted Date: March 4th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-8063381/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Dedication and distinction: How reputational and branding pressures influence teacher work effort

Keywords: School marketization, work effort, employee voice, psychological safety, reputation, branding.

Abstract

Educational reforms have driven a neoliberal turn and marketization in Norwegian upper secondary schools, increasing reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour among teachers. While marketization is justified by promises of higher quality and efficiency, this study examines whether it also increases teachers' work effort. Survey data (N=823) show that reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour directly stimulated work effort. Promotive voice, but not psychological safety, mediated these effects. Yet psychological safety mediated most links between marketization variables and voice, suggesting serial mediation: both reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour boosted effort via psychological safety and promotive voice. In sum, reputation and branding pressures raise effort directly and indirectly through voice and, to some extent, safety. Ensuring avenues for voice and psychological safety can help channel this effort into constructive school improvement.

Main text introduction

Public sector upper secondary schools in Norway, particularly in Oslo, have faced major debate following post-millennium New Public Management reforms, which shifted the school system toward a neoliberal, quasi-market model in which schools compete for students, funding, and, consequently, reputation and branding. This neoliberal turn contrasts sharply with Norway's traditional governance of upper secondary schools, where "the steering of education by formal structures and decision-making procedures was centralized" (Helgøy and Homme 2016, 53). Norwegian public upper secondary schools reflect "the Nordic model of education," providing high-quality education grounded in "social justice, equity, equal opportunities, inclusion, nation building, and democratic participation" to all students, "regardless of social and cultural background and abilities" (Imsen, Blossing, and Moos 2017, 568).

Features of marketization

Today the field is marked by marketization, part of an international trend described by Ellis, Gatti, and Mansell (2024) as a *new political economy* of educational management. This links school personnel management to "education reform, and, moreover, economic reform" amid austerity and "budget cuts to public expenditure on services such as education, health, and housing" (Ellis, Gatti, and Mansell 2024, 3; Esping-Andersen 1989). Gunter (2023, 2) terms this a claimocracy, in which calls for change are "based on a crisis framed according to a particular version of history that makes targeted accusations (failing teachers, failing schools) and supplies credible solutions (autonomous schools, corporate leadership)". In Norway, average PISA results were framed as a crisis by politicians seeking deregulation (Helgøy and

Homme 2016). Marketization in Norwegian schools involves assessments, benchmarking, a national testing system, per capita funding (Haugen 2020), and a broader "system of accountability"n (Imsen, Blossing, and Moos 2017, 574), largely driven by NPM reforms. While these measures are often optional for local authorities, leading to variation across regions, the quasi-market model remains prominent nationwide (Hovdenak and Stray 2015).

With school choice, competition for students makes organizational reputation crucial. Reputation in public sector organizations is defined as the "collective assessment of the organization by both the mediated and personal experiences of stakeholders that results from the stakeholders' expectations and shapes their attitudes and trust toward and their collaboration with the organization and more broadly the sector in which that organization operates" (Canel and Luoma-Aho 2019, 125), emphasizing the interconnection between reputation and brand. Reputation is regarded as "a new form of currency and, more generally, value" (Hearn 2010, 421), which schools must cultivate to attract students and secure public funding (Imsen, Blossing, and Moos 2017; Dahle 2021). Schools "have to appear attractive in order to succeed in the competition for students" (Dahle 2023b, 1). This requires cultivating a concern for reputation among staff and promoting brand-congruent behaviour, defined as "an employee's personal communication and appearance in a customer interaction [being] in line with the organization's brand identity" (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos 2014, 315).

Scholars, educational commentators, media, and policymakers have identified numerous negative consequences of these developments, including divisions between A- and B-schools, classed, racial, and gendered popularity spirals, segregation, manipulation of output metrics, accountability-driven governance, control-oriented HR practices, restrictions on staff voice, and erosion of worker rights (Malkenes 2014; Hovdenak and Stray 2015; Wangberg 2020; Haugen 2020; Dahle 2022; Elstad and Turmo 2011; Bjordal 2016).

Others adopt a more positive view, suggesting that marketized sectors provide better performance and, thus, services (Grand 1991, 2009), with competition enhancing school effectiveness and educational quality (Böhlmark, Holmlund, and Lindahl 2016; Morris 2011). This perspective assumes that school employees respond by increasing their work effort, defined as "how hard workers try to perform their jobs, which includes where they devote their effort (direction), the amount of their effort (intensity), and how long they persevere in their effort (persistence)" (Van Iddekinge et al. 2023, 130). Whether this applies in Norwegian schools remains under-researched. Furthermore, variables such as reputation, branding, employee voice, and psychological safety were not included in the recent review of work effort antecedents by Van Iddekinge et al. (2023).

The present paper aims to fill this gap by examining how these neoliberal developments, operationalized as reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour, affect teachers' work effort, and whether the variables' influence on work effort work through employee voice and psychological safety. This guides the overall research question for the present study:

> *To what extent does marketization-inspired concerns for upper secondary schools' reputation and brand affect teachers' work effort, and to what extent is the influence of the variables mediated by psychological safety and promotive and prohibitive voice?*

This study responds to calls for "research that contributes to extant knowledge about employee commitment to branding of public organizations" (Leijerholt, Biedenbach, and Hultén 2019, 134), and on "which conditions are particularly relevant to individuals' discretionary work effort" (Yu and Kuo 2023, 2). It contributes by examining reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour as antecedents to teachers' work effort, testing

promotive and prohibitive voice as mediators, showing that psychological safety mediates only between reputational / branding variables and voice, not effort, and identifying serial mediation through psychological safety and promotive voice. Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual model

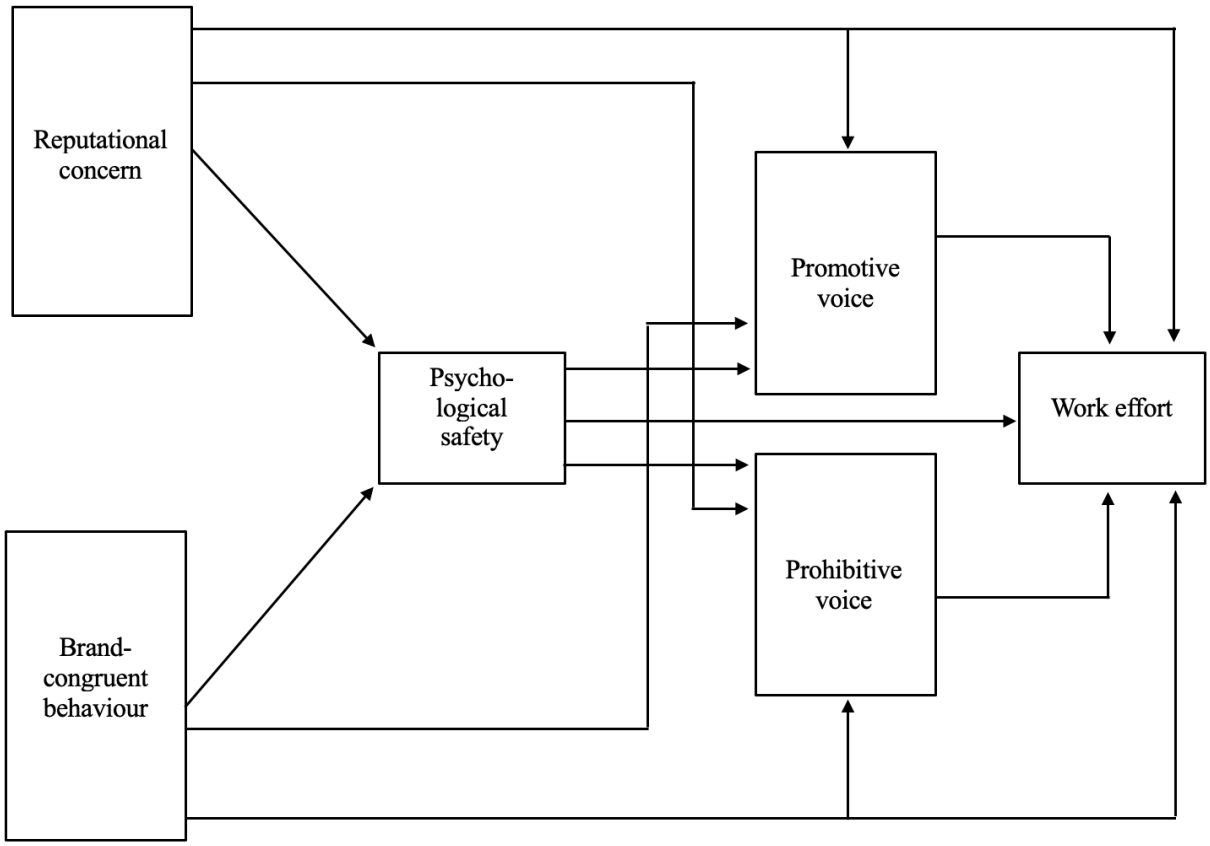


Figure 1: Conceptual model for the present study.

Theory and hypotheses

This paper presents two possible theoretical argumentations that may help understand the links between work effort and marketization-related variables like reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour. Psychological safety theory carries one of these argumentations.

Work effort in a psychological safety perspective

Kahn (1990) introduced psychological safety as arising from "nonthreatening, predictable, and consistent social situations" that provide "incentives or disincentives to personally engage" (703, 708), without "risks of self-expression" (708). He defined it as "feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" (708).

Building on this, Edmondson (1999, 375) described psychological safety as "a shared belief about the consequences of interpersonal risk-taking", later linking it directly to employee voice as it "facilitates the willing contribution of ideas and action to a shared enterprise" (Edmondson and Lei 2014, 24), and reflects "the belief that one can speak up without risk of punishment or humiliation" (Edmondson and Mortensen 2021, 2). High levels of psychological safety lead to low-risk activity, encouraging employee voice, while low levels suggest high-risk, discouraging expression (Newman, Donohue, and Eva 2017). Beyond voice, psychological safety is associated with individual and team work effort (Li and Yan 2009; Singh, Winkel, and Selvarajan 2013), team functioning (Schaubroeck, Lam, and Peng 2011; Brueller and Carmeli 2011; Edmondson 1999), and organizational-level outcomes (Baer and Frese 2003; Newman, Donohue, and Eva 2017).

Employee voice as stimulator of work effort

Employee voice provides a second theoretical foundation. Voice concerns the extent to which employees speak up in their organization. Hirschman (1970, p. 30) defined it as "any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs," while later work

emphasized its supportive role as a tool for improvement (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Morrison, 2011; Zhang, Liang, & Li, 2020). A comprehensive definition frames voice as "the discretionary or formal expression of ideas, opinions, suggestions, or alternative approaches … with the intent to change an objectionable state of affairs and to improve the current functioning of the organization" (Bashshur & Oc, 2015, p. 1531). Voice is thus both critical and supportive, reflected in Liang, Farh, and Farh's (2012, p. 74) distinction between promotive voice - "employees' expression of new ideas or suggestions for improving the overall functioning"—and prohibitive voice - "employees' expression of concern about work practices … harmful to their organization." Risk is central to distinguishing between promotive and prohibitive voice. While promotive voice focuses on constructive suggestions, prohibitive voice involves raising concerns about harmful practices or behaviors and "carries far more personal risk, because pointing out dysfunction directly implies the failure of important stakeholders in the workplace" (Liang et al., 2012, p. 76). Accordingly, high levels of psychological safety are required for employees to engage in prohibitive voice, and indeed, Liang et al. (2012, p. 86) found that "psychological safety was the most strongly and uniquely associated with prohibitive voice."

In their review, Bashshur and Oc (2015, 1539) identified outcomes of voice at individual, team, and organizational levels. Despite mixed findings, voice "positively relate[s] to individual performance", and can enhance unit performance (Detert et al. 2013). At the organization level, results are less consistent, yet, "voice is expected to lead to higher organizational performance", as voice opportunities encourage employees to "become more satisfied and committed…, try harder, and engage in extrarole behaviors, ultimately turn translates into better individual performance" (Bashshur and Oc 2015, 1543). These outcomes resemble employees' work effort.

Hypotheses

In marketizated school settings, reputation is crucial for attracting good students and, thus, securing funding. Within this context, a tension arises between employee voice and schools' reputation and branding efforts (Dahle 2023b; Wæraas and Dahle 2020). On the one hand, voice can strengthen reputation and brand, most likely through promotive voice, suggesting that reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour encourage such expressions. On the other hand voice can undermine reputation and branding (Wallace and de Chernatony 2008; Ind 2007), presumably through prohibitive voice. Thus, reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour may stimulate promotive voice, while constraining prohibitive voice. We hypothesize:

> *Reputational concern relates positively to promotive voice (H1a) and negatively to prohibitive voice (H1b), so that the level of voice increases / decreases with reputational concern.*

> *Brand-congruent behaviour relates positively to promotive voice (H2a) and negatively to prohibitive voice (H2b), so that brand-congrent behaviour leads to increasing levels of promotive voice and decreasing levels of prohibitive voice.*

Reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour can be seen as systematic strategic efforts; through strategy organizations aim to build "strength and competitive power," while branding seeks to "gain advantage over competitors" (Dahle, 2021a, p. 27; Kornberger, 2010). This suggests that reputation and branding should enhance competitive capacity, linking them

to employees' work effort. Performance or effectiveness has been identified as an outcome of reputation (Bustos, 2021). Accordingly, we expect reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour to exert a similar influence in this study.

Reputational concern relates positively to work effort, so that reputational concern leads to increased work effort (H3a).

Brand-congruent behaviour relates positively to work effort, so brand-congruent behaviour leads to increased work effort (H3b).

In the present study psychological safety is tested as a mediator between independent and dependent variables. Most similar research treats it as a mediator, since antecedents "influence workplace outcomes… through the development of psychological safety" (Newman, Donohue, and Eva 2017, 525). Outcomes include "voice and speaking up" (Edmondson and Bransby 2023, 65; Kong, Liu, and Weng 2020; Liu et al. 2017; Unler and Caliskan 2019). While Norwegian teachers have traditionally enjoyed autonomy and freedom of speech (Helgøy and Homme 2016), they now work in reputation- and brand-sensitive organizations where voice serves as a reputation- and branding tool (Dahle 2023a), potentially undermining psychological safety and shaping promotive and prohibitive voice. We hypothesize:

Psychological safety mediates the relationship between reputational concern and promotive voice (H4a) and between reputational concern and prohibitive voice (H4b), so that reputational concern affects psychological safety, which, in turn, affects voice.

Psychological safety mediates the relationship between brand-congruent behaviour and promotive voice (H5a), and between brand-congruent behaviour and prohibitive voice (H5b), so that brand-congruent behaviour affects psychological safety, which, in turn, affects voice.

Internal branding literature posits that reputation is built "from the inside-out" (Ind and Bjerke 2007; Dahle and Wæraas 2023), positioning employees as key messengers enabled to *sell the brand* to external stakeholders. Employees are not only seen as messengers but expected to become "corporate ambassadors" or "brand champions" (Dreher 2014; Alsop 2004; Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak 2009), trusted to represent the brand. This role may provide a sense of psychological safety, which, given its established link to individual performance (Newman, Donohue, and Eva 2017), can increase work effort:

H6: Psychological safety mediates the the relationship between reputational concern and work effort, so that reputational concern leads to psychological safety, which leads to higher work effort.

H7: Psychological safety mediates the the relationship between brand-congruent behaviour and work effort, so that brand-congruent behaviour leads to psychological safety, which leads to higher work effort.

Given the hypothesized positive relationship between promotive voice and both reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour, we expect these variables to stimulate promotive voice. Since employee voice encourages employees to "try harder" (Bashshur and Oc 2015, 1543), a notion aligned with work effort, it is plausible that reputational concern and

brand-congruent behaviour influence work effort through promotive voice:

H8: Promotive voice mediates the relationship between reputational concern and work effort, so that reputational concern leads to promotive voice, which leads to increased work effort.

H9: Promotive voice mediates the relationship between brand-congruent behaviour and work effort, so that brand-congruent behaviour leads to promotive voice, which leads to increased work effort.

Psychological safety may also shape the relationship between work effort and both reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour. Since ot concerns feeling safe to use voice (Edmondson 1999), these variables may influence psychological safety, which may affect voice, and, ultimately, work effort, suggesting serial mediation:

H10: Both psychological safety and promotive voice mediate the relationship between reputational concern and work effort.

H11: Both psychological safety and promotive voice mediate the relationship between brand-congruent behaviour and work effort.

Materials and methods

Sampling and procedure

This study was conducted in public sector upper secondary schools across three Norwegian regions: the urban-suburban areas of Follo and Romerike, the suburban-rural area of Østfold, and the predominantly rural northern regions of Troms and Finnmark. Strategic cluster sampling (Pfeffermann and Rao 2009) was applied to capture urban-rural and north-south dimensions of Norwegian society and schooling (Blossing, Imsen, and Moos 2014). Oslo schools were excluded due to missing data on work effort.

In April 2023 a web-based questionnaire was distributed to 3884 teachers across 65 schools, using email adresses published on school websites. Within five weeks, 1107 responses were received (28,5 % response rate). After excluding incomplete responses, 823 responses remained for analysis. The sample consisted of 56 % women, and 44 % men, with a mean age of 49,9 years, indicating a slight skewness toward older teachers. . 52,9 % held master degrees or Ph.Ds, 43 % held bachelor's degrees, and 4,1 percent held no degree, reflecting the national teacher population (Roksvaag and Texmon 2012).

All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items had been previously validated, demonstrating good reliability and internal consistency, and published in international peer-reviewed journals. English-language items were translated into Norwegian, and translated back into English (Brislin 1986). Scales and items are listed in Appendix 1.

The conceptual model was tested using path analysis, which enables simultaneous examination of complex models with multiple regression relationships, including both direct and indirect relationships (MacKinnon 2008; Kline 2015). Analyses were conducted with AMOS 26.0 using bootstrapping procedures (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007). Moderation analyses were performed with the Process macro for SPSS. Simultaneous path testing Zhao,

Lynch Jr, and Chen (2010); (Meule 2019) was applied rather than the causal steps approach of Baron and Kenny (1986).

To assess model fit, several fit indices were utilized. First, the likelihood ratio or 'Chi-square test' produced a CMIN / *df* value of 7.7 (*df = 3*), suggesting a reasonably good fit. However, given the Chi-square test's sensitivity to sample size (Vandenberg 2006), additional indices were considered. Specifically, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the comparative fit index (CFI) and the normed fit indix (NFI), all incremental, were employed. Results indicated good model fit: RMSEA = .044, CFI = .992, NFI = .988 (Lei and Wu 2007, 36 - 37).

Common method bias was addressed through several ex ante steps: a large sample size (Katou and Budhwar 2006), multiple types of measures (Eisenhardt and Tabrizi 1995), an extensive questionnaire, and a thorough data collecting process (Kintana, Alonso, and Olaverri 2006). The model's complexity also helped counteract cognitive mapping effects (Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, and Eden 2010). Post ante, a common latent factor test was conducted (Podsakoff et al. 2003), comparing regression weights with and without the CLF (MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2012). Differences were small (< 0.1), indicating minimal common method bias.

Measures

Reputational concern was measured with a six-item scale, adapted from Wæraas (2014, 197), reworded for educational settings. A sample item is: *'Management are concerned about improving the school's reputation'.* Principal component analysis extracted one component (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .872, Bartlett's test of sphericity p. < .000). Relability was good (Cronbach's α = .849).

Brand-congruent behaviour. Employee behaviour and communication aligned with the brand were measured using a three-item scale from Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014), adapted from Morhart, Herzog, and Tomczak (2009). A sample item is: *'I see that my actions are not at odds with our brand'*. One component was extracted (KMO = .684, Bartlett's < .001). Reliability was good (α = .853).

Psychological safety. Perceived psychological safety was measured using Edmondson's sevel-item scale (1999), adapted to the organizational rather than team level. A sample item is: *'If you make a mistake in this organization it is often held against you'.* One component was extracted (Bartlett's p < .000), KMO = .869. Reliability was good (α = .816).

Promotive / prohibitive voice. A ten-item scale by Liang, Farh, and Farh (2012) measured the two dimensions of voice, with wording adapted from 'unit' to 'organization'. Sample items include *'I proactively develop and make suggestions for issues that may influence the organization'* (promotive) and *'I dare to voice out opinions on things that may affect efficiency in the organization, even if that would embarrass others'* (prohibitive). Two components were extracted. Promotive voice: Bartlett's p < .001, KMO = .863, α = .912. Prohibitive voice: Bartlett's p < .001, KMO = .772, α = .760.

Work effort. Employees' work effort was measured using a ten-item scale by De Cooman et al. (2009), capturing persistence, direction, and intensity. One component was extracted. A sample item is: *'I put a lot of energy into the task that I commence.* One component was extracted (KMO = .907, Bartlett's p < .001, α = .881).

The control variables *gender* and *age* affected the dependent variable and were included in the model, while other control variables were not (Becker 2005). Age was measured as the actual number provided by respondents, and gender was dummy-coded (female=1, male=0).

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(1) Promotive voice	3.80	0.83							
(2) Prohibitive voice	3.34	0.77	.48**						
(3) Reputational concern	3.87	0.74	.18**	.07*					
(4) Brand-congruent behaviour	4.10	0.87	.24**	.13**	.21**				
(5) Psychological safety	3.62	0.78	.23**	.14**	.19**	.25**			
(6) Work effort	4.53	0.47	.32**	.20**	.21**	.26**	.18**		
(7) Gender (female)	0.56	0.49	-.06	-.08*	.10**	.10**	-.01	.18**	
(8) Age	49.9	9.67	.08**	.07*	.05	.07*	-.01	.12**	-.04

*Correlations = Pearson's r. **p<0.01-level; *p<0.05, two-tailed.*

Results

Table 1 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations. Independent variables, the mediator, and both dependent variables were all significantly correlated. The strongest correlations were between promotive and prohibitive voice (Pearson's R-value = 0.48**), promotive voice and work effort (R = 0.32**), and brand-congruent behaviour and work effort (R = 0.26**). Variance inflation factors (VIF) was all below 1.4, well below the recommended threshold factor of 4.0, indicating low multicollinearity (Hair et al. 2010).

Direct effects

Table 2 and Figure 2 show standardized coefficients analyzed with Amos 28.0.. Reputational concern was positively related to promotive voice (β = .123, p = .002), supporting H1a, but not to prohibitive voice (β = −.014, p = .706), so H1b was not supported. Brand-congruent

behaviour was positively related to promotive voice (β = .180, p = .001), supporting H2a, but not to prohibitive voice (β = .018, p = .664), so H2b was not supported. We note that reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour stimulate promotive, but not prohibitive, voice.

Work effort was positively related to reputational concern (β = .118, p = .001) and brand-congruent behaviour (β = .168, p = .001), supporting H3a and H3b.

Mediation

Bootstrapped tests (95% CI, 5000 samples) showed that psychological safety did not mediate between reputational concern and promotive voice (β = .013, p = .165) but mediated between reputational concern and prohibitive voice (β = .062, p = .002), supporting H4b, but not H4a. Psychological safety mediated between brand-congruent behaviour and both promotive (β = .037, p = .001) and prohibitive voice (β = .109, p = .001), supporting H5a and H5b.

Using user-defined estimands (unstandardized estimates, Table 3), psychological safety did not mediate between reputational concern and work effort (β = .009, p = .082) or between brand-congruent behaviour and work effort (β = .024, p = .110). Neither H6 nor H7 were supported. Promotive voice significantly mediated both relationships (reputational concern: β = .028, p = .001; brand-congruent behaviour: β = .068, p = .001), supporting H8 and H9. Prohibitive voice did not mediate these relationships.

Table 2: Direct, indirect, and total effects with p-values and confidence intervals for the model. Mediator: Psychological safety.

	Direct effect	P	CI lower bound	CI upper bound	**Indirect effect**	P	CI lower bound	CI upper bound	**Total effect**	P	CI lower bound	CI upper bound
Promotive voice												
Reputation concern	.123**	.002	.047	.191	.013	.165	-.002	.022	.136**	.002	.060	.209
Brand-congruent behaviour	.180***	.001	.112	.251	.037***	.001	-.103	-.038	.216***	.001	.149	.285
Prohibitive voice												
Reputation concern	−.014	.706	-.082	.056	.062**	.002	.023	.086	.048	.224	-.030	.125
Brand-congruent behaviour	.018	.664	-.061	.088	.109***	.001	-.192	-.110	.127**	.002	.047	.202
Work effort												
Reputation concern	.118***	.001	.046	.190								
Brand-congruent behaviour	.168***	.001	.089	.243								

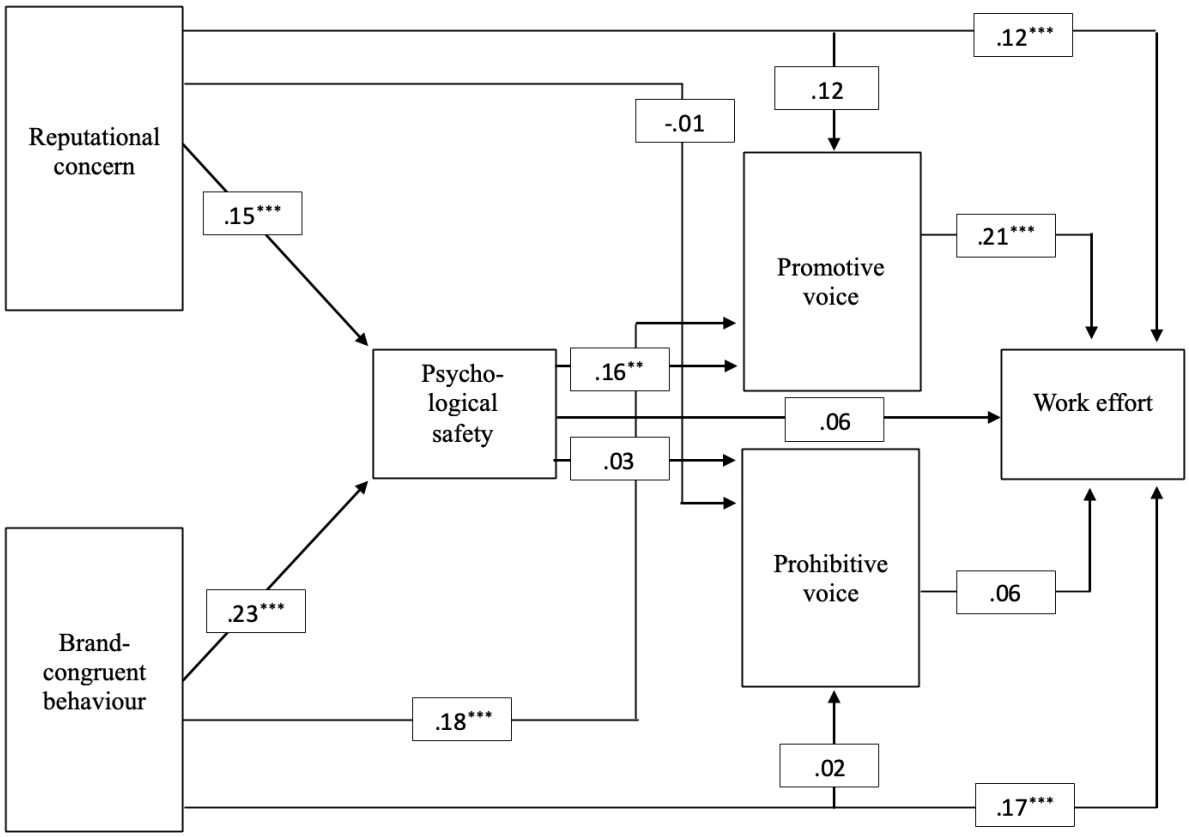


Figure 2: Full model with paths and effects.

Table 3: Indirect effects in the full model with multiple mediators.

	Indirect effect	P	CI lower bound	CI upper bound
Reputational concern > prohibitive voice > work effort	-.001	.511	-.009	.003
Brand-congruent behaviour > prohibitive voice > work effort	.002	.433	-.005	.016
Reputational concern > promotive voice > work effort	.028***	.001	.010	.050
Brand-congruent behaviour > promotive voice > work effort	.068***	.001	.037	.112
Reputational concern > psychological safety > work effort	.009	.082	-.002	.024
Brand-congruent behaviour > psychological safety > work effort	.024	.110	-.006	.054

Table 4: Serial mediation effects from Process, model 6.

	Effect	CI lower bound	CI upper bound
Reputational concern > psychological safety > promotive voice > work effort	.0115[sig]	.0057	.0191
Brand-congruent behaviour > psychological safety > promotive voice > work effort	.0212[sig]	.0107	.0354

Using the Process macro in SPSS 27.0, model 6 (Hayes 2018), sequential indirect effects were found, as shown in Table 4. Reputational concern increased work effort through psychological safety and promotive voice (E.S. = .0115, 95% CI = [0.057, 0.189]). This is a small, but statistically significant effect, supporting H10. Similarly, brand-congruent behaviour increased work effort through the same pathway (E.S. = .0212, 95% CI [0.107, 0.354]), supporting H11. Table 5 summarizes results from the hypothesis testing.

Table 5: Support and non-support of hypothesis summarized.

Hypothesis	*Result*
Reputational concern relates positively to promotive voice (H1a) and negatively to prohibitive voice (H1b.	H1a: Supported H1b: Rejected
Brand-congruent behaviour relates positively to promotive voice (H2a) and negatively to prohibitive voice (H2b).	H2a: Supported H2b: Supported
Reputational concern relates positively to work effort, so that reputational concern leads to increased work effort (H3a).	H3a: Supported
Brand-congruent behaviour relates positively to work effort, so that brand-congruent behaviour leads to increased work effort (H3b).	H3b: Supported
Psychological safety mediates the relationship between reputational concern and promotive voice (H4a) and between reputational concern and prohibitive voice (H4b).	H4a: Rejected H4b: Supported

Psychological safety mediates the relationship between brand-congruent behaviour and promotive voice (H5a), and between brand-congruent behaviour and prohibitive voice (H5b).	H5a: Supported H5b: Supported
H6: Promotive voice mediates the relationship between reputational concern and work effort.	H6: Supported
H7: Promotive voice mediates the relationship between brand-congruent behaviour and work effort.	H7: Supported
H8: Both psychological safety and promotive voice mediate the relationship between reputational concern and received rating.	H8: Supported
H9: Both psychological safety and promotive voice mediate the relationship between brand-congruent behaviour and work effort.	H9: Supported

Summary of results

The study was initiated with a question of how and how much reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour, reflecting marketization of upper secondary schools, directly and indirectly affect promotive and prohibitive voice for teachers, and, in turn, their work effort. These are the results summed up:

- Both reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour stimulated promotive, but not prohibitive voice, directly.
- Psychological safety mediated the relationship between reputational concern and prohibitive voice, but not between reputational concern and promotive voice. Consequently, reputational concern stimulated promotive voice directly only, while it stimulated prohibitive voice indirectly, through psychological safety, only.
- Psychological safety mediated between brand-congruent behaviour and both promotive and prohibitive voice. As such, brand-congruent behaviour stimulated

promotive voice both directly and indirectly, while it stimulated prohibitive indirectly only.

- Both reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour stimulated work effort directly.
- Promotive voice mediated both relationships, so that both reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour stimulated work effort indirectly through promotive voice.
- Psychological safety did not mediate these relationships. Reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour did not stimulate work effort indirectly through psychological safety.
- Reputational concern stimulated work effort sequentially through both psychological safety and promotive voice. Similarly, brand-congruent behaviour stimulated work effort sequentially through both psychological safety and promotive voice.

Discussion

This study investigated how marketization dynamics - reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour - relate to teacher work effort in Norwegian upper secondary schools. The findings indicate that branding and reputational pressures extend beyond formal policy intentions, shaping teachers' actual practices and behaviours.

Both reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour were found to stimulate work effort directly. This finding is consistent with arguments that market-oriented reforms can intensify organizational demands and expextations (Hood 1991; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). At the same time, the fact that reputational concerns are tied to teachers' daily effort also raises questions about sustainability. Research warns that externally imposed demands may lead to work intensification and strain if not balanced by supportive conditions (Day and

Gu 2010).

A central contribution of this study is clarifying the processes through which branding-related pressures relate to work effort. Promotive voice emerged as a key mediator, suggesting that teachers do not merely comply with reputational demands but often respond by offering constructive suggestions to improve school practice. This aligns with research that identifies voice as essential for organizational learning and innovation (Morrison 2014).

Psychological safety did not directly explain the link between marketization pressures and effort but operated indirectly, by enabling voice. Thus, branding pressures alone may not create a safe environment, but when psychological safety is present, teachers are more likely to channel external demands into constructive voice, which in turn enhances effort. This underlines the importance of cultivating supportive school climates (Edmondson 1999).

The serial mediation analysis further demonstrated that reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour stimulated effort through the sequential pathway of psychological safety and voice. This layered effect highlights how external reforms interact with internal school dynamics: reputational and branding pressures shape teacher effort most strongly when combined with an environment that encourages risk-taking and expression of ideas.

Theoretical and practical implications

Theoretically, the findings advance research on educational marketization by showing how branding and reputation-related pressures influence teacher behaviour at the organizational level. Rather than focusing only on broad policy outcomes, this study demonstrates how reforms filter down into daily practices and social processes within schools. By connecting insights from education policy with theories of voice and psychological safety (Morrison 2014; Edmondson 1999), the study highlights the importance of examining both external and

internal drivers of behavioural change.

Practically, the results suggest that while branding and reputation concerns can indeed be linked to higher teacher effort, their effectiveness is partly contingent on organizational conditions. Leaders should recognize that sustainable and constructive forms of effort depend on organizational conditions, that is, that effort generated by marketization may be more sustainable and constructive when accompanied by psychological safety and avenues for voice. Such organizational conditions appear particularly important for ensuring that reputational and branding concerns translate into collaborative school improvement rather than simple work intensification. Without such support, reputational pressures risk fostering compliance and intensification rather than constructive contributions to school development.

Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design prevents causal inference. Reverse causality cannot be ruled out: Psychological safety may affect teachers' perception of autonomy levels and the functioning of the performance appraisal system, and not the other way round. Data were self-reported and collected at one point in time only, which may affect validity. Future longitudinal research could examine how these processes evolve over time. The Norwegian context, characterized by co-determination, dialogue and professional autonomy, may also shape responses to branding, and findings may not generalize to systems with more hierarchical governance. Finally, while this study focused on work effort, subsequent research could assess broader outcomes, such as well-being, professional identity, or student achievement, to capture the full implications of marketization. Others scholars are advised to examine other marketization-related variables, for example threats towards professionalism, administrative guidelines, and leadership style. Variables like organizational

commitment, leader-member exchange, and intrinsic motication could be tested as mediators. Methodologically, qualitative or mixed methods could give even deeper insights into these matters.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that reputational concern and brand-congruent behaviour - core aspects of school marketization - are linked to teacher work effort both directly and indirectly, through psychological safety and promotive voice. These findings add nuance to debates on neoliberal reforms in education, highlighting that branding and reputational pressures shape teachers' everyday practices in complex ways. Sustainable effort, however, depends on school climates that allow teachers to speak up and contribute constructively to organizational development.

Declaration of interest statement

No conflict of interest regarding the present work is declared.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics approval

The collection of the survey data used in the present paper was approved by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT). The project number is 548028.

References:

Alsop, R. J. 2004. *The 18 immutable laws of corporate reputation: Creating, protecting and repairing your most valuable asset*. New York: Free Press.

Baer, Markus, and Michael Frese. 2003. "Innovation is not enough: Climates for initiative and psychological safety, process innovations, and firm performance." *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior* 24 (1): 45-68.

Baron, Reuben M, and David A Kenny. 1986. "The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 51 (6): 1173-1182.

Bashshur, Michael R, and Burak Oc. 2015. "When voice matters a multilevel review of the impact of voice in organizations." *Journal of Management* 41 (5): 1530-1554.

Becker, Thomas E. 2005. "Potential problems in the statistical control of variables in organizational research: A qualitative analysis with recommendations." *Organizational Research Methods* 8 (3): 274-289.

Bjordal, Ingvil. 2016. "Markedsretting i en urban norsk skolekontekst - et sosialt rettferdighetsperspektiv [Marketization in an urban Norwegian school context. – A social justice perspective]. PhD Thesis." Trondheim: NTNU.

Blossing, Ulf, Gunn Imsen, and Lejf Moos. 2014. *The Nordic education model. 'A school for all' encounters neo-liberal policy*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Brislin, Richard W. 1986. "The wording and translation of research instruments." In *Field methods in cross-cultural research*, edited by W. J. Lonner and J. W. Berry, 137–164. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Brueller, Daphna, and Abraham Carmeli. 2011. "Linking capacities of high-quality relationships to team learning and performance in service organizations." *Human Resource Management* 50 (4): 455-477.

Böhlmark, Anders, Helena Holmlund, and Mikael Lindahl. 2016. "Parental choice, neighbourhood segregation or cream skimming? An analysis of school segregation after a generalized choice reform." *Journal of Population Economics* 29 (4): 1155-1190.

Canel, María José, and Vilma Luoma-Aho. 2019. *Public sector communication: Closing gaps between citizens and public organizations*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Chang, Sea-Jin, Arjen Van Witteloostuijn, and Lorraine Eden. 2010. "From the editors: Common method variance in international business research." *Journal of International Business Studies* 41: 178-184.

Dahle, Dag Yngve. 2021. "Brand on the run?: Marketization, market position, and branding in upper secondary schools." In *Public Branding and Marketing: A Global Viewpoint*, edited by Staci Zavattaro, 175 - 196. New York: Springer Nature.

---. 2022. "Magic muzzles? The silencing of teachers through HRM, performance appraisal and reputation concern." *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 35 (2): 172 - 194.

---. 2023a. "Beat the rich? Employee voice inhibitors at the crossroads of market and privilege." *International Studies of Management & Organization* 53 (3): 167 - 190.

---. 2023b. "Trust and Shout: The Reputation/Voice Tension in Schools and Hospitals." *Corporate Reputation Review* 27: 52 - 69.

Dahle, Dag Yngve, and Arild Wæraas. 2023. "Ticket to rate: antecedents to turnover intention among teachers." *International Journal of Leadership in Education* Ahead-of-print: 1 - 23.
Day, Christopher, and Qing Gu. 2010. *The new lives of teachers*. London: Routledge.
De Cooman, Rein, Sara De Gieter, Roland Pepermans, Marc Jegers, and Frederik Van Acker. 2009. "Development and validation of the work effort scale." *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* 25 (4): 266-273.
Detert, James R, Ethan R Burris, David A Harrison, and Sean R Martin. 2013. "Voice flows to and around leaders: Understanding when units are helped or hurt by employee voice." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 58 (4): 624-668.
Dreher, Sonja. 2014. "Social media and the world of work: A strategic approach to employees' participation in social media." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 19 (4): 344-356.
Edmondson, Amy C. 1999. "Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams." *Administrative science quarterly* 44 (2): 350-383.
Edmondson, Amy C, and Derrick P Bransby. 2023. "Psychological safety comes of age: Observed themes in an established literature." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 10: 55-78.
Edmondson, Amy C, and Zhike Lei. 2014. "Psychological safety: The history, renaissance, and future of an interpersonal construct." *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav.* 1 (1): 23-43.
Edmondson, Amy C, and Mark Mortensen. 2021. "What psychological safety looks like in a hybrid workplace." *Harvard Business Review* 3: 1-7.
Eisenhardt, Kathleen M, and Behnam N Tabrizi. 1995. "Accelerating adaptive processes: Product innovation in the global computer industry." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40 (1): 84-110.
Ellis, Viv, Lauren Gatti, and Warwick Mansell. 2024. *The New Political Economy of Teacher Education: The Enterprise Narrative and the Shadow State*. Bristol: Policy Press.
Elstad, Eyvind, and Are Turmo. 2011. "Obeying the rules or gaming the system? Delegating random selection for examinations to head teachers within an accountability system." *Education, Knowledge and Economy* 5 (1-2): 1-15.
Esping-Andersen, Gosta. 1989. "The three political economies of the welfare state." *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie* 26 (1): 10-36.
Grand, Julian Le. 1991. "Quasi-markets and social policy." *The economic journal* 101 (408): 1256-1267.
---. 2009. *The other invisible hand: Delivering public services through choice and competition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Gunter, Helen M. 2023. "A political sociology of education policy." In *A Political Sociology of Education Policy*, 17-18. Bristol: Policy Press.
Hair, JF, B Black, B Babin, and RE Anderson. 2010. *Multivariate Data Analysis 7th*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
Haugen, Cecilie Rønning. 2020. "Teachers' experiences of school choice from 'marginalised' and 'privileged' public schools in Oslo." *Journal of Education Policy* 35 (1): 68 - 94.
Hayes, Andrew F. 2018. *Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach*. New York: Guilford Publications.
Hearn, Alison. 2010. "Structuring feeling: Web 2.0, online ranking and rating, and the digital' reputation' economy." *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization* 10 (3/4).

Helgøy, Ingrid, and Anne Homme. 2016. "Educational reforms and marketization in Norway – a challenge to the tradition of the social democratic, inclusive school?" *Research in Comparative and International Education* 11 (1): 52-68.

Hood, Christopher. 1991. "A public management for all seasons?" *Public administration* 69 (1): 3-19.

Hovdenak, Sylvi Stenersen, and Janicke Heldal Stray. 2015. *Hva skjer med skolen?: en kunnskapssosiologisk analyse av norsk utdanningspolitikk fra 1990-tallet og frem til i dag [What is happening with the school? A sociological analysis of knowledge in Norwegian educational policies from the 1990s and to the present]*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Imsen, Gunn, Ulf Blossing, and Lejf Moos. 2017. "Reshaping the Nordic education model in an era of efficiency. Changes in the comprehensive school project in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden since the millennium." *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 61 (5): 568-583.

Ind, Nicholas. 2007. *Living the brand: How to transform every member of your organization into a brand champion.* London: Kogan Page.

Ind, Nicholas, and Rune Bjerke. 2007. *Branding governance: A participatory approach to the brand building process*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Kahn, William A. 1990. "Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work." *Academy of management journal* 33 (4): 692-724.

Katou, Anastasia A, and Pawan S Budhwar. 2006. "Human resource management systems and organizational performance: a test of a mediating model in the Greek manufacturing context." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17 (7): 1223-1253.

Kintana, Martin Larraza, Ainhoa Urtasun Alonso, and Carmen García Olaverri. 2006. "High-performance work systems and firms' operational performance: the moderating role of technology." *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17 (1): 70-85.

Kline, Rex B. 2015. *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling*. New York: Guilford Publications.

Kong, Fang, Peng Liu, and Jie Weng. 2020. "How and when group cohesion influences employee voice: a conservation of resources perspective." *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 35 (3): 142-154.

Lei, Pui-Wa, and Qiong Wu. 2007. "Introduction to structural equation modeling: Issues and practical considerations." *Educational Measurement: issues and practice* 26 (3): 33-43.

Leijerholt, Ulrika, Galina Biedenbach, and Peter Hultén. 2019. "Branding in the public sector: a systematic literature review and directions for future research." *Journal of Brand Management* 26: 126 - 140.

Li, Ning, and Jin Yan. 2009. "The effects of trust climate on individual performance." *Frontiers of Business Research in China* 3 (1): 27-49.

Liang, Jian, Crystal IC Farh, and Jiing-Lih Farh. 2012. "Psychological antecedents of promotive and prohibitive voice: A two-wave examination." *Academy of Management Journal* 55 (1): 71-92.

Liu, Wu, Zhaoli Song, Xian Li, and Zhenyu Liao. 2017. "Why and when leaders' affective states influence employee upward voice." *Academy of Management Journal* 60 (1): 238-263.

Löhndorf, Birgit, and Adamantios Diamantopoulos. 2014. "Internal branding: Social identity and social exchange perspectives on turning employees into brand champions." *Journal of Service Research* 17 (3): 310-325.
MacKenzie, Scott B, and Philip M Podsakoff. 2012. "Common method bias in marketing: causes, mechanisms, and procedural remedies." *Journal of Retailing* 88 (4): 542-555.
MacKinnon, DP. 2008. *Introduction to statistical mediation analysis*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.
Malkenes, Simon. 2014. *Bak fasaden i Osloskolen [Behind the facade of 'The Oslo school']*. Oslo: Res Publica.
Meule, Adrian. 2019. "Contemporary understanding of mediation testing." *Meta-Psychology* 3: 1-7.
Morhart, Felicitas M, Walter Herzog, and Torsten Tomczak. 2009. "Brand-specific leadership: Turning employees into brand champions." *Journal of Marketing* 73 (5): 122-142.
Morris, Allison. 2011. *Student standardised testing: Current practices in OECD countries and a literature review.* Paris: OECD Publishing.
Morrison, Elizabeth W. 2014. "Employee voice and silence." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 1 (1): 173-197.
Newman, Alexander, Ross Donohue, and Nathan Eva. 2017. "Psychological safety: A systematic review of the literature." *Human resource management review* 27 (3): 521-535.
Pfeffermann, Danny, and Calyampudi Radhakrishna Rao. 2009. *Sample surveys: design, methods and applications*. Amsterdam: North Holland - Elsevier.
Podsakoff, Philip M, Scott B MacKenzie, Jeong-Yeon Lee, and Nathan P Podsakoff. 2003. "Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88 (5): 879-903.
Pollitt, Christopher, and Geert Bouckaert. 2017. *Public management reform: A comparative analysis-into the age of austerity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Preacher, Kristopher J, Derek D Rucker, and Andrew F Hayes. 2007. "Addressing moderated mediation hypotheses: Theory, methods, and prescriptions." *Multivariate behavioral research* 42 (1): 185-227.
Roksvaag, Kristian, and Inger Texmon. 2012. Arbeidsmarkedet for lærere og førskolelærere fram mot år 2035. Oslo: Statistics Norway.
Schaubroeck, John, Simon SK Lam, and Ann Chunyan Peng. 2011. "Cognition-based and affect-based trust as mediators of leader behavior influences on team performance." *Journal of applied psychology* 96 (4): 863.
Singh, Barjinder, Doan E Winkel, and TT Selvarajan. 2013. "Managing diversity at work: Does psychological safety hold the key to racial differences in employee performance?" *Journal of occupational and organizational psychology* 86 (2): 242-263.
Unler, Ela, and Sibel Caliskan. 2019. "Individual and managerial predictors of the different forms of employee voice." *Journal of Management Development* 38 (7): 582-603.
Van Iddekinge, Chad H, John D Arnold, Herman Aguinis, Jonas WB Lang, and Filip Lievens. 2023. "Work effort: A conceptual and meta-analytic review." *Journal of management* 49 (1): 125-157.
Vandenberg, Robert J. 2006. "Introduction: statistical and methodological myths and urban legends: where, pray tell, did they get this idea?" *Organizational Research Methods* 9: 194 - 201.

Wallace, Elaine, and Leslie de Chernatony. 2008. "Classifying, identifying and managing the service brand saboteur." *The Service Industries Journal* 28 (2): 151-165.
Wangberg, Ida Søraunet. 2020. *Skolevalget [The school choice]*. Oslo: Forlaget Manifest.
Wæraas, Arild. 2014. "Kommunal omdømmebygging som konkurransestrategi [Municipal reputation building as competitive strategy]." In *En strategisk offentlig sektor [A strategic public sector]*, edited by Åge Johnsen. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
Wæraas, Arild, and Dag Yngve Dahle. 2020. "When reputation management is people management: Implications for employee voice." *European Management Journal* 38 (2): 277-287.
Yu, Wei-hsin, and Janet Chen-Lan Kuo. 2023. "Going the extra mile at work: Relationships between working conditions and discretionary work effort." *Plos one* 18 (8): 1 - 23.
Zhao, Xinshu, John G Lynch Jr, and Qimei Chen. 2010. "Reconsidering Baron and Kenny: Myths and truths about mediation analysis." *Journal of Consumer Research* 37 (2): 197-206.

Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- Appendix.docx